

## Rabbi Tarfon's All Night Seder Discussion

**R. Eliezer:** One of the most disturbing things to me is that since the Temple burned, people have forgotten, so it seems, that the pesach offering must be cooked on an open fire with a spit made of pomegranate wood! It's the only wood that doesn't leak fluids and boil the insides. The pesach must be roasted! And none of these fancy metal spits either...

**Joshua:** And why not? It's hard enough on the poor that they can only use pomegranate wood...

**R. Eliezer:** Because you know as I do Joshua that the metal spits cook the meat inside. The meat has to be cooked only by an open fire.

**Rabbi Akiva (to Eliezer)** My teacher, in my humble opinion, we can no longer focus our intention on the sacrifice of the pesach, as we did in our fallen Temple. I am more alarmed at the people among us who seem to have so readily adapted to the Roman ways. They are trying to forget and those who forget will not teach their children to remember. It is my opinion that we would better spend our time together around R. Tarfon's generous table, thinking of a way to better teach our children about our redemption from slavery in the land of Egypt.

**R. Eliezer:** No Akiva, the commandment is not to teach, it is to answer their question. They must ask us: What did the Lord do for us when we left Egypt?

**A few of them together:** With a strong arm and a mighty hand...

*(A few beats, think, think, think)*

**Rabbi Tarfon:** You know, our people who live in Caesarea seem to enjoy the Roman symposia. They like to go and have good food and drink and lively conversations about philosophy and to hear stories and see plays performed. What if the new order of our Pesach is like a Roman symposium...except in opposite order?

**Rabbi Joshua:** What do you mean, "make it like a Roman symposia except in opposite order?"

**R. Tarfon:** I mean, change the order from drinking and eating first and listening later, to something a little different.

**R. Joshua:** Ha! That's a good one! We can show them how to act Roman--like a Jew ... ?

**R. Eliezer:** The biggest problem with the Roman symposia idea is that they don't seem to include children. Our Seder symposia must be child-friendly. Because if a

child does not ask the question—what did God do for us? We have not fulfilled our commandment to answer their questions.

**R. Elazar b. Azaria:** Well, and to point out another painful lesson, we weren't child-friendly enough in the ruined Temple. And look at the results.

**R. Eliezer:** Yes, children did not know ... did not ask ...

**R. Joshua:** I see another problem. Romans eat and drink first, then when they are satiated and drunk, they talk. Is drunken, Bacchanalian learning the kind of learning that sticks?

**R. Akiva:** I agree, but I have an idea. Since it is a festival, we must first make Kiddush to sanctify the day. A small drink, a olive's volume worth, no more. Then, after Kiddush, we do something unusual, something that will provoke the children to ask questions.

**R. Tarfon:** Yes! Like the Romans, we will drink to gladden our hearts, but unlike them, we will sweeten it further with ribbons and new shoes for our wives, and walnuts and almonds for our little ones so that everyone arrives to the table with a joyful heart! And we will all relax as we recline in the manner of free people. We will drink four cups of wine, one to make Kiddush, and three others to celebrate rescue and redemption.

**R. Eliezer:** Tarfon, your generous spirit and love for a good party has permeated this entire long night. But I must caution that people should not be encouraged to drink wine greedily like a Roman, or all at once, or we could meet the unfortunate fate of (reluctantly, whispering) ... R. Ilai.

**R. Tarfon (*leaning in*):** What happened to R. Ilai?

**R. Akiva:** (*stage whispering*) One Pesach, he drank so much wine, so fast, that he had a headache until Sukkot! True story, I saw him.

**R. Joshua:** You say we set this up so the children will ask, but what if our children don't ask us about our redemption from Egyptian slavery? Our children live amid the ruination of our nation, and there has been no redemption, not yet. It could backfire...

**R. Eliezer:** The Torah commands us to answer our children when they ask ... but if they forget then their children forget to even ask. Then they become slaves to the Romans like our forefathers were slaves in Egypt; people who forget. Your question should be, "*How we can prompt them to ask that question? What actions guarantee that a child will ask a question?*"

**R. Tarfon:** When I want to get my kid's attention, I do something wrong. Deliberately, so she can correct me.

**R. Elazar b. Azaria:** When I shuffle something or change something, my kids inevitably ask, "Why did you do it that way and not the way you always do it?"

**R. Eliezer** (*scratching his beard, musing*): We usually start our meals with *pat*—pita bread—and we dip it once in something, then we eat it. What happens if instead of *pat*, we dip...something green and bitter, like lettuce?

**R. Joshua:** And, then, we don't dip it *once*, like we usually do. We dip it *twice*.

**Akiva:** That is genius! Because if I were a child, I would ask, "What makes this night different from all the other nights? Why do we dip with lettuce instead of bread? Why do we eat only matzah? Why are we reclining?"

**Tarfon:** So we gladden our hearts, eat a little, have a little story time, like a Roman symposia, and then we tell them the story of the redemption from Egypt. Then we go to the meal.

**Eliezer:** But first the child has to ask the question, or we cannot fulfill the commandment to answer.

**Akiva:** But Teacher, what if the child *can't* ask? What if he is a baby? Or a rasha? Or a stupid child?

**Eliezer:** Whether the child is a baby or a stupid child, this is our opportunity to begin to teach the child how to ask. If the child is wise and asks what it all means, we teach the entire halachah—the rules for preparing the pesach, especially, so some semblance of sacrifice at the Temple will be remembered. And if the child is stupid? Teach the basics, no more. If you fill a jar too full, it will overflow and what it cannot hold becomes lost. But if he is a rasha ...

**Joshua:** We point out that if he acted that way back then, God would not have redeemed him. Scare him to death. And tell him he must go to his quarters and not go out after the meal.

**Akiva:** And if the child does not ask, then take pains to help that child open up. Meet him where he is, teach the child to ask. *Mah nishtana ha laila ha'zeh?*

**R. Tarfon:** And then after the meal, we have an afikomen! Just like at the Greek symposia—dessert and perhaps a little singing and entertainment. And then full, some will sleep, and those of us who can stay awake, keep talking and remembering and praising and lauding until the sun rises.

**R. Joshua:** I think this all sounds very lovely except for the poor. How do we assure that even the poorest person in Israel must recline and drink four cups of undiluted wine?

**R. Akiva:** We must spread the word to every Jew in every community in the entire world about our new order, our seder, and ensure that the charity collectors know that it shall be the law that even the poorest person in Israel must recline on this night, and drink all four cups of wine—undiluted, like everyone else. Even the poorest person will gladden the heart and praise G-d for the miracle of redemption from slavery to freedom, from disgrace to dignity.

*Teachers, Your time for study draws to a close for it is time for ....*