

Ma Nishtana?

A NEW GENERATION OF

Voices AT THE Table



Passover Seder Supplement

2011 | 5771

J Street ↗

A Night of Questions.

Tonight is a night of questions. In the earliest Passover seders, young people were expected to ask their own spontaneous questions. If necessary, parents would prompt questions by asking, “Why is this night different from all other nights? / Ma nishtanah halayla hazeh mikol halaylot?”¹

In our community today, nowhere is the ancient and vital tradition of intergenerational questioning more alive than in the conversation about Israel’s future and our role as American Jews. What values should guide this relationship? Is there space for dissent in the communal “tent”? Is our community doing enough to welcome the voices of young Jews, or are they being pushed away?

For millennia, families sitting around the seder table have transmitted core values from one generation to the next. Let us make tonight’s seder an opportunity to wrestle together with our own questions about peace, freedom, Israel, and the future of our community.

Voices from Tradition.

In every generation,
each person must regard
him/herself as though s/he
had personally experienced
the Exodus.

— Passover Haggadah,
from Mishnah Pesachim 10:5

Rabbi Hanina said: I have learned
much from my teachers, and even
more from my colleagues, but most of
all from my students.

— Babylonian Talmud, Taanit 7a

Fun a kasha shtarbt man nisht.
From a question, no one has ever died.

— Yiddish proverb



Four Questions to Discuss.

OUR STORIES. What are the significant events and experiences of your generation that have shaped your relationship with Israel? In what ways?

OUR COMMUNITIES. In our community, are young people engaged and helping to shape the community conversation? Are we creating a community that invites questioning? Who needs to take initiative to make change?

WHAT'S AT STAKE. How do we benefit from encouraging questions about Israel? How might we lose?

ISRAEL'S FUTURE. What are your greatest hopes for Israel's future? What are your greatest fears?

Voices from Young Leaders.

We love Israel unconditionally. We have a moral commitment to a national home in which Jews can determine our own political destiny. We have a religious and cultural connection to that home. We do not, however, support Israel's policies unconditionally. That is not true love.

— Jesse Rothman, Carleton College; Logan Bayroff, University of Pennsylvania; and Moriel Rothman, Middlebury College, in *The Jerusalem Post*²

I want to say openly and unequivocally that I am pro-Israel. I am also pro-Palestine. To me, until there is a state of Palestine alongside a secure state of Israel, Israel and Israelis will never be secure.

— Yonah Lieberman, University of Michigan³

At this crucial moment in the history of our community, we face a choice. We can choose to let baseless hatred divide us, or we can choose to take our inevitable disagreements and shape them into a fruitful, influential dialogue. We can choose to pass on a legacy of openness to a younger generation — my generation — or we can tear our community apart by throwing out of the temple all who disagree.

— Abby Backer, Columbia University, in *The Jewish Week*⁴



Take Action.

Want to help reshape the conversation in our community and ensure Israel's future as a Jewish, democratic homeland that lives out our progressive values? Take action:

1) ASK YOUR RABBI TO SIGN OUR PETITION TO TAGLIT-BIRTHRIGHT ISRAEL.

Earlier this year, planning for J Street U's Taglit-Birthright Israel trip was abruptly halted. Now rabbis from around the country are asking Birthright to provide more trips that allow young people to engage with the many Palestinians and Israelis working on behalf of peace, democracy, and social justice in Israel and the region. Will you ask your rabbi to lend their support? They can sign at www.jstreet.org/birthrightabbiletter.

2) HAVE THE (ISRAEL) TALK.

Want to continue the intergenerational conversation? Invite someone in your family or community to sit down and talk about what Israel means to them and to you. Then let us know how it goes. To get started, download the Have the (Israel) Talk guide at www.jstreetu.org/havethetalk.

3) GET INVOLVED.

Join the effort in your community or campus to foster an open conversation and a strong pro-Israel, pro-peace voice.

- Find J Street in your community at www.jstreet.org/local
- Get active on campus at www.jstreetu.org
- Are you a rabbi or cantor? Visit www.jstreet.org/rabbinic

About J Street & J Street U.

J Street is the political home for pro-Israel, pro-peace Americans. The organization gives political voice to mainstream American Jews and other supporters of Israel who, informed by their progressive and Jewish values, believe that a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is essential to Israel's survival as the national home of the Jewish people and as a vibrant democracy. www.jstreet.org

J Street U is a network of students committed to Israel, human rights, democracy, and social justice. On campuses around the country, J Street U builds a pro-Israel space that recognizes the urgent necessity of a Palestinian state and lasting peace. www.jstreetu.org

1 Passover Haggadah, from Mishnah Pesachim 10:4. The seder, with its emphasis on telling the Passover story, began to develop in the period following the destruction of the Second Temple.

2 "Why J Street Speaks to Us," *The Jerusalem Post*, March 21, 2011

3 Letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu, March 20, 2011

4 "Exclude Me at Your Own Peril," *The Jewish Week*, October 26, 2010