

The Sabbath Eve Seder: An Indispensable Innovation*

■■■ Mordecai M. Kaplan

The Jews of the world today, except for anti-Semitic purposes, constitute an anonymous amalgam of human beings with no functioning bond of unity. The most serious symptom of this abnormal situation is the uncertainty with regard to Jewish identity. This has recently been demonstrated on two occasions: one in Israel, where Ben-Gurion's appeal to about two hundred Jewish scholars for an answer to the question "Who is a Jew?" proved to be in vain; the other in America, where an anthropologist, in an article on the subject of Jewish identity, wrote: "No word means more things to more people than the word Jew." That means that Jews nowadays lack that group consciousness which throughout the past united all Jews throughout the world with a sense of mutual responsibility, and which was a source of happiness to every Jew individually. Both in order for them to regain that happiness, and to recover the history-making ability of their group consciousness, Jews have to be formally and publicly reconstituted as a people. That is the only way it can be saved from the fate that overcame the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel.

A History-Making People

However, are the Jews fully aware of the danger to their survival as a people? The answer is certainly in the negative. Those who are concerned look to Zionism as the solution. The marginal Jews, whose number is

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legion, are not at all concerned. As for the rest, who amount to about half the number of Jews, something has to be done to reawaken in them enough of a desire to prevent the Jewish people from becoming absorbed by the various populations among which it is dispersed to demand that they be formally and publicly reconstituted as a people *de jure*. For that to be the case, a way has to be found whereby that "saving remnant" might become aware of the history-making genius of the Jewish people throughout its entire past of about thirty-five centuries.

To be a history-making people means to contribute to the enhancement of human life and the creative fulfillment of its most worthwhile potentialities. For that it is not enough to produce writers of history. It means being collectively as a people so aware of its history as to derive from it a sense of destiny which is that of being a source of blessing to all other peoples and nations in the world. To recover that history-making ability as a people, Jews have to get to know the past of their people, with its promise for their own future as well as for that of the rest of the world. To that end it is of utmost importance to introduce into Jewish life an innovation of an educative character, the practice every Friday night of the Sabbath Eve Seder, analogous in spirit and purpose to the Pesah Eve Seder.

One Seder a Year Not Enough

Why the Pesah Seder as a model? Because its purpose is to educate the Jewish people in the art of functioning as a history-making people. That is the art of transmitting the social and spiritual heritage from one generation to the next. To succeed in that art, the education has to be adapted to the character and maturity of each child. Thus, the four-fold repetition of the command in the Torah for parents to acquaint their children with the story of the Exodus from Egypt, which marks the beginning of the history-making career of the Jewish people, is interpreted as referring to four different types of children: the wise child, the stubborn child, the naive child, and the very young child who has to be taught to ask questions.

In view of the present critical situation of the Jewish people, one such Seder a year, no matter how well conducted, even with the aid of the *New Haggadah*, is far from enough. Every Friday night must be used to conduct a Sabbath Eve Seder for the transmission of the Jewish heritage from parents to children; this has become indispensable to the parents as well as to the children. However, instead of a fixed liturgical text, as the Pesah Seder, the Sabbath Eve Seder has to include first the consecutive reading each Friday night of selections from some major standard work which might serve as the basic text for at least two years. By that

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time, we may assume, the family will be prepared to make use of other sources of their choosing. If enough families take this innovation seriously, sufficient interest would be aroused in the Jewish history and destiny as to expedite the formal and public reconstitution of the Jewish people.

Friday Night Home Night

Apart from the foregoing direct purpose to be served by the Sabbath Eve Seder, the following spiritual purposes might also be achieved:

In the first place, it would reinstate the one religious institution which has done more than any other to render the functioning of religion the most humanizing aspect of a people's life style or civilization. No less a modernist Jewish thinker than Ahad Ha-am has written: "There is more significance to the observance of the Sabbath than the fact that the Jewish people kept it; it is the fact that the Sabbath observance kept the Jewish people alive."

In *Judaism as a Civilization* (1934) there is the following passage concerning the Sabbath: "In the last instance it is not what the Jew will refrain from doing on the Sabbath, but the affirmative conduct which the observance of the Sabbath will elicit from him. The Sabbath must make itself felt in the home. Only there can its observance be made attractive enough to impel the Jew to effort and sacrifice in its behalf. If it depends upon the home to render the results of Sabbath observances tangible, the Jew should take advantage of the Sabbath eve which, in most cases, is the only time when the home can be utilized for that purpose.

"Though the late Friday night services afford an opportunity for congregational worship to those who cannot attend synagogue on Sabbath morning, they do not constitute an ideal way of spending the Sabbath eve. That should be a time for family reunion. Away from the routine of work and the thousand and one distractions of clubs, organizations and entertainments, the members of the family might learn to know one another. It is then that parents should become acquainted with their children and children should exchange their experiences with their parents. The memories and impressions resulting from a Sabbath eve spent in this manner will have a far more permanent influence upon the happiness and character of Jews than the most successful Friday night services and lectures" (p. 445).

Innovation to Foster Unique Quality of Jewish Value System

Second, the foundation of Jewish education, as an education in human values instead of in facts and technics, must be laid in the home life and

atmosphere. It is there that the child achieves the basis for whatever relevance and interest he can find in the studies of the religious school. That is especially the case with Jewish education, which, unlike general education, especially in the Diaspora, deals with facts and values which belong to an entirely different universe of discourse from the universe of discourse into which the child is thrown by the studies in the religious school. The fact that, despite the many years with Jewish education in America, it cannot be said to have achieved satisfactory results is not due to the lack of pedagogic ability on the part of the Jewish teacher and educator, but to lack of an educative Jewish atmosphere in the home. That condition would undoubtedly improve with the introduction of the Sabbath Eve Seder into the home.

Third, as a method of dealing with the problem of the extent to which it involves the conservation of religious practices as well as the spirit of Judaism as a whole, *innovation* is to be recommended. To quote one instance of the method of innovation, the institution of the *bat mitzvah*, which corrects the Jewish traditional attitude toward the religious status of the woman, is a form of amendment to a constitution.

Fourth, the spiritual primacy of the collective self-consciousness, which is Judaism's contribution to the humanization of man, would be underscored. In contrast with the Greek oracle "Know thyself," which is addressed to the individual, Hebraism's revelation in the Ten Commandments is addressed to the collective mind of the people of Israel. Thus Judaism, in keeping with Hillel's maxim, aims to have the individual not only know his individual needs but also the needs of the organic society to which he belongs, and without which he would not be able to meet his own individual needs in proper fashion. The sense of responsibility which the individual acquires through his belonging to an organic society like a family, clan, tribe or nation, adds the fourth dimension, holiness, which renders the other three dimensions authentic, viz: truth, goodness, creativity. Without the dimension of holiness, truth is likely to be rationalization, goodness to be not disinterested, and creativity to be for destructive ends.

Dimension of Holiness

On the other hand, it is the dimension of holiness which enables the human being to experience the reality of God with the same immediacy as he experiences the objects of the senses. This idea of God is in keeping with the oft repeated emphasis on God as being experienced when He is sought after. The prophet urged his people to "seek YHWH where He may be found and to call upon Him where He is near." Likewise the psalmist says: "YHWH is near unto all who call upon Him, to all who

sincerely call upon Him." If we seriously, there would be an aspect of reality. The meaning as the attitude of mind essentially be recognized as a distortion of the Bible is concerned, the equilibrium. (cf. Job 28:28).

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Incidentally, that projection among Jewish families : consciousness, and that might : whatever reasons, have be

sincerely call upon Him." Were the prophet's and psalmist's words taken seriously, there would be an end to the misconception of religion as essentially concerned with the supernatural, the metaphysical, or the mystical aspect of reality. The meaning of the term *emunah* as faith, and therefore as the attitude of mind essentially associated with religion, would at last be recognized as a distortion of truth. On the other hand, as far as the Bible is concerned, the equivalent of the term "religion" is *hokhmah*—wisdom. (cf. Job 28:28).

The entire project of the Sabbath Eve Seder, however, depends for its success upon the cooperation of the rabbis. They would be only too happy to offer specific guidance on the way to conduct those Sedarim through their bulletins and special lectures, as well as through occasional demonstrations within their synagogues. The main problem is to see to it that whatever text is to be read should be provided with questions that would render it relevant.

Incidentally, that project might lead to the kind of mutual socialization among Jewish families that might help to foster Jewish collective consciousness, and that might attract to the synagogue those Jews who, for whatever reasons, have become alienated from it.

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The Shabbat Seder Program

■■■ Joel Alpert

The Sabbath Eve Seder described below represents a new direction in Jewish education and family life. (The term "family" is used here to refer to any combination of one or more adults and one or more children.) The Seder program aims at providing an environment and context for the experiencing of Shabbat as a family and as part of a larger extended family, i.e., the synagogue or the community. It is hoped that the Seder program will regularly bring families together into these and other settings to celebrate Shabbat and Judaism. Most of all, we aim to create an environment of interaction where parent and child learn from each other, teach each other, and experience each other.

The program is meant to present Judaism to our students in an atmosphere outside of the classroom, while they are together with those with whom they regularly share life. It is hoped that through these programs families will grow together and that Judaism may come to play a regular part in their lives.

The Seder program is modeled on the Pesah Seder and is thus meant to be both an educational and a social program. The Pesah Seder itself contains many elements which make it an ideal model for this program: an ordered atmosphere that nevertheless includes a free-flowing question-and-answer format; a home- and family-based celebration which is open to all family members; and a series of rituals which surround a special meal.

This program is not intended as a program unto itself, although it could function in this way, but rather as a way of integrating families into a larger Jewish context, such as the synagogue, and as a way of preparing families so that they can apply what they learn and experience at the Seder to their Jewish life at home. In addition, the Seder program

can be a component of the social studies or history areas of classroom study. A Seder can be used as an area of study or to conclude a unit of study. The Seder of integrating parents into the program is a goal.

The Seder experience includes the Seder, Shabbat Eve rituals, and a study program that lend themselves to exploration over a single evening. (See the details in the appendix below.)

The individual programs, including the Seder, and their families, run no more than one hour. The age group seemed to work well. The program to verbalize their thoughts clearly was a goal that they did not want their parents to do. The success of the program depends on the nature of the synagogue or the nature of the family involvement that can be achieved in preparing to get together.

A Seder can be held in any setting. The program works best. These provisions provide participants to be able to move from the Seder. Our experience is that the program be limited to allow as many as 150 people. Groups larger than twenty and smaller than ten are programs for as many as 150 people. Activities should be prepared to be prepared to get together.

The staffing of a Seder program is an educational director and a staff of individuals from the group. Familiarity has been developed with the staff the program, it is desirable to have personnel over a period of time. Familiarity that will help achieve the program developed.

Finally, it should be noted that the discussions of the writings of Meir Kahane wrote of the Seder idea as part of the significant home experience for the need for Jewish professional and community with the ability to be intended to be a step in that direction.

can be a component of the school curriculum with themes picked from areas of classroom study. A Seder could be used either to introduce an area of study or to conclude a study unit. It might also serve as a way of integrating parents into the ongoing program of the school.

The Seder experience includes a meal, a developing familiarity with Shabbat Eve rituals, and a study of a Jewish theme with topics chosen that lend themselves to exploration (not completion) in the course of a *single evening*. (See the detailed explanation of the Seder on Folk Tales below.)

The individual programs, designed for children aged eight to eleven and their families, run no more than two hours, including the meal. This age group seemed to work well because the students were old enough to verbalize their thoughts clearly with parents present but not so old that they did not want their parents present. The program has been tried successfully with some modification for younger and older groups. The success of the program depends not so much on the age-group involved or on the nature of the synagogue or school but rather upon the amount of family involvement that can be generated. A great deal of staff time is needed in preparing to get families to come and to share.

A Seder can be held in any setting but a large room or small auditorium works best. These provide enough space for the meal and for the participants to be able to move about as needed to work out the activities of the Seder. Our experience also indicates that the group size should be limited to allow as many people as possible to participate actively. Groups larger than twenty and less than forty seem to work best. Seder programs for as many as 150 people have been held. In a group this large, activities should be prepared which can involve a whole table of people together.

The staffing of a Seder program can consist of a rabbi and teacher, an educational director and teacher, a special team of teachers or individuals from the group, synagogue, or community, and, after a familiarity has been developed, different families. Whoever is chosen to staff the program, it is desirable that the program be led by the same personnel over a period of time. In this way, the type of consistency and familiarity that will help achieve the goals of the program can be developed.

Finally, it should be noted that this program developed out of discussions of the writings of Mordecai M. Kaplan. It is Kaplan who first wrote of the Seder idea as part of his goal of making the Sabbath a significant home experience for the Jewish people. Kaplan also wrote about the need for Jewish professionals to provide the members of the Jewish community with the ability to do things for themselves. This program is intended to be a step in that direction. Thus, in contrast to other similar

program ideas, this program does not attempt to create an entire ritual as a substitute for a service, nor does it focus on a study-discussion format for learning. Rather, it places its emphasis on rituals that families can perform on their own and at home, and on learning through doing and sharing as part of a family and a community.

What follows is a description of the elements that can make up a Seder; a sample Seder; and outlines of other Sedarim that have been tried and tested. It is hoped that the reader will develop a much clearer idea of what this program is and how it works by reading and trying our outlines and then by developing others appropriate to the needs of other specific situations.

Elements of the Shabbat Seder

- 1) A booklet is handed out which contains the Shabbat rituals and the "Four Questions."
- 2) *Candle lighting.* Families are asked to bring Shabbat candles with them. The candles are lit, everyone closes his or her eyes, and we sing the blessing as a group.
- 3) *The "Four Questions."* To set the theme of the Seder, four questions about the theme are written by the coordinators. Four children are selected to read the questions. The questions may be answered later as part of an activity. They may also be used to generate a discussion at home after the Seder.
- 4) *Blessing the children.* We sing the "Sabbath Prayer" from *Fiddler on the Roof* together for the customary blessing of the children.
- 5) *Kiddush.* We use Sidney Greenberg's *Likrat Shabbat* for rituals. It is printed clearly, well translated, and contains a good transliteration.
- 6) *Motzi.* We sing this together with the song used by the National Federation of Temple Youth. Often, one of the Shabbat rituals or ritual objects (candles, hallah, hallah cover, wine) is explained by a coordinator. For good ritual explanations, see *The Jewish Catalog*; Philip Birnbaum, *A Book of Jewish Concepts*; Abraham Heller, *A Vocabulary of Jewish Life*; Abraham Millgram, *The Sabbath: A Day of Delight*; *Keeping Posted* 27:2—an issue on the Sabbath; and the CCAR, *A Sabbath Manual*.
- 7) *The meal.* The options are to cater a meal, to have families bring "pot-luck" dinner, or to purchase coldcuts, bread, potato salad, cole slaw, and beverages. We have found the last option to be the most convenient and practical for our purposes.
- 8) *Birkhat Hamazon.* A shortened form, also taken from *Likrat Shabbat* by Sidney Greenberg.

- 9) *The question from home.* As part of the Seder family members, the times this may be done. The home question material as a family sometimes asked to "The Jewish Idea of..."
- 10) *Theme activities.* These materials. For this type of simulations—are the film or slides would be available source (Edition), a monthly American Hebrew Council which explores one of the...
- 11) *Closing song.* A short "Shabbat" for the evening. With these examples of Seders...
- 12) *Additional material.* The book which are not used in Hebrew terms and examples of Seders might be displayed in...

SEDER I: Folk Tales

- A. Four questions:
 1. What makes a folk tale?
 2. How do folk tales come about?
 3. Why do people like folk tales?
 4. What do all folk tales have in common?
- B. Questions from home:
 1. What is your favorite folk tale?
 2. How do you like to hear folk tales?
- C. Activities:
 1. Children present plays (See Appendix A).
 2. Parents present plays (See Appendix B).
 3. Listen together to a folk tale story in play form.
 4. Sing "Dona, Dona."

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taken from *Likrat Shabbat* by

- 9) *The question from home.* A question related to the theme is sent home as part of the Seder notice. The children each introduce all the family members, then give their answer to the question. Sometimes this may be done before the meal.

The home questions are used to initiate an exploration of the material as a family before the Seder. In addition, families are sometimes asked to bring an object. (See "Judaism and Art" and "The Jewish Idea of the Future.")

- 10) *Theme activities.* These may be readings, songs, discussions, or activities. For this type of group, activities—plays, word games, simulations—are the most successful. If more time is available, film or slides would be useful.

An available source for themes is *Keeping Posted* (Teacher's Edition), a monthly magazine published by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 838 Fifth Avenue, N.Y. 10021, which explores one theme a month.

- 11) *Closing song.* A short "Shabbat Shalom" song makes a good ending for the evening. With adult groups, a selection of *zemirot* might be included. These elements are best illustrated by the specific examples of Seders which follow.

- 12) *Additional material.* The booklet can also contain materials on the theme which are not used during the Seder. For example, common Hebrew terms and expressions might be listed and explained. A bibliography might be included. Also, books related to the theme might be displayed in the room.

SEDER I: Folk Tales

A. Four questions:

1. What makes a folk tale Jewish?
2. How do folk tales come about?
3. Why do people like to tell folk tales?
4. What do all folk tales have in common?

B. Questions from home: Bring a legend about your family.

C. Activities:

1. Children present play of biblical folk tale "Tower of Babel" (See Appendix A).
2. Parents present play based on midrash "The Tongue's Power" (See Appendix B).
3. Listen together to a recording of "Bontscha the Silent," a short story in play form by Peretz.
4. Sing "Dona, Dona."

TEN COMMANDMENTS (ASERET HA-DIBROT)



1. ADONAI IS OUR GOD
2. ADONAI IS OUR ONLY GOD
3. DON'T MESS WITH GOD'S NAME
4. CELEBRATE SHABBAT
5. BE NICE TO YOUR PARENTS
6. DON'T MURDER
7. DON'T STEAL
8. BE LOYAL TO YOUR PARTNER
9. DON'T BE JEALOUS OF WHAT OTHERS HAVE
10. MEAN AND KEEP YOUR PROMISES

What kind of learner are you? Which of these captures your most natural choice for learning?



Letter	Value	Letter	Value
א	1	י	30
ב	2	כ	40
ג	3	ל	50
ד	4	מ	60
ה	5	נ	70
ו	6	ס	80
ז	7	ע	90
ח	8	פ	100
ט	9	צ	200
י	10	ק	300
כ	20	ר	400

Questions

In what ways is the Torah a gift?

Why remind ourselves of having been wanderers and slaves when we bring the first fruits to God?

Is there more than one season for harvesting in the Bible?

How can you remember to count the omer for seven weeks of weeks (that's a lot of days)?

What do all three of the Shelosh Regalim (Sukkot, Shavuot, and Pesach) have in common?

חג זמן מתן

תורתנו

Chag Zman

Matan

Torahtenu –

Gift of Torah

חג השבועות

Hag

Hashavout -

Weeks

(counting the

Omer)

חג הבכורים

Hag

Habikurim-

the Day of

the First

Fruits

חג הקציר

Chag

***HaKatzir* - the**

Harvest

Festival

Shalosh Regalim

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Edit

Deuteronomy 16

(16) Three times a year—on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the Feast of Weeks, and on the Feast of Booths—all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place that He will choose. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed, (17) but each with his own gift, according to the blessing that the LORD your God has bestowed upon you.

דברים ט"ז

(טז) שְׁלוֹשׁ פְּעָמִים | בַּשָּׁנָה
יֵרָאֶה כָּל-זְכוּרָךְ אֶת-פָּנָי |
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר
יִבְחָר בְּחַג הַמַּצּוֹת וּבְחַג
הַשִּׁבְעוֹת וּבְחַג הַסִּפּוֹת וְלֹא
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(יז) אִישׁ כַּמַּתְּנֵת יָדוֹ כְּבִרְכַּת
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לְךָ:



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**When They Received the Torah
a Poem for Shavuot by Le'ah Naor
from her book *Chag Li***

When they received the Torah
When they received the Torah
The desert was still and no bird chirped
and the wind did not blow
and the ox did not low
and the people stood around and everyone saw.

That's exactly how it was
when they received the Torah.

It was on the third day of the third month. Just yesterday they all finished washing their garments, and suddenly there was a heavy cloud, all of the mountain of Sinai trembled and I heard that everyone really saw the voices.

That's exactly how it was when they received the Torah.

From the mountain smoke arose, it was like from a kiln. There was thunder and lightning and awe and the sound of a horn and the people stood aside because they were all scared, all the people stepped back and only Moses climbed the mountain.

That's exactly how it was
when they received the Torah.

Then suddenly there was silence even the wind did not hum, the silence was so full and no bird chirped and even the angels did not break into song only God spoke and all the people received the Torah,

That's exactly how it was
when they received the Torah.

* In Hebrew 'keshekiblu'

The Origins of the Omer in Exodus Chapter 16

ויראו בני ישראל ויאמרו איש אל-אחיו מן הוא כי לא ידעו מה הוא ויאמר משה אליהם הוא הלחם אשר נתן יהוה לכם לאכלה:

When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?"—for they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "That is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.

16

זו הדבר אשר צוה יהוה לקטו ממנו איש לפי אכלו עמר לגלגלת מספר נפשתיכם איש לאשר באהלו תקחו:

This is what the LORD has commanded: Gather as much of it as each of you requires to eat, an omer to a person for as many of you as there are; each of you shall fetch for those in his tent."

17

ויעשו כן בני ישראל וילקטו המרבה והממעט:

The Israelites did so, some gathering much, some little.

18

אמדו בעמר ולא העדיף המרבה והממעט לא החסיר איש לפי אכלו לקטו:

But when they measured it by the omer, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no deficiency: they had gathered as much as they needed to eat.