

Dear Rabbi Fried,

This may sound a little revolutionary, but I have a new idea for the seder. Instead of just reading through the same monotonous hagaddah year after year, with modern technology we can really make it come alive! Every home can show a dynamite video presentation of the Exodus story, far superior to the Ten Commandments flick, and the kids and the family would really feel the pyramids, slavery and leaving Egypt. That just seems so much more effective than just eating matzoh and bitter herbs, etc. It seems so simple to me that I'm surprised we're not already doing it! What do you think?

Bruce W.

Dear Bruce,

At first glance, your idea sounds great, but as we delve more deeply, there's a profound reason that the seder is done as it is for thousands of years. (I'm not going to deal with the halachic issues involved in showing a video on the Yom Tov-holiday, rather the core seder issue).

Recent studies show that holding a seder is the most prominently observed ritual among Jews in America, even with those who sparsely observe any other area of Judaism. Why is this so? There may be multiple factors involved, but a leading contemporary sage, who recently visited Dallas, offered the following explanation.

The seder, with its mild reminders of leaving Egypt, is working upon the subconscious portion of a Jew's psyche. In a way, it is similar to the concept of subliminal suggestion, where a quick flash of a scene with a Coke on the table will subconsciously inspire the viewer to get up and take a Coke out of the fridge. Rather than staging a Broadway show with awesome images of Egypt, we do things that will affect every Jew at their core, in a way that the story of Exodus becomes an integral part of the Jewish thought process.

Imagine a fabulous movie being shown at all the theatres before Pesach, the end-all movie about Exodus. The first year it's shown, everybody just has to see it, and does. The second year, a lot of people will go see it again. By the third year, a few less. By the fifth year, how many people will go back and have a fifth viewing? Probably not to many, because the film is a conscious thing, and works upon one's conscious mind. After a few viewings, it's already done what it can, and gets old. But we keep coming back after thousands of years, year after year, and hold the same old seder again and again. Because there's no limit to how we can continue to go deeper and deeper into our subconscious, until we touch our hidden souls at the core.

We need to always make the seder fun, exciting and new. But, within the framework the Torah and the sages, with their profound understanding of the human psyche, enacted.

Have a wonderful, meaningful, and fun seder!