



BACK-POCKET TORAH

CORE IDEAS FOR THE FEAST OF FREEDOM

Use these ten Passover themes to start a conversation, add a moment of Jewish learning to your celebration or teach a class about Passover. Or just leave them around your Hillel, and watch what happens!

1) WELCOMING

Let all who are hungry come in and eat; let all who are in need come and join us for the Pesach.

- Passover Haggadah

Who are you inviting in this Pesach?

2) INDIVIDUALITY

The Torah relates to four types of children: one who is wise, one who is wicked, one who is a simple, and one who does not know how to ask.

- Passover Haggadah

To what extent do you identify with each of the four children? How are you labeled by others?

3) PARADIGM

And this promise is what has stood by our ancestors and us; for it was not only one who rose up to destroy us; rather, in every single generation people rise up to destroy us, but the Holy Blessed One saves us from their hands.

- Passover Haggadah

When have you seen history repeat itself?

4) PERSONALIZATION

In every generation, each person must see him or herself as if he or she had personally come out from Egypt.

- Passover Haggadah

Every person needs to have a certain Egypt, to redeem themselves from it, from the house of slavery, to go out in the middle of the night to the desert of fears,

to march straight into the waters,
to see them open before them to both sides.

...

Every person needs to have a certain Egypt,
and a Jerusalem,
and one long journey,
that they will forever remember
in their feet.

- Amnon Ribak

What is your certain Egypt?

5) RITUAL

Many Jews, even those with no religious affiliation, engage in a variety of traditional Jewish practices. Seven-in-ten (70%), for example, say they participated last year in a Seder, a communal meal commemorating the beginning of the Passover holiday. Even among Jews of no religion, four-in-ten (42%) say they participated in a Seder.... Attending a Seder is more common among Orthodox Jews (99%) than among members of other denominations. And it is more common among Jews married to other Jews (91%) than among intermarried Jews (54%).

- [A Portrait of Jewish Americans](#), Pew Research Center, 2013

Is participating in a seder a part of your Jewish identity?

6) EMPATHY

The formative story around which we orient our collective life is about our harrowing sojourn in Egypt and our eventual miraculous redemption by God. We should not oppress the stranger because we as a people remember what oppression can mean... part of us responds to the experience of suffering by wanting to make sure that no one else has to endure what we did, but another part of us feels entitled and above reproach: if you had been through what I've been through, we can hear ourselves saying, you would understand that I don't owe anybody anything... The Torah challenges us to nurture and cultivate the compassionate response and to make sure that the raging, combative one never becomes an animating principle of our lives.

- Rabbi Shai Held, [Turning Memory Into Empathy](#)

How do you respond to your own suffering and the suffering of others?

7) SLAVERY

We live in this very paradoxical relationship with slavery that's enunciated through the pages of the Haggadah, the book that we use to guide us through the Seder experience, in which we both articulate that we are free and we're celebrating our freedom but also we are still slaves and maybe next year we'll be free. We recognize that our freedom is intimately linked to the freedom of those who are most vulnerable in our society today, and we can't be fully free until they are also free.

- Rabbi Sharon Brous, [Passover Themes](#)

Do you think that it's possible to feel enslaved through the oppression of others? Is your personal

freedom dependent on the freedom of all others?

8) ABUNDANCE

Matzah is the most powerful food substance there is. We hold it up at the beginning of the Seder and say Ha lachma 'anya, "This is the bread of affliction," this is the bread of poverty, and it's also the bread of freedom. When we share our resources, when we live from a place of abundance instead of from a mindset of only scarcity, when instead we say "Come in and share this meal with me, share this bread with me," so then it becomes the bread of freedom.

- Rabbi Sharon Brous, [Passover Themes](#)

How do you experience abundance in your life? Do you find it liberating?

9) CLEANSING

The rabbis suggest that the leaven transcends the physical world. This leaven, this hametz, also symbolizes a puffiness of self, an inflated personality, an egocentricity that threatens to eclipse the essential personality of the individual. Ironically, it is what prevents the individual from rising spiritually and moving closer to holiness. Thus, what hametz effectively does in the material world is exactly what it precludes in the realm of the spirit. That's why it has to be removed.

- Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, [Spiritual Hametz](#)

What "spiritual hametz" would you like to remove this Passover?

10) REDEMPTION

To have faith in redemption is to believe that suffering, exile and oppression will end — someday. However distant that day may be, those who can envision it muster the strength to bring it closer.

Belief in redemption stands as one of those fundamental human divides. It's the difference between those who believe we're in a tunnel, though we sometimes can't see the light at the end, and those who think there is no tunnel, just a world that's unalterably dark.

The compilers of the Haggadah certainly knew the dark times of Jewish history. But they chose to bequeath us a book that defiantly celebrates hope.

-David Arnow, [Finding Redemption in the Seder](#)

How do you sustain hope in a broken world?

Were these helpful? Be sure to let us know how you used 'em by emailing bgoldberg@hillel.org.

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