

Inspire Your Children Forever

Enhance your seder with tips and insights from:

**Rav Yitzchok Berkowitz,
Rav Dov Brezak
and Rav Fishel Schachter**

2 hours of
Seder Preparation
you should not
miss!



CD recording available

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Inspire Your Children Forever: *Conference Call*

Many of us are aware of the unique opportunity that we have on Seder Night to give over a special message to our children.

Over the years I have been asked by many people – **How does one run a Seder?** What messages should I be giving?

A couple of years ago I came across a conference call that dealt with precisely these issues. With permission from the Chofetz Chaim Heritage foundation I am delighted to be able to share with you the insights of 3 great mechanchim:

Rav Yitzchok Berkowitz,
Rav Dov Brezak
and **Rav Fishel Schachter.**

Some of the questions they will be dealing with are:

- **What is the primary goal of the Seder?**
- **How do you Implant Emunah on a practical level?**
- **How do you balance the seder with children of different ages?**
- **How does one reduce tension at the seder?**
- **How do you prepare for the Seder?**

This is a transcript produced from the conference call.

To obtain a CD recording of these conversations please contact me on 0425858503

Wishing you a Chag Kosher V'sameach

Rabbi Ariele Berlin

Question 1: What is the primary goal of the Seder?

Rabbi Henoah Moshe Levine:

If there is a single time in the year when the *mesorah* from one generation is given over to the next, that time would seem to be the night of the Seder, starting with the *mitzvah* of *v'higgadeta l'vincha* and the Torah *sheb'ksav* and continuing with the description of *maggid* and Torah *sheb'al peh*, and continuing further with many *minhagei Yisroel*. There seems to be a clear emphasis on reaching the younger members around the table.

What is the primary goal parents should seek to accomplish at their Seder?

Rabbi Yitzchok Berkowitz:

If you look at the *pesukim* in the beginning of *Parshas Bo*, the Torah there says, "*ki ani hichbadeti es libo v'es lev avadav l'maan shisi ososai eileh b'kirbo ul'maan tesaper b'aznei bincha uven bincha es asher hisalalti b'mitzrayim.*" The *pasuk* states that the *tachlis* of Hashem having done the *nissim* is for the sake of our telling over to our children – *bincha uven bincha* – just what Hashem did to Mitzrayim. What Hashem did to Mitzrayim includes two things. Number one, the fact that Hashem did *mofsim*. The fact that Hashem rules over heaven and earth. There is no such thing as any law of nature that is greater than Him. There is absolutely nothing Ribono Shel Olam cannot do. That's number one. And number two, there is absolutely nothing Ribono Shel Olam won't do for the sake of Klal Yisroel. There is absolutely nothing – there is no element in nature that the Ribono Shel Olam would not bend if necessary for the sake of saving Klal Yisroel, for the sake of building Klal Yisroel.

And that's something that every Yid has to know. A Yid who is *shayach* to Klal Yisroel, a Yid who knows that he's part of Klal Yisroel, has to understand that nothing stands before Him. Hashem can and will be there for him. Understanding that we're part of this *umah* that's been here since the very beginning. We've been fighting the enemy from without and *b'chol dor v'dor omdim aleinu l'chaloseinu v'Hakadosh Baruch Hu matzileinu miyadam*. That really is the *ikar* of what we want to teach them.

I would add that it is the *minhag Yisroel* to sing *V'hi she'amdah* which is a *p'liah*. We sing *sheb'chol dor v'dor omdim aleinu l'chaloseinu*. One of the things that we want to give over is, I guess, the antithesis of "*shver tzu zein a Yid*." The fact that we are proud, that we live *b'simcha* knowing we must really be great if the whole world is out to get us. And you know something, don't be afraid. The Ribono Shel Olam *b'davka* saves us.

So it is the fact that Hashem can do, will do, and above all – we are proud of that fact. He'll do anything for us, can do anything for us.

Rabbi Dov Brezak:

Nowadays, the Seder in itself has so much in the way of implanting very, very deep and strong *emunah* in a child's heart, as Rabbi Berkowitz said in his beautiful words.

Emunah means that everything is Hashem. *Emunah* means that everything Hashem does is good. *Emunah* means *bitachon*, that Hashem will always come through for you. Whatever it is, it's all there. It's like a pill that if you take this pill you'll be fortified in Yiddishkeit. It's unbelievable. There's nothing that compares to it.

Our goal is that the child should swallow the pill. The Seder can be compared to a pill that if the child takes it he'll be fortified against Internet, against the other *nisyonos*. We are faced today with so many things that you can't even walk in the street. I should say even more than that. The street comes into our home.

And what protects a child? What protects a child is his connection to *emunah*. How deep his *emunah* and *yiras shamayim* is implanted in him.

And the Seder is such an opportunity to implant *yiras shamayim* in our children's hearts and to be able to fortify them from everything that's out there.

But it all depends on if they swallow the pill. The pill is a bitter pill they're not going to swallow it. If it's made sweet and tasty, they'll absorb it, they'll internalize it, and they'll accept everything. It'll go into them and it'll do whatever it has to do.

Therefore, please – I'll translate it into practical terms *b'ezras Hashem* – please make the Seder a pleasant experience for your children. Everybody does all kinds of things, of course to make it pleasant. Of course, we let the children say *Mah Nishtana*, we show them pictures, we sing with them. We do this, we do that. Of course we make it pleasant.

No. You be pleasant to your children at the night of the Seder. So if I'll take it back towards forwards, the goal at the Seder is that you be sweet and kindly to your children throughout. No matter what happens, you be sweet and kindly, because that will create a positive association for the Seder. They'll swallow the pill and they'll have intense, deep *emunah* and Yiddishkeit. They'll be fortified for the rest of their lives.

Friends have told me that they remember for tens of years later what their parents and grandparents did at the *leil haSeder*.

I'll just conclude with one sentence. A sage in Bnei Brak, a venerable sage, Rav Moshe Turk, a *talmid* of the Chazon Ish for 40 years. He told me that the Seder is as important as a *bar mitzvah* or a wedding. So therefore, if I could just say that you be sweet and kindly at the *leil haSeder* is as important as you be pleasant and kindly at your child's *bar mitzvah* or wedding.

Rabbi Fishel Schachter:

I heard a story from Rabbi Reisman. He said somebody wrote a report about an accident to his insurance company. *V'maaseh shehayah kach hayah*. This person was a bricklayer, and he wanted to leave early. And his friends had gone off wherever they had gone off, and apparently in New York State you're not allowed to leave bricks on the roof overnight. So he put it on to, like, a pulley to be able to take down. He assumed he would be able to do it. He ran down to fasten the ropes and then he realized that he was off with his mathematics, because the bricks weighed 400 pounds, and he weighed 250 pounds. As the bricks started coming down he was going up, and he smashed into the bricks on the way up. And when he got to the top, the bricks hit the ground and it fell out of the basket. Now the basket weighed 50 pounds, and he weighed 250 so he started coming down, and he smashed into the bricks on the way down. He says he hit the bottom, he hit the floor,

and he was so bewildered at that point, that he let go of the rope, and at that point the basket came flying down and crashed on his head.

I think that metaphor for many people describes their life. We live a life where people lose it. We're just under such pressure. You have husbands and wives, each one is holding down two or three jobs. There are pressures on parents, pressures on kids.

And the Maharal says that Seder is called Seder because it has a *ko'ach* to organize our life. It could put *seder* into our life. And I think that it has to be explained to children. That we all need *Siyata D'Shmaya*. If not, our day could look like that day of that bricklayer, and in certain ways it does. And that the Seder has a *ko'ach* -- that the *mitzvos* of the Seder have a *ko'ach*, that's why it's called Seder -- to organize our life.

And we have to believe in this. That this is not just a ritual, and it's not just something we're doing to commemorate something. This is a *metzi'us*. It's going to give us the *Siyata D'Shmaya* to be able to get through the year.

Question 2: How do you Implant Emunah on a practical level?

Rabbi Yitzchok Berkowitz:

Well, first of all the Haggadah does it. The Haggadah tells the story. We're *maschil b'gnus umesayemim b'shvach*, going through what Klal Yisroel faced and how Hashem took us out. But in order for the Haggadah to do it, you have to speak the language of the Haggadah. The rich *lashonos* of Torah *sheb'ksav* together with the *midrashim* of Torah *sheb'al peh* have to be translated into something the children can really relate to. It's really very important that it be given over in a way that you can say, "I came out of Mitzrayim."

If you take a look at a lot of the *midrashim*, if you take a look at the Ramban, it's very clear that what the Mitzriyim were doing to Klal Yisroel was not just making them work hard.

What the Egyptians were doing, what the Mitzriyim were doing, was dehumanizing Klal Yisroel. They were turning us into *avadim*, not only limiting our freedom. The work itself, the *avodas perach* of making them go and build cities that couldn't stand, building in a place that couldn't sustain what they were building, so that they couldn't even have the satisfaction of enjoying having built something. You work and work and work, and it just collapses, and you know that it's going to collapse. Taking away every bit of satisfaction in life. Not giving them anything other than hard work that shows no product, that shows no fruit. Dehumanizing the Yidden. *Vayorei'usu osanu*. They turned us into *anashim ra'im*. They turned us into subversives. They had the Mitzriyim hate us.

Giving across to your children, first of all, that *shibud Mitzrayim* meant dehumanized, delegitimized our right to exist, our right to being anything.

The second part is, obviously, going into the *hatzalah*. The *nissim v'nifla'os*, and there it's all surreal anyway. You don't have to translate it into modern terms. A description of the different Chazal of exactly what happened. If you're creative, if you can make it *mamash* come alive in your house; if you're a little less creative, just telling over the *midrashim* does a lot. There are those that will bring out the plastic frogs. There are those – making it very, very real to them. Seeing the *mofsim*. And, the *ikar*, making sure that

they're not walking away with, *chalilah*, fairy tales. But understanding that what we're really getting from there is how Hashem twisted and turned every element in *teva* for the sake of Klal Yisroel.

Now I'm talking a lot, and I'm first, and it's not really right. But I just want to add one more thing. The *mitzvah* of *emunah*, of *anochi Hashem Elokecha asher hotzeisicha me'ereetz mitzrayim* really includes two elements. The first is *emunah* – knowing that there is a Ribono Shel Olam. The *ikar* is the *yedi'ah* that there's a Ribono Shel Olam. After *ma'amad har Sinai* we don't really need anything else. Klal Yisroel witnessed it. Klal Yisroel witnessed this, the way the Rambam describes. We ourselves all experienced *nevu'ah*. We were *ro'im es hakolos*. There is no question whatsoever. We don't have to talk about finding *remazim* in the *briyah*. We heard the Ribono Shel Olam speak.

That's not the *emunah* of Pesach. Pesach is dealing with the *mofsim*. Pesach is dealing with I know that there's a Ribono Shel Olam. We're not trying to convince our children that the Ribono Shel Olam exists. We're not *chalilah* telling them, "You know, let's try and see if we can figure out, proving that the Ribono Shel Olam is really there." That is taken for granted.

The *mitzvah* of *emunah* on *leil haSeder* is not deriving Hashem's existence. The *mitzvah* of *emunah* on *leil haSeder* is *davka* the *mofsim*, which is *hashgacha* – the fact that Hashem is there for us, Hashem did all this for us, and that He could do anything, like I said before.

So telling over, *alef*, what the *shibud* in Mitzrayim was, and what they did to us, in a way that they can relate to it – was dehumanizing. And then second, showing how Hashem really did twist and turn every part of nature, making sure to translate the *midrashim* in a way that it's really graphic and they can understand.

I want to add one little *prat*, which is, I think, another very important thing that has to come over. Is that Klal Yisroel is special. Every child has to walk away feeling Klal Yisroel is special. Hashem did all this for us. Klal Yisroel is special. I, as a member of Klal Yisroel, I am special. I am great. I can do great things. I was put into this world special. I was put into this world through *mofsim*. Our whole existence is through *mofsim*, and therefore I'm special. I'm a Yid.

Rabbi Dov Brezak:

If I could expound on a different aspect, and that's that the focus must be on the children at the Seder. Everything revolves on that.

If I could share with you a story I heard from R' Yechiel Yakovson in Eretz Yisroel, a famous educator, about cholent. The rebbi was in class, and the class was really worked up, and everybody was excited. The rebbi said it was an opportune time to ask the children, "Children, what's the most important thing in the world?"

And everybody screams out, "Torah!"

One boy screams out, "Cholent!"

So the rebbi made his way to the boy, and he wanted to teach him a lesson he wouldn't forget. When he came closer he saw the boy was angry. He wasn't joking. He understood that there was something underlying, and he sent the boy down to the principal.

The principal said, "Do you really think that the most important thing in the world is cholent?"

He said, "No. I know that Torah is the most important thing. But not my Torah."

"What do you mean?"

"My father tells me to prepare a *dvar Torah*, and he wants me to say it over at the Shabbos table. But when we come to the Shabbos table, when I say the *dvar Torah* his head is buried in the cholent. So I understand that my Torah is not important."

The focus of the Seder has to be on the children. If I'm focusing on myself, and I want to have a good Seder for myself, then I'm missing the point. If I'm interested in saying all the good *divrei Torah* that I know and make it enjoyable it for myself, I've missed the boat.

The focus has to be on the children.

I just would like to preface that most of the things that I'm saying I've heard from Rav Moshe Turk, the *talmid* of the Chazon Ish. Rav Moshe Turk *shlita* who lives in Bnei Brak, someone who the Steipler Rav used to stand up for him when he walked in the room. A very, very big *eved Hashem* and *tzaddik*.

The focus has to be on the children. And that has to be in a few different ways, but that's the foundation. We're focusing on the children that they should have a successful Seder.

Now, number one – how do you do that?

Number one, like R' Yitzchok was saying, is to make *yetzias Mitzrayim* real to our children in the things that you're saying. It's not only to give them good *vertelach*, but it's to bring it down to a level they can feel.

Now another point is to variate. You don't have to only do this in one style. You're not a storyteller. A friend of mine brings pictures. He brought pictures of people working in buildings, in construction. It doesn't have to be heavy. It has to be something that is pleasant, that gets the point across. It brings a point home. To make it real to our children.

It has to be on their level. Now some kids like pictures. Some kids like – R' Yitzchok mentioned before – you'll take out plastic animals. Other people do other *shtik* on the kids' level. You can also sing and dance with them. Different children respond to different things.

You can also pay attention to what they're saying. Now I'm not saying that the Seder has to be run by the children. Of course not. *V'higadeta l'vincha*, you're the one in charge. You're leading the show, as we said before. You're an ambassador, or maybe you're the captain of the ship, perhaps that would be more apropos. Whatever you are, but you have to pay attention to the children. When they say things, take an interest in it. Don't just hem and haw.

I heard from Rav Shach. A friend of mine, a big *talmid chacham*, who has 13 children, told me he has a very successful Seder. He told me a story from Rav Shach that they say over. How come you can find that *talmidei chachamim* can have children that are not *talmidei chachamim*, whereas we can find that sometimes *baalebatim*, people that are not learning all day, can have children that are *talmidei chachamim*. How can this happen at all?

So he said from Rav Shach the following. Because a *talmid chacham* if his child comes home and says a *dvar Torah*, so the *talmid chacham* Very nice. He wasn't really interested, and he knows it already. Whereas when a child comes home to a person that's not really versed in learning and he tells him a *dvar Torah*, the parent gets all excited. "Wow! I never heard that before! Wow, amazing!"

So according to the response of the parent that's how the child learns how important his Torah is, like we said before.

The same thing at the Seder. We ask you, aside from making it real, and aside from singing, and varying it, and singing and dancing, and bringing it down to their level, you can also pay attention and be excited about what your children have to say. Don't just be bored. Take an interest in it, and be excited and enthusiastic about what they have to say.

So basically, again, it's focusing on the children and bringing it down to their level that they can experience it and take part in it.

Question 3

How do you balance the seder with children of different ages?

Rabbi Henoah Moshe Levine: This is a hot button question that a lot of *gedolim* have. You know, *be"h* the kids are preparing with all kinds of *divrei Torah* for weeks beforehand and they're bursting to say different things. What *l'maaseh*, how do you achieve that balance? In other words, you mentioned it before a little bit about being the captain of the Seder, leading it. What *l'maaseh* should be the balance in that, in terms of the kids saying their *divrei Torah* and you trying to lead it towards something that they're interested in.

Rabbi Dov Brezak:

So once again I'll mention what my friend said, the one who has 13 children. He told me to say that he has 13. We're experienced in this area *baruch Hashem*. The point is that you can't fall into the Seder. You can't just come in, you're running in last minute on Erev Yom Tov, and you come in and you expect everything to be *mesudar*. Like R' Fishel said before, the Seder is called Seder. You have to be *mesudar* in order that you should experience the Seder. You have to prepare. When you prepare then you can do it. *B'ezras Hashem*. You can prepare that you'll give a certain amount of attention to the younger children until *Mah Nishtanah*, let's say till four. Four and down. And then you can buy some prizes or some games for them to play. After *Mah Nishtanah* and *Avadim Hayinu*, they can leave the table because they anyway won't be able to sit more than that and so on. So then you've taken care of the younger ones.

Now you can get to the next group. And the next group you can prepare that in a different part of the Haggadah, that some will say. You can ask them: Where do you have prepared? What do you have? Where would you like to say? Okay, you'll say a *dvar Torah* on *Arba Banim*. This one will say a *dvar Torah* on this thing. Now what are the older children going to do in the meantime, while the younger children are being paid attention to?

..... I'll tell you his name. R' Dovid Munk, he's a son-in-law of a big *talmid chacham* in Eretz Yisroel, called Rav Ganz. He's a big *posek* in Yerushalayim. So R' Dovid Munk told me that he has the older children helping out with the younger children in the meantime. Let them feel they have what to do.

They're making it interesting for the younger children. Maybe they want to show them pictures in their Haggadah. Give them a *tafkid*. Give them a job that they can do until it comes their turn that you'll pay attention to them.

So, like this, if it's planned out. And this one maybe will start singing. Maybe the older one will start singing. And he'll start a *niggun* at this point. If you prepare beforehand, you can allocate different parts to different children. And you can tell them, "I'll be giving you." But he prepared so much. But it's not fair to him. Here you said before you have to pay attention to them, now you're saying to only give them a limited time. It makes no difference. When you give them their time they know it's their time, and they're getting a time at the Seder that's designated for them they'll be very happy with that.

So, again, it's a matter of preparation beforehand. If you prepare for a wedding – do you know anybody in the world that does not prepare for a wedding? Just shows up at the hall on the day of the *chasunah*? We've never heard of such a thing. So R' Moshe Turk *shlita*, *talmid* of the Chazon Ish from Bnei Brak, he told me that a Seder night, or the two Seder nights we have *chutz l'aretz*, is as important as a *chasunah*. You have to prepare it, and this is part of what you should prepare. Who sits where? Which one will sit next to you, which one will sit over here? And even though that he's sitting away from you, maybe put the older ones a little further away from you, and then, again, give them a job. "I need you over there to look on your younger brother." "I need you to be showing him things as we go through *Maggid*. He may not be able to pay attention, but he wants to sit at the table. He's not like the four-year-olds that want to go to the side and play games. So therefore you sit next to him, even though you're sitting away so you won't feel bad." That's part of the planning out.

One last point is, he did mention and it can be done, prizes at the Seder. If you want to give out incentives during the Seder, that's one thing. Or if you want to have, he personally R' Dovid Munk, he buys a prize for each child to get after Afikoman. I'm not saying not to steal Afikoman, maybe the one who steals it gets a special prize, but he has a prize for each child and they don't have to wait. They get it right after Afikoman on the spot. Whether it's a *sefer*, whether it's a little thing. Something they can use on Yom Tov. And it gives them a reason to want to stay up also.

And I heard from Rav Turk – I asked him, “Is that right? To have prizes on the night of the Seder?”

And he says – I’ll say it in my *lashon* – he says, “You better believe it.” He didn’t say that, but that is what he said. Because that will make it enjoyable for the children. Someone told me he ran a Seder for 75 kids in a hotel, and he said it was one of his most successful. He gave points to children, and there were points to be able to redeem it for prizes later on.

Rabbi Fishel Schachter:

I know as a rebbi the most difficult time of the day is when the kids say over the *gemara*. It’s important for every child to say, probably more important than anything else, but the most difficult thing is to keep everyone else at bay, when everyone else is saying. And *b’frat* when you’re dealing with a range from pre-kindergarten pre-nursery, nursing babies, all the way up to girls in seminary and *bachurim* in *shidduchim*.

We mentioned when we were discussing this beforehand, Rav Schwab *ztl* used to say, the *mitzvah* is supposed to be *v’higadeta l’vincha* not *v’higadeta l’avicha*. And what kind of happened is, not, *chas v’shalom*, I’m not saying this in a derogatory way, but everything has to be used in its proper way. Kids come home, *baruch Hashem*, with huge *haggados*, and the rebbi – from the day after Purim – is working on *divrei Torah*, and it’s all beautiful. It becomes impossible if each child is going to have seventy or eighty *divrei Torah* to say over by the Seder table. It is impossible to keep everyone else at bay. I think you have to explain to the children that each child should get his spotlight, pick the best *dvar Torah* beforehand and say it. The rest of the *divrei Torah*, there are many more Yom Tov *seudos*. There’s a second Seder, there are the day *seudos*. Rav Schwab writes that he had all his *einiklech* and children say the *divrei Torah* – I believe this is what he writes – by the day *seudos*. And I think we shouldn’t lose focus on that. Some children need it more; some children need it less. Give everyone their spotlight, but understand that it’s not fair to have everyone else just sitting there because it’s not going to work.

Rabbi Yitzchok Berkowitz:

I, too, am in favor of the father not only being the captain, but also doing most of the talking because that's the *mitzvah*. And for the children to understand that. Yes, they should be involved. Not saying over the *divrei Torah* that the rebbi said, unless it's something pertinent to a discussion that's going on. And, yes, the *divrei Torah* can be said over at lots of other occasions. Not only the *seudos Yom Tov*. You know the Shabbosos before Pesach. There is plenty of time to discuss the Haggadah then. There's absolutely no reason why a Shabbos HaGadol table – even though it's like three days before Pesach and perhaps the *chametz* is out the door, or something –

You may be in the basement on milk crates.

Yes, that doesn't mean that you cannot spend the *seudah* with the kids telling things over. Of course, this is something that has to be discussed with them beforehand, especially if you haven't been doing it this way until then. But it's very important to try to really create certain feelings at the Seder and stick to them. So many of the *divrei Torah* are beautiful, but they're not part of the seeing, they're not part of giving over *yetzias Mitzrayim*. If anything, they show the beauty and *gaonus* and *gadlus* of Chazal and *rishonim* and *acharonim*. And it's wonderful, and they give a *geshmak*, but it's not what the *tachlis* of the Seder is.

And it's very important – if the father feels the children have something to add with regard to that, of course, give them attention. It's not a matter of just hearing your voice; it's not a matter of just hearing yourself talk. You don't have to go and take over everything. But what you really do have to make sure is that the scenes of the Seder are really what is being given over. And, for that matter, most of what the children are going to say over are really not for *leil haSeder*. Their participation should be as part of a discussion of what happened.

Of course, you want to provoke them to talk and ask *kashas* and offer incentives. *Baruch Hashem*, I'm in Eretz Yisroel where children's *hasagos* are different. When our kids were young, *egozim* really did it for them. *Egozim* at the Seder table, collecting their *egozim* – everybody had a little dish for putting their *egozim* in – it worked. I understand that *acheinu shebagolah*

are used to a different level of stimulation, and as a result of it you're not going to be able to do that. I don't know. Perhaps also, even if you promise them bigger gifts at the end, there's no reason why you can't give out small things *b'shaas maaseh*, which could also be food. Whatever *nosh* it is that you don't mind them having at that point, so that they have something on the spot and not just a *havtacha* for after Yom Tov.

But their participation should be in the form of reacting to what you're saying or adding to it, or asking a good *kasha*. And all of those should be rewarded on the spot. But essentially, it's keeping the theme of the Seder. It's keeping the theme of the Seder.

And in terms of the differences of ages, you do have to divide the time. But I think that a more effective way of doing things – if you can do it – is if you can tell the same story, something that will interest the older ones and the younger ones. The older ones are going to get all the nuances; the younger ones may get a joke or two over here, but it's the same story and they're getting it on different levels. As much as you can do that, that's really preferable, so that nobody goes bored. I know it means being a bit of a magician, but with ample preparation – people are talented with ample preparation – you can be creative. And there is so much in writing today; there is so much printed material where you can find a story and the different angles of *yetzias Mitzrayim* that you can share with them and bring it down to their level, so that the little ones will get something out of it, and the big ones will also appreciate it.

Again, looking back at the *sedarim* that I grew up with, there were a lot of the stories that I remember hearing over, year after year. I didn't really get the *nimshal* until I was a lot older. In fact, there were some stories where it didn't even occur to me that it was a *moshol*. Like I just remembered the story part of the Seder as I was growing up. And then it only dropped later. Wow! The *nimshal* is something so profound.

So you'll have the younger ones enjoying the story, and the older ones really enjoying the *nimshal*. As much as possible to try to give over something that is *shaveh l'chol nefesh*, although they're going to be taking it in different ways.

And, once again, I don't think that the Seder is at all a time that's supposed to be filled with the *divrei Torah* of the children. Perhaps a little bit here and there, but not all that much.

I don't know if we're supposed to be discussing scheduling as well. We don't have all that much time to play with because the night isn't long enough, and the children aren't going to be able to stay up all that long unless you're so talented that you could keep them interested 3 or 4 in the morning.

Rabbi Henoah Moshe Levine: Now you mentioned the theme of the Seder – everything should concentrate, be focused, on that. Just to reiterate one more time again. You said that the theme of the Seder is –

Rabbi Yitzchok Berkowitz:

That Hashem can do anything and will do it for Klal Yisroel. He did it and will do it for Klal Yisroel.

Rabbi Henoah Moshe Levine: That arises from telling over the actual story in depth and the *medrashim* of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. Is that correct?

Rabbi Yitzchok Berkowitz:

Yes.

Question 4: How does one reduce tension at the seder?

Rabbi Dov Brezak:

I asked this question to Rav Moshe Turk *shlita*, again, the *talmid* of the Chazon Ish. And he told me that whatever you do, deal with it in a sweet and a kindly way. Interact with yourself in a sweet and kindly way. Whatever happens – if a child is fighting, to get involved and break it up in a sweet and kindly way. If a child is sitting and he's not listening, he's not participating, sweet and kindly go over, give him a hug. Go over, take him around, and maybe sing to him, or sing with him, or just even interact. The most important thing at the Seder is that your children should get a pleasant association. They should love Yiddishkeit. That is the supreme goal.

The whole point of the Seder is *emunah*. *Emunah* means Hashem does everything, like R' Yitzchok was saying before. But *emunah* also means everything Hashem does is good.

If I am sweet and kindly even when things go the way I don't want them to go, I am living my *emunah*. Then your children will absorb it from you firsthand, the way you're acting. If you act kind, even though this one spilled the wine. If you act kind and sweet, even though this one spoke up. If you act kind and sweet even though another relative is there and is not letting you deal with the children the way you want to, and all the other things that go the way I don't want them to go – if I'll be kind and sweet the message will come across.

I'll just conclude with this. A friend of mine had such a miserable Seder a few years ago – it was one of the worst times he ever had. Here he planned, and he wanted, and his two older boys were fighting with each other. This one was hungry; this one had no patience. They were fighting; they were arguing. It was such a miserable Seder for him. But he went through, and he kept going, and he accepted it. He tried to be sweet and kindly. Even if he wasn't successful, he tried.

When he came to the words *shebshifleinu zachar lanu ki l'olam chasdo* in the Hallel, closer towards the end, he just felt *shebshifleinu* – this is such a low Seder. And he started dancing. *Shebshifleinu zachar lanu ki l'olam chasdo*.

And he went on for ten minutes. It made such an impression on his children. He said it made such an impression on himself. He never had such a high point in his Seder ever.

So whatever happens, please remember the paramount goal. The Seder should be pleasant for your children that they have a love for Yiddishkeit. Even if everything goes wrong. You be sweet and kindly and pleasant and that will do it, *b'ezras Hashem*.

Rabbi Yitzchok Berkowitz:

Chazal tell us that there is a *mitzvah* on *leil haSeder* of *cherus*. First there is a *mitzvah* of *heseibah*, where you have to recline. We're trying to show aristocracy, and the aristocrats of old used to recline.

Now, aristocracy is not just a matter of reclining and sipping your wine, and doing a little vegetable dip at the beginning of the Seder. Turning your house into a palace. It's not just that.

I mean something is even more fundamental. And all of what Chazal are telling to do, perhaps, is pointing to us becoming aristocrats *leil haSeder*. To show what we mean when we say that we became *bnei chorin*.

Yidden are big people. We're aristocratic. Aristocrats are self-possessed. Aristocrats are not tense. Aristocrats are calm. Tension is a killer. Tension makes for just being unpleasant to be around you. You're an unpleasant spouse when you're tense; you're an unpleasant father when you're tense. And if anytime you're dealing with *mitzvos* you get tense, the kids will associate *mitzvos* with something very unpleasant.

Chazal came along to you and say that the way we celebrate our *cheirus* is by being aristocratic. If there is any night of the year that a Yid has to do whatever he can not to be tense, it's *leil haSeder*. You have to be calm, and happy, and loving, and caring. Radiate calmness, serenity, joy, a *simchas chaim*, come what may.

A glass falls and breaks, even if it was one of a kind, or now you're missing one to a set, come on. Put that in perspective. We're *bnei chorin*. An aristocrat has the whole world; he's missing nothing. Be aristocratic. Be calm. Make your face shine. That is really the image a Yid is supposed to have, and the *baal habayis*, remember, is at the center of the Seder. This is the face you're supposed to have. It should be reflected in everything you do.

It's an *achrayus* you have to your children. Making sure that what you're giving over is the *cheirus*, that you're giving over that aristocracy.

This is true really of all year long too. Make sure that the way you approach *mitzvos* is not with tension. It's not as if there's someone standing over me with a sledgehammer. You're doing *mitzvos* because you love the Ribono shel Olam. Yes, we're *mekayem halacha*. What else are *mitzvos* all about? For the *ratzon Hashem*, and you've got to do it right. But *yiras shamayim* doesn't mean with tension. *Yiras shamayim* means with love. *Yiras shamayim* means I know this is real, I know this is true, I know *retzono Yisborach* is all that matters, and that's why I'm going to fulfill it.

Leil haSeder, especially, you should be radiating calmness and *simcha*. No matter what happens. No matter what happens. You don't lose anything by being calm. We know that when you're in traffic, you don't get there one second earlier by looking at your watch, not a fraction of a second earlier by looking at your watch and pressing on the horn. You know, it doesn't get you there any earlier. All you do is you eat yourself up. All you do is you ruin your health. All you do is you turn yourself into an unpleasant human being. What are you doing it for?

Certainly, *leil haSeder*. This is what you want to give over to your children. A Yiddishkeit that is calm, that is aristocratic, that is deep and wonderful. It's the calmness and it's also that love.

The point has been brought up about how kids who need that love to really be attached to their Yiddishkeit because there's so much competition out there. I see it time and again.

You know, there's a lot going on outside. And not every kid is *zoche* to find excitement in Torah and *mitzvos* on the same level as the excitement of the stimulation out on the street. Although we have a very good product, and if it's sold properly, they're missing nothing. They're missing nothing if a Yid has Torah and *mitzvos*. We've got it all. But there are some kids who just weren't *zoche*. There is one thing that they absolutely will not find in the street, and that is the unconditional love of family. And if they feel it from you, nobody will be able to give it to them out there. And even if they temporarily find themselves there, they're going to come back because they're going to miss it. And they're going to know that there's a family waiting for them that's not going to say, "Told you so." There's a family waiting to accept them.

So once again, at the Seder, radiate calmness, radiate warmth, radiate love. Radiate real aristocracy, the aristocracy of a Yid. We are a *mamleches kohanim v'goy kadosh*. We are not little people that are afraid of our shadows. We are not little people that get upset over every small thing, where every petty problem becomes a major issue. We're not losing our temper all day. *Leil haSeder* be a *ben chorin*. Your kids will learn from that so much about Yiddishkeit, that perhaps you don't have to tell them. They'll just see it.

Rabbi Fishel Schachter:

You know, we mentioned the story before when we were preparing for this. I was once doing a conference call and I had to speak to a combination of different yeshivos. Los Angeles, I think it was. It was approximately – many, many children – I don't remember how many. Maybe up to a thousand kids. And there was a timing conflict with the time zones, and it turned out that I would be doing it during class. We had this novel idea. I would be sitting in my class and I would be doing the conference call and my children, my students, would be listening, and so would everyone else on the other side of the country.

Of course, the obvious problem would be that if one of the children in my class misbehaved – yes, that does happen sometimes, even in my class – so what happens then? Here I am, I can't say anything to the kid, and so many hundreds of people are listening to me, and we know how popular the Chofetz Chaim tapes are, so it's thousands. What happens?

So I pleaded and begged with my class, the same way I pleaded with my family before, that everyone should behave and that they should understand that they really have to give it their best shot. If not, I won't do it during class, but they wanted me to do it during class. So it was exciting.

I was saying a story. And there are two kids sitting in the back of the class, and these two children have a hard time getting along with each other. Yes, even though they're 13 or 14 years old, and there are times even that I had to break up a fight between them. And I see one of the kids is taking out an orange and he starts eating it. Now, I never said, "Don't take out an orange and start eating it." So I couldn't really complain. I tried to beckon to him, to motion to him, to put it away.

Then I saw that when he finished the orange, he was bored, and he started flipping the orange peels to the other boy in the class, who probably has like the least patience in the entire class. And I said there's going to be a fight over here. *Dos feilt mir ois* now, in front of everybody. I knew I shouldn't have done this during class. And when the first orange peel hit whatever that boy's name is – let's call him Shimmy, of course it's not his real name – I saw Shimmy was going to get up and just take the whole desk and throw it. I didn't know what was going to happen.

I connected with Shimmy for a second. I kind of intertwined it into the story so I could make that facial expression that *shtims* with the story, it'll coordinate with the story. I kind of pleaded with Shimmy. I said, "I know what you feel like. I know you want to take that whole orange peel and throw it back at him. Please!" And he looked at me and he nodded, as if to say okay, I got it, don't worry rebbi.

And he held himself back. And there was no fight. And I gotta tell you that at the end of that I had such an appreciation for this Shimmy. And this Shimmy was a difficult, difficult kid. He really was. And the patience that I had for him the rest of the year, and the *avodah* that I put in – and even though we have to put this *avodah* into all of our students regardless – but I have to tell you that there was this tremendous incentive. Because the *hakoras hatov*, the sense of gratitude that I had – I know his temperament, I know that he, under normal circumstances, would have exploded when he threw the

orange peel at him – and because he knew that my dignity, so to speak, my honor was on the line, so he held back for me. I had such a sense of appreciation for this kid, it's unimaginable.

I think that's what the Seder is. We all have to think about that. This is the *chuppah*. All the cameras in *Shamayim* are focused at us. If you're upset about what your wife said, you're upset about what your father-in-law said, about what your mother-in-law said, or what one of your children said – and make up beforehand that it's going to happen, someone is going to say the wrong thing. And you want to respond. And you say, "Ribono Shel Olam." You give that nod, that smile to the Ribono Shel Olam. Don't worry. I realize it's the Seder. Think about the appreciation that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has to you afterwards.

Rabbi Dov Brezak:

A father told me, a Rov of a city here in Eretz Yisroel – I can't tell you which city and which Rov – told me that his child ran away from the Shabbos table. He had actually been coming to our parenting workshop, and he heard about making the Shabbos table, making Yiddishkeit, pleasant for your child, and how crucial it is nowadays when you can get 300 channels of cable television on your cell phone, when you can get – I'm not even going to go into all these things – but whatever it is, and a teacher can tell me that a child put their head down in class because they didn't feel well, they had a headache, and they put their hood over their head, and that the child was actually watching a movie in the middle of class, because they had an earphone and the hood was covering it, and they had the MP – whatever number they had – under the table and were watching a movie. There are so many things out there, and there are so many people falling *korbanos* to what's out there. How crucial and critical is it to have a love for Yiddishkeit. And the only way the child will not have a love for Yiddishkeit if you're going to be grouchy, if you're going to be under pressure, if you're going to be negative, or you're going to associate with the child negatively there's no way they will have a love for Yiddishkeit.

That's true for Shabbos. It's especially true for the *leil haSeder*, that there's so much at stake, as you've been hearing.

The father told me, the Rov of the city in Eretz Yisroel, the boy ran away – a 7-something year old ran away from the Shabbos table. He has been coming to the workshops. He ran after the boy, he said he caught up with the boy, and he took the boy's hand and he started dancing. The boy was first in shock, but he danced with him, and he danced him all the way back to the table.

Rav Wolbe used to tell us, Rav Shlomo Wolbe – I went to his *shiurim*, I had a *shtikel keshet* with him – he told us that what if you come home at night, every night, you come home at night and it's all a *baal agan* as we say in Hebrew. The house is all in a turmoil. The kids aren't asleep yet, and you're ready to give this one a smack, and that one a big potch, and this one a scream. What would happen, said Rav Wolbe, if you pick up the kids on your shoulders and you dance them into bed?

Of course, it's not usually going to happen to us. We're not as focused during the year. But at least on one or two times a year, the *leilos haSedarim*, whatever you do, however you're going to do it – if a kid is not interested, if you go over to him and give him a kiss. Give him a kiss when he's not interested, and he's not participating? Is this *chinuch*? This is the *chinuch* of the *leil haSeder*? Like *Mah Nishtanah halaylah hazeh mikol haleilos* – this night is different than all the other nights. The *chinuch* of this night is different. You especially have to try, whatever you do, try to do it in a pleasant and sweet, kindly way.

If a kid is going to run away because of the Afikoman, you're going to run after him, whether you let him vent or whether you won't let him vent. But at least give him to feel that you care that he was disappointed. If you're not going to listen to all the kids' *divrei Torah* because you can't listen to seventy *divrei Torah* of each kid at the Seder, at least let each child feel that he's special and you want to listen. When a child is not participating, and you're disappointed with the way they're cooperating, and they're talking about other things – it's such a holy night how could you be talking about mundane things like this – go over and give him a smile. Give him a wink. You be sweet and pleasant.

Rav Moshe Turk *shlita*, this *gadol* from Bnei Brak, the *talmid* of the Chazon Ish, told me: You can notice, if you take sugar cubes, how many sugar cubes

do you need to sweeten a cup of tea. I don't know. I don't drink sugar cubes. I just pour it on. He said, you would probably need about two or three perhaps. If you drink a cup of tea while holding a sugar cube in your mouth, then you could drink a few cups through one sugar cube. You drink the tea through the sugar cube.

Rav Shach said a big *klal* in *chinuch* is to overlook. You don't have to notice everything. But if something you can't help but noticing because it's in front of you, and because there's catastrophe or whatever, make lemonade out of your lemon.

And, again, that's the *emunah* we're living. Everything Hashem does is good. If you dance when things don't go your way, and you sing to Hashem --

And when your kid acts up, "Thank You, Hashem. *Shebshifleinu zachar lanu ki l'olam chasdo.*" Then you're living the *emunah* that you're preaching. And that will make the greatest impact on your child, more than anything else.

Rabbi Henech Moshe Levine:

On the same topic, *eitzos* for the kid who disturbs and how to deal with it.

Rabbi Fishel Schachter:

Rashi says, "*Vatikra shemo Yosef ... vatomer asaf Elokim es cherpasi.* Rochel was so unbelievably excited when Yosef was born. *Asaf Elokim es cherpasi.* So Rashi says in the second *pshat*, why was Rochel so excited. Because if you don't have a child and something breaks, so whose fault is it? It's the wife's fault. *Kol zeman she'ein l'isha ben ein lah b'mi litlos sirchona v'sheyesch lah ben*, if she has a son, no problem. If something breaks, *mi shavar keli zeh bincha, mi achal te'einim eilu* – who ate up the *te'einim*, *bincha* – your son. It was your son.

You would think from this Rashi that Yaakov Avinu was the type who came home *chas v'shalom* and said, "What's going on here!? Who ate my supper? Who ate my cake?" And Rochel would have to like – oh no – cringe when Yaakov comes home. And finally she has a son and she can say, "Ha, your son did it."

What's *pshat* in this Rashi? What does this mean?

But I once heard from one of my rebbeim exactly the opposite. Yaakov Avinu had the ultimate love for everybody that was around him. But the ultimate love comes out only in one scenario – when your child disappoints you, when your child breaks something, when your child embarrasses you in front of your father-in-law/mother-in-law, whatever it may be, and you swallow and you approach that issue with love, and you say, “It’s okay. I’ll help you pick up the pieces. We’ll go further. I understand you.”

As great as you are, and as kind as you are, you are never as tested when you feel betrayed by your child. No doubt that when Yaakov Avinu saw his child break something, so Yaakov Avinu in his ultimate response of *ahavah* would say, “Come my child, let’s pick up the pieces.” And that’s what Rochel meant when she said, “*Asaf Elokim es cherpasi.*” Because she said this would give Yaakov an opportunity to create a kindness that never existed beforehand.

I think also it’s very important – there’s a famous story of R’ Yaakov Kamenetzky *ztl.* Yesterday was the *yahrzeit*. Actually we’re pre-recorded so it’s a couple of days before. But, he once told someone who scolded a two-year-old that was dancing on the table. And he said to him, “Why did you scream at the child?”

He told R’ Yaakov, “Well you need *chinuch*.”

So R’ Yaakov said: *Chinuch* is to be *mechanech* the child that he doesn’t do something wrong when he gets older. Now when he’s going to be ten or fourteen or twenty he may do things that are wrong. He’s not going to be dancing on the table. He’s only doing it as a two-year-old. So where is the *chinuch* here? Why did you yell at him? It’s natural for a child to jump on the table.

We have to understand in terms of discipline whom are we really disciplining. Are we disciplining ourselves or the child? If you’re embarrassed by something the child did, and you’re angry, that’s not *chinuch*. *Chinuch* is when there’s a concern for the child. What could I do to help this child? And don’t be shocked, don’t be surprised, “What?! This is what you’re doing by the Seder!?”

Yes, this is what he’s doing by the Seder. Your job is to deal with it.

I think if you take out the element of surprise then you’re ahead of the game.

Question 5: How do you prepare for the Seder?

Rabbi Fishel Schachter:

First of all, the technical things, where everyone sits and so on. It's also important that there shouldn't be – what we call in Yiddish *penyurai*. The most difficult thing for children, and for everyone, is when just they're stalling. When things are not happening. And the larger the family the more naturally you're going to have that.

I think, to try to work things out and to be as helpful as possible. And work things out doesn't mean to yell at your wife how come things aren't moving. It means to get into the kitchen and to help.

But to try everyone should be involved in trying to move things as quickly as possible. Whatever time it takes, which is quality time, all the better. Whatever time is wasted should be eliminated. The quicker the Seder moves in that sense – I don't mean quick in skipping over important parts. But quicker in the sense of things that are unnecessary, just people *schmoozing* around. You're going to have an easier time with the children, an easier time with everyone. And a lot of that takes preparation during the day, like really it says in *Shulchan Aruch*. You're supposed to start *mi'be'od yom*.

I heard from someone, the earlier you can *daven maariv* the better. You can't make Kiddush till it's at night, but you could *daven maariv* earlier. That's not always *toluy* in us, but at least when we get home to get moving right away.

And then to emphasize really three things.

There are three main focus points by the Seder to emphasize to the children.

One is the ***shemirah***. That this is *leil shemurim*, and we all need *shemirah*, like the *choshuve rabbanim* said till now.

Emunah, like the *choshuve rabbanim* said till now.

And also, the ***hakaras hatov***, which basically is what was discussed.

Plan out where you're going to put in, where you're going to insert, all these three things. Where you're going to emphasize the point that, yes, we are in

galus and that the world hates us. Try to emphasize to the children, without scaring them too much, that we need *shemirah*, *emunah* and *hakaras hatov*.

At what point am I going to say to my children, “Look how much Hakadosh Baruch Hu did for us. Look how much Hakadosh Baruch Hu did for your grandfather, for your great-grandfather. Plan that out beforehand in the Seder, where are you going to talk about these three *nekudos*.”

We have this interesting *minhag* at home. Before we get to *vanitzak* I tell the kids a story, and I’m not going to give you the full-color story now, but there was a Yid who came to the Apter Rov and he was crying. He had absolutely no money, and the *poritz* was throwing him out, the local squire and landowner was going to toss him out of his apartment into the dungeon. And basically his world was caving in on him.

To make a long story short, actually he couldn’t get to the Apter Rov because it was the Shabbos HaGadol *drasha* and he was standing all the way outside. He was about to give up. I can’t even get into the *drasha*.

Suddenly he hears the Rov saying: The Ribono Shel Olam loves every single Yid. The Ribono Shel Olam loves every single person. The Ribono Shel Olam cares for all of us. Let’s say there’s a Yid by the name of Mechel – and his name was Mechel. Let’s say the *poritz* wants to throw him out. Do you realize when he says *Baruch Atah Hashem... go’al yisroel* or *go’el yisroel*, whether it’s the Seder, whether it’s *Shemone Esrei*, do you realize that redemption means everybody. Every single person. The Ribono Shel Olam worries about us all.

And he came home, he was so happy. He was so excited. He said, “You know, the Apter Rov is talking about me! If he knew I was there, surely the Ribono Shel Olam knows I was there.”

And throughout the Seder night he was dancing and singing and *b’frat* when it came to *vanitzak*. He said, “Come on Yidden in Mitzrayim, scream, yell! The Ribono Shel Olam knows each and every one of your pain, exactly what you’re feeling, what your pain is.” And the whole family started to scream and yell and yell.

And the *poritz* came to the window, and he looked through and he said, “Uh oh. They’re going out of their minds.” And he suddenly burst in and he said, “Look. I see you’re losing it. You’re all just standing there and screaming. The fact is that you’re one of my best managers. Okay, forget it, I’m *mochel* you the entire rent. Alright? Just calm down a little bit.”

And of course they started screaming more because they realized their *tefilllos* were answered.

And I always say this story every single year, and I add the color and the humor to it. Then before we get to *vanitzak*, that whole part of the Haggadah, so everyone gets up and says, “I want to be *mispallel* for so-and-so who needs a *shidduch*. I want to be *mispallel* for so-and-so, this couple that is waiting for a baby. I want to be *mispallel* for so-and-so that needs a *refuah shleimoh*.” We go through the entire circle; everyone prepares someone to be *mispallel* for and we say the name. And then we say, “Ribono Shel Olam, let’s *daven* for them. Let’s *daven* for us; let’s *daven* for them.” *Hamispallel b’ad chaveiro hu ne’eneh techilah* – if you *daven* for a friend you’re answered first. And we scream *vanitzak*. And we scream at the top of our lungs. And the kids laugh. They look so forward to it. It just brings a sense of reality and a sense of connection into the Seder.

And, of course, I once said this story on a tape, and a couple called me up and they said: We want to tell you that we did not have children for over 12 years after we were married, and we were sitting all alone by the Seder. And we were so depressed. And the wife said to her husband, “Let’s try it.” And the husband was a little bit like – She said, “No one’s here anyway, right? So who are we going to be embarrassed for? There is no *poritz* that’s going to come walking in.” And she told me, they yelled their hearts out. By *vanitzak*. And that year they had a baby. And, of course, that’s another story, actually, every single year.

Something in the Seder, something that you do, each of us does it in our own way, where it becomes real. This is real. *Kadesh, urchatz* are all buttons that we are pressing, that are creating *yeshuos*, that are creating *emunah*.

The Noam Elimelech says – and we’ll conclude with this – *I’maan tesaper*, and the *pasuk* goes on to say “*es asher hisalalti b’Mitzrayim*.” He says *I’maan*

tesaper, according to how you give over *yetzias Mitzrayim*, that's how it's going to be *es asher hisalalti b'Mitzrayim*.

We live in a dangerous world. We live in a world where people are creating nuclear bombs aimed at us. It's nothing. There's a *yeshua*. And the *yeshua* is *sipur yetzias Mitzrayim*. And the more we get into the *sipur yetzias Mitzrayim* then *l'fi* that *madreigoh* corresponding to that level of intensity, emotion and seriousness, and -- as you heard now -- how gentle and kind we are about this, that's how we are going to see the *es asher hisalalti b'Mitzrayim*.

Rabbi Henech Moshe Levine:

What do you do *l'maaseh* when a child is disturbing at the Seder? How should one approach it?

Rabbi Yitzchok Berkowitz:

If the child is disturbing at the Seder because there's something really bothering him, deal with the issue. He wants something, so you either give it to him, or you can tell him, "We'll discuss it later," but with a smile, with a big smile.

If he *stam* needs attention, then *avadeh* you have to pick him up and hold him in your lap and go on radiating your warmth. You never show an angry face at the Seder. You cannot show an angry face at the Seder. I don't want to make everyone neurotic, but you really should be calm. You should have this real feeling of serenity.

And you're going to hold your kid, and with your smile, and you continue. And a smile is so much powerful. A warm smile is so much more powerful than a dirty look.

If the kid really has an issue, so deal with it. If there's something the child wants, don't ignore it. You think it's petty; you think it's small; you think it's stupid. For you perhaps. It's something that bothers the child. There's nothing wrong with saying yes. I'm not talking about giving in, giving the child whatever he wants forever. But *leil haSeder* you're allowed to give him a little more. You don't have to be so rigid. It doesn't have to be that "No."

Not now. Not yet.” It doesn’t have to be, “You got already.” He wants, he can have. The others will want, you’ll give the other ones more too.

Leil haSeder you’re an aristocrat. You’ve got everything. You’re wealthy. You give. You share. You should just be radiating warmth and love.

If there’s something that’s totally inappropriate, it can also be dealt with, with a smile. You have to go over to the child and pick him up. I’m just reminding, this is the *leil haSeder*. We’re coming out of Mitzrayim. It’s not what the kids were doing on the way out of Mitzrayim.

Rabbi Henschel Moshe Levine:

How should a person reasonably prepare for the Seder? How does he go about planning on the *ruchniyus*? All these things that we’ve been speaking about, *l’maaseh* how should a person go about doing this?

Rabbi Yitzchok Berkowitz:

There are two really important things.

First of all, one cannot prepare *ruchniyus* and overlook *gashmiyus*, because the *gashmiyus* very much facilitates the *ruchniyus*. R’ Fishel talked about there shouldn’t be wasted time. Because we’re dealing with a limited amount of time, the Seder is on a certain level *b’chipazon*. Because the time is limited, it’s very important to see to it that things are organized in a way that they don’t take any longer than they really have to.

Just giving out matzoh and *maror* to a large group, if you have a lot of people at the Seder, can take a long time. It can really take a long time. The way to cut it out is that you have things prepared. You also talk about dividing who is going to distribute what to whom. Filling each others’ *kosos* of wine. You should have a few different people filling simultaneously it shouldn’t take too long. And move. You also have to know how much time to allot for it. You really have to figure out how long does it really take. So that when you plan you don’t find that you took for granted that things would take less time than they really are.

Matzoh, *maror* and the *kricha* can easily take an hour if you have a large group of people there. You can cut down a little bit with preparation. You can also make the schedule a lot longer if you don't prepare well. The logistics are very important. The pre-weighed matzos, for example, that are already pre-packaged and are handed out just before *motzi matzoh*, you then make your *bracha* on yours. Everyone's already got theirs; you just pass out to them as you begin to chew, you pass out little pieces from what you made the *bracha* on. That can save a lot of time.

The same thing perhaps pre-measured *maror* that you then pass out. So that with the *kricha* you have the pre-weighed matzos ready and the pre-measured *maror* and you have different people passing things around. This can really save a lot of time.

And really working things out. And that when you come home, and about to start the Seder, everyone knows exactly where they're going to sit, and everything is prepared for them. And you don't have to go searching for your *kittel*. Everything is really there. This is very, very important.

The other part obviously of getting yourself into the mood of the Seder, giving yourself this elevated feeling. We discussed together at some point – R' Fishel mentioned that particular point. That sometimes you just can't force yourself to feel a certain thing. It's important that you get yourself into the mood. But if it doesn't work then you'll have to go and play along anyway. And perhaps you'll fall into it. And if not, you'll just have a great Seder anyhow. But you should try to really remind yourself what the Seder is all about.

Some practical things. First of all, Erev Pesach is a difficult time. People are busy. You can't eat *chametz*; you can't eat *matzoh*. People go tired, hungry. It's important that perhaps we even have lunch. A friend of mine suggested that we sit down to chicken for lunch on Erev Pesach; it'll take a lot less time than everybody searching for food, or people just being hungry, grouchy as a result of it, nervous. Make sure that you take care of yourselves. Take care of everybody on Erev Pesach, so that Erev Pesach you don't find yourself hungry, exhausted and then come to the Seder on an empty stomach, have your first cup of wine and your head starts spinning, and you forget

everything that you prepared to say. And all you really want to do is go to sleep. You have to make sure that you do that.

And of course, reading, thinking, being *misbonen* for days beforehand. Being *misbonen* about what it was like. What *shibud Mitzrayim* was like. And what it must have been like to be there for the *nissim*. What it must have been like for all of Klal Yisroel to come – *vayehi bachatzi halaylah* – and they're all coming together, and all of Klal Yisroel coming to Ramses from all over the place, about to leave Mitzrayim. Just what it looked like.

The Kuzari says that you're supposed to try and walk around with these visions of it. Not just *leil haSeder* what you're telling, but to try to feel it yourself. And reading up on it. There are a few very good *sefarim* out with *midrashim*. There's *Medrash Leil Shemurim*, there's *Matamei HaShulchan*, there's *Let My Nation Go*. There are a lot of good *sefarim* that give you a lot of background, based on the *medrashim* ... and trying to get yourself into that

And, of course, if at all possible, don't leave things for the last minute. Don't find yourself having to stay up *leil bedikas chametz*, Erev Pesach, pretty much the whole night because of all the things that you haven't done. It's a little late to talk about starting early, but nevertheless if you have to stay up a whole night, you do that not the last minute, not the night before, but many nights before, so that you come to the Seder fairly rested. It may be wishful thinking, but if you could even take a bit of a nap on Erev Pesach, that is just wonderful.

Rabbi Henoah Moshe Levine:

Preparing reasonably for the Seder, and also from a time management perspective, what to spend time on. Between the Kiddush, *karpas*, *matzah*, *maror*, *kricha*, everything it's not all that much time. How does one manage?

Rabbi Dov Brezak:

I think the main preparation has to be to develop the mindset that you will be sweet and happy even if things don't go your way. Even if things go wrong, you will be sweet and happy, because that's the most important thing. The greatest goal at the Seder is to give your child a love for Yiddishkeit. That

supercedes everything. Therefore, no matter what will happen, I will be sweet and happy.

Allow me to share with you a story that I heard from the *tzaddik* in Yerushalayim, R' Tzvi Meir Zilberberg. He said over t ha, I think, R' Aharon from Karlin had a very elevated Seder one year. And the Chassidim said, "Rebbe, this is a tremendous Seder, isn't it?"

So the Rebbe said, "Yes, it's tremendous, but it doesn't come to R' Berel's Seder."

"R' Berel? What was R' Berel's Seder?"

So they asked R' Berel, "How was the Seder?" I guess they asked him the next day or whatever.

And he told over, he came home. In those days they didn't have something to protect the table; there were no tablecloths. They had, I guess, things on the table. They would put a board, a wooden board on top of all the items to keep it from falling over. And R' Berel's wife was what we call a *schlimozzel*. She had two left hands and she would do things wrong. And, of course, R' Berel comes home in a very ecstatic mood, like you heard from R' Yitzchok. An aristocrat is coming home, and he's ready. He's beaming; his face is shining. And it's dark. He sees from the outside it's dark. He comes into the house everything is on the floor; the matzoh, the wine, the wood. What happened? His wife banged into the wood and she knocked everything over.

And he comes into the room, there's his wife. She's crying hysterically. What does R' Berel do? He comes home. He's all ready to have the Seder you heard about described tonight. That we're all *melochim*, and we're all free people, and we're all on a high spiritually. And he comes in, and there's his wife crying.

And he was kind and pleasant. Little by little he got her to come back. "Come, we'll gather everything from the floor. Come, we still have time. It's not yet *alos hashachar*."

And they got everything together just – I don't know how much before *alos hashachar* -- they were able to run through the Seder and they just made it in time for *alos hashachar*, before the rising of the dawn.

So the Karliner Rebbe said: Our Seder was really good, but it didn't compare to his Seder.

That's in general. Prepare yourself to realize – and I've been repeating this theme a few times throughout the evening tonight – repetition works, repetition works, repetition works. Realize the most important thing is that you remain sweet and kindly even if things go wrong. That is the most preparation. The most important thing. A practical way to remember it – excuse me, I jumped ahead of myself.

So prepare that. Write down on a piece of paper that my child develops a love for Yiddishkeit. This is the most important thing. And take that piece of paper, have it with you, refer to it, now! From now till Pesach. Refer to it. Look at it. And in your mind picture all the things that go wrong. Picture something going wrong. Picture yourself up there. And you're ready for this and ready for that, and a child – like R' Fishel said before – a child crawls across the table. Picture it, and picture yourself. Look at the thing and say, "I will maintain my sweetness and my pleasantness."

And allow me to add: Prepare yourself that even if you don't remain sweet and kindly, don't get upset at yourself. Even if things go wrong and one of those things is that you lost it, it's okay. Don't worry. Even if you did get upset – here you're hearing a whole night I didn't get upset and I shouldn't get upset, and I can't be grouchy, and *oy vey* I ruined my kids' Yiddishkeit. It's terrible! What's going to be with them?

No. You never ruined anything. If you react to yourself losing it by, after that, being resilient and becoming sweet and pleasant after that, and you won't be thrown by your own *chisronos*, you won't be thrown by your own negativity, you'll get back on track right away, and you'll be sweet and pleasant – that will make the difference.

A friend of mine. What did he hear? The story about the Shaagas Aryeh. The Shaagas Aryeh was the contemporary *gadol* in the time of the Vilna Gaon,

and he used to prepare his *shiur*. Rav Shach said over the story. The Shaagas Aryeh would go into a room and prepare his *shiur*. He had a very sharp son; his son would ask him a lot of *kashas*. I think his son was R' Moshe. So when the Shaagas Aryeh prepared the *shiur* and his son would ask him all kinds of questions, he would try to prepare during the *shiur* as if to be prepared for his son's questions – like we're saying now to be prepared for things that don't go right. So he was preparing the *shiur*, and one time his son was so curious he hid under the bench in the room. He wanted to hear how his father, the Shaagas Aryeh, prepared for the *shiur*.

So the Shaagas Aryeh started saying: Okay, in the *gemara* it says this, and the *mefarshim* say this, and Rashi says this. Tosfos says this. Okay and such and such. And if R' Moshe will ask me such and such, I'm going to answer him such and such.

Then the Shaagas Aryeh continues, and the *gemara* goes further. And the *gemara* says this, and the *Rishonim* say this, and the *Acharonim* say this. And if R' Moshe will ask me such and such, I'll answer him such and such.

And that's how he prepared his *shiur*. And R' Moshe was lying under the bench, but the Shaagas Aryeh didn't know his son was in the room.

And then the Shaagas Aryeh gets one more time Okay, such and such. If R' Moshe asks such and such, I'm going to answer such and such.

So R' Moshe couldn't contain himself anymore, and he said, "Abba, what if R' Moshe will ask such and such?" And he asked the Shaagas Aryeh a real hard question that the Shaagas Aryeh didn't think of.

So he stumped the Shaagas Aryeh, and the Shaagas Aryeh says, "Well, that's a very hard question. You know what? When Eliyahu HaNavi comes on the night of Pesach, we'll ask him then."

So my friend took from that story the fact that Eliyahu HaNavi really comes. It's not a fairy tale; it's real. When you open the door for *shefoch chamascha*, and Eliyahu HaNavi comes into drink -- whether he drinks from the cup or whether he doesn't drink from the cup, and all the kids want to see if there's a little bit going down – it's not a kid's thing, it's real. It really happens.

So he tells the story over to his family, and they all – before Eliyahu HaNavi comes in – make sure that everybody is standing at the door, before they open the door. He makes sure everybody has their shirts tucked in. Even the adults, it's such a highlight of the Seder, he told me. It made such an impression.

What's the point? Everybody has something that inspires him. So at *leil haSeder* you're the captain. Share it with your family. Let yourself live your inspiration. Pick out – now this is where the preparation comes in – pick something out that you know, really—

It doesn't have to be an original thing. It could be something you heard tonight, an idea that you liked. Whether you heard the *shebshifleinu dance*, or whether you heard about *vanitzak el Hashem*, or whether you heard about Eliyahu HaNavi . Whether you heard sitting like *melochim*, like R' Yitzchok said. Whatever you want, plan it out. Where is the piece that you inspires you that you will share with your family, and you'll be yourself, and let yourself get inspired.