

Tammy Kaiser
Havruta Assignment Seminar Four

I shared a Pesach text with twelve faculty members during a faculty meeting. I chose this particular text because it seemed accessible - meaning my diverse staff made up of Jews, non-Jews, young and old with varying levels of education and experience - could all read the text and have an opinion about it.

Text: "How do we share the Passover Story with Kids?" Rabbi Sara Y. Sapadin

I introduced the faculty to the language I hoped they would use. I explained verbally the difference between the norms of conversation and the approach of challenging and supporting.

I provided the reason for the assignment by reading the reason directly from the assignment. I thought about rewriting it using my own words, but I really did not feel I could improve what was already written. I provided prompts using supporting and challenging language on a white board.

The text I chose asked many questions of the learner. They were questions I felt were meaningful and topics I really wanted my teachers to think about, contemplate and maybe even react to with action.

The group separated into partners. They studied the text in pairs first using some of the "supporting and challenging prompts" I provided. I walked the room and offered aid when needed (asked). Then, we came together as a group and shared.

During the group share, I modeled the technique.

Articulating confusion was helpful. There was a disconnect between the understanding of teaching authentically and teaching myth. The act of sharing interpretations shed light on our similarities and our differences - our diversity and the unique backgrounds and how we experience the world. People often talk about the "Jewish lens". There is no *one* Jewish lens.

In order to continue the conversation, I offered two self-study assignments for my faculty to complete and either share with a colleague or with me. One was 'How Round Matzah Became Square' and the other was 'The Story of Nachshon'. I also shared an article I wrote titled, 'Musings on the Origins of the Seder'. I offered this article as an example of *my* "interpretation".

How do we share the Passover Story with Kids?

But when it comes to the Passover story, what is the story we actually want to tell? Especially with children present, how deeply do we descend into the narrative, and how strictly do we adhere to its framework? As parents, we have to think in advance and decide things like whether we should shelter our children from the bitter truths of the seder or lift the curtain. Is it enough to say that we were slaves, or must we, as one Haggadah states, "feel the lash and feel the hope that defeats its pain"?

Is there a happy medium between those goofy "bags of plagues" and the harsh reality that defines each grisly act? And with the objective of making the story accessible, is a puppet of the "death of the first born" really the best way to go? Is there merit in painting over the most explicit, the most graphic, and the most terrifying in order to make the story more palatable, or does the *mitzvah* lie in confronting the details, dreadfulness and all? Where do we draw the line between the faithful and the family-friendly telling of the story?

Rabbi Sara Y. Sapadin

How round matzah became square

In biblical times, the irregularly round-shaped matzah was different from the hard, square matzah of today. The unleavened product was called "cakes," which implies something soft and closer to modern pita.

It was often made by synagogues or holy men because one of the commandments is that the matzah must be guarded or supervised to prevent it from being chametz. For most of our history, the process was done by hand. Then, about 150 years ago, people started using machines to do different components of the process.

Changes in food preparation followed the industrial revolution. For example, the first machines used in matzah production were used to mix the dough. Food historians credit Dov Manischewitz and his family as responsible for creating machine-made matzah in 1888. Dov and his family took the components and put it all together to create a machine-made process. It caused controversy, because their matzah was square.

Why square, after thousands of years of round matzahs? It's very difficult to make an economically viable round matzah. You have a huge amount of wasted dough that you can't reuse in the 18-minute process period. Plus, you are wasting food, which is not a good Jewish thing to do.

Some rabbis objected, because they foresaw how factory-made matzah would drive handcrafted matzah out of business. At the same time, a huge influx of Jews was arriving in America. Between 1881 and 1890, some 193,000 Jews immigrated to the United States. Suddenly, there was a huge increase in the demand for matzah.

If there wasn't a way to accelerate production, there wouldn't be enough matzah to meet the holiday demand of the growing Jewish population. So, rabbinical authorities agreed to allow the machine-made matzah to be kosher for Passover.

Answer the following questions and complete the assignment to receive 3 Chai Climb Points:

Plan a lesson encompassing the following:

- Objectives for student learning
- Teaching/learning activities
- Strategies to check student understanding

The lesson should have a clear, beginning, middle and end and should focus on the idea of changing something (like round matzah) into something more practical (like square matzah) and the reasons for the change (Like factories and food waste).

For younger children, the lesson can focus on shapes and pieces fitting together (can you put a round matzah in a square box? How about a square matzah in a round box? Are there round boxes?)

The Story of Nachshon

It's the Exodus. The Israelites are finally free. They arrive at the Sea of Reeds with Egyptian soldiers chasing them and are really upset that Moses led them to a huge body of water that they can't cross. They say, "Why have you led us here to die?" Moses replies, "Don't worry. God will save you."

God was not so happy with Moses' response and told Moses to compel the Israelites to march forward. "Raise your staff and split the sea!" God said.

The Torah is a bit sparse here and doesn't really go into detail about what happened now – the play by play. So, what actually happened in this story? Did the people walk and *then* the water split? Or did the water split *before* they started walking?

Midrash is a special kind of story told to fill in the gaps in Torah. The ancient rabbis created a great story about this moment. They find a character elsewhere in the Torah named Nachshon.

According to the Midrash, Nachshon saw the fear in the eyes of the escaping slaves. He saw the tribal leaders all confused, trying to figure out what to do. He saw God and Moses arguing over whose job it was to save the Hebrew slaves. What did Nachshon do? He just started walking into the water. Up to his knees, then waist, then shoulders, then neck! Suddenly, the Hebrews stopped crying, the leaders stopped arguing, God and Moses stopped debating and Moses raised his staff for the waters to part.

Following Nachshon's courageous example, the Hebrews walked through the parted waters.

Answer the following questions and complete the assignment to receive 3 Chai Climb Points:

1. What do you think the ancient rabbis were trying to tell us with this story?
2. Do you have any "Nachshon's" in your life? If so, explain?
3. Plan a lesson encompassing the following:
 - Objectives for student learning
 - Teaching/learning activities
 - Strategies to check student understanding

The lesson should have a clear, beginning, middle and end and should focus on the lessons learned from the Nachshon story or the actual story itself.

Musings on the Origins of the Seder

Tammy Kaiser

By the time you read this, the Passover dishes will have been put away, the Haggadot neatly stored and Elijah will have come (perhaps?) and gone. However, there is no timeline on Jewish learning, and Passover is such a rich learning experience that I thought I would share some of what I am studying at the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute (MTEI). So, read this and muse about the holiday that just passed (over).

I recently had the honor of studying with Barry Holtz, the Theodore and Florence Baumritter Professor of Jewish Education at The Jewish Theological Seminary. His class, 'The Origins of the Seder' was based on the book of the same name by Baruch M. Bokser and was one of the highlights of my time at MTEI. The holiday of Passover is rich with tradition, metaphor and symbology. I have written extensively about this holiday, never really considering the evolution of the holiday as one of devolution. The picture that Barry Holtz painted in his class was so vibrant, so real, that I felt the need to share it with all of you.

Imagine not one, but two holidays: a holiday of the paschal lamb, and a holiday of unleavened bread. These two holidays merge to become what we know today as Passover or Pesach. Originally, this holiday was celebrated in the home. Eventually, the home rituals morphed into a national event and the holiday was observed in Jerusalem. The lamb was sacrificed as a community and, only then, did the observant return to their tents (homes). All of this changed, however, in 70 CE with the destruction of the Temple. This was one of the tipping points for Judaism. Would Judaism survive? Was there a place for a people without their temple? Early Christians took this opportunity to offer Jesus as the new paschal lamb, interpreting Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice. *How*, it was asked, *could Jews have a Judaism without a temple? Impossible!*

Not so impossible. The rabbis of the time were using the description of the Passover holiday taken from Deuteronomy - a national celebration, a community event. *How*, they asked themselves, *can we keep our people together and not allow them to be compelled to accept Jesus as the paschal lamb?* Imagine a huge collective light bulb going on over the heads of a lot of rabbis. Or a bunch of tiny light bulbs - whichever you prefer. *Why not*, they thought, *revert to the Passover story in Exodus? The one where the holiday was a home celebration.* You know, the story they accepted before it was changed to a nationalistic one? But, the rabbis didn't just go back to the home event, they added other elements as well. They added interpretation, conversation, and an element of redemption. The temple might have been gone, but the Torah was still alive!

This home ritual also included everyone - even children. This was a big deal. To put this in context of the times (Roman rule), if you wanted to attend a symposium, you had to be Socrates (or one of his buddies). If you wanted to attend a seder, all you had to do was be YOU and show up (and maybe bring a little nosh).

The rabbis did something really remarkable. They forged life out of loss. They refused to allow Judaism as a whole to go the way of the temple, instead they reinvented by returning to a classic-the home seder. They made personal meaning

from communal tragedy. We can all learn from this. Sometimes, when things seem at their worst, maybe it's time to take a step back. Sometimes a few small steps...other times, a few books of Torah!

Now, imagine yourself at your Passover table next year, whether in Stuart or in Jerusalem, and give a little nod to the ones long ago who didn't let a little temple destruction get in the way of their matzah.