

Alone at the Seder

THE PAIN OF DIVORCE HURTS MORE AT THE HOLIDAYS



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Pesach, by all accounts, is the apex of all family time. A survey taken last year by UJA revealed that over 77% of Jews celebrate some form of Seder. Growing up, these were the most profound and memorable moments of my youth. The intense preparation and cleaning in the weeks before Pesach

(to which I was mostly an observer), the beautiful Seder table, set with such precision and elegance, and the image of my parents, family, and guests sitting at the Seder is one that will be etched in my heart and mind forever.

This year, however, as Seder night nears, I am filled with a roller coaster of emotions. On the one hand, I am so very much looking forward to a special Seder night, following the tradition, and reliving those special moments of my childhood. On the other hand, the unfortunate reality is that, based on the divorce decree that I have with my former wife, we alternate years for the holidays, and the children will not be spending Pesach with me this year. If I had to point to the singlemost painful fallout of divorce, I would zero in on this Seder night experience.

There are no songs and no inspirational words of wisdom that can mitigate the gut-wrenching feeling that a parent experiences, sitting at the Seder without his children. If you are a divorced parent, you know exactly to what I am referring. The words of the Torah are explicit and unmistakable. On this night, “you shall tell your children and teach them of the great miracles that were bestowed upon our people.” So on this, the greatest parenting night of the entire year, to be sitting at a Seder, where we are commanded to teach our children about the Exodus from Egypt, and to not have them present is likely the most painful of all divorce-related experiences.

As the countdown to this year’s Seder night begins, I know that I will reflect upon

the memories of last year, spending the Seder with my children, as a solace and comfort for a year when I don’t have them. Of all the amazing experiences and beautiful moments at the Seder, I am drawn to a very special memory at last year’s Seder with my babies. I was privileged to be able to celebrate the Seder at my home, with my children. It was the most exhilarating and meaningful parenting experience I have ever had. The children were prepared, their faces shone, and I prayed that the Seder would never end. Each child shared age-appropriate Torah thoughts, and contributed in his or her own unique way, to a glorious and exquisite evening.

They say that at the Seder, you are supposed to act like a king. In real life, that’s not always easy. But on that night, we were a royal family. As parents, we invest so much in our children. Very often, the returns are late in coming. But on this Seder night, there was glorious harmony among the children. The symphony of love, respect, and tradition was majestic.

After we *bentched*, we were ready to welcome Eliyahu Hanavi. This was always my favorite part of the Seder. As we stood up to welcome Eliyahu, I shared with my children that this was the most auspicious time of the night, because Eliyahu Hanavi shows up at moments of greatest joy. He was there when they were born and named, and now he is back at the night of the Seder, to deliver hope and salvation, and to answer our prayers and earnest requests. I urged them to close their

eyes, and say a prayer, asking Hashem for whatever their heart desired, whatever would make their young lives and tender hearts whole. Moments later, my little boy Mordechai went to the front door and opened it. We said the *tefillah* and then resumed with the remainder of the Seder.

A little while later, as I was tucking Mordechai into bed, I asked him "Mordechai, what did you pray for?" He looked at me with a

glass half full, and while these are emotional, and often painful experiences, they are also a springboard for growth. As I look back at my Seder last year, I marvel at the opportunity that Hashem gave me to sit with my children and celebrate in such a meaningful way. Bringing family together to one table, on one night, doesn't always work. In my case, it was an inspiring evening, one that neither I nor my children will soon forget.

"Daddy, I prayed that you and Mommy will get married." I took his hand in my hand, and held him close.

twinkle in his eye. "Daddy, I prayed that you and Mommy will get married." I took his hand in my hand, and held him close. I didn't respond directly to the prayer. I expressed to him how much love and emotion my heart holds for him. I told him that while his Mommy and I will never again be together, I assured him that we will forever celebrate our love for him united, and be there for him at the special milestones of his life.

In one quick moment, my little man captured the feeling and the chasm that divorce brings. We can overcompensate, we can go out of our way to be extra special parents to our children, but at its core, children of divorce are often left with seared hearts and painful memories.

Life has taught me about looking at the

So as I will sit down to the Seder this year alone, without my children. My heart will be filled with gratitude to Hashem for the greatest gifts he has given me—the gift of three healthy and beautiful children. In the moments that I may feel sadness, I will recall the magical memories of last year, knowing in my heart that the next Seder with my babies is only 364 days away. ●

For more information about Frum Divorce, a community-support organization dedicated to helping members of the religious community who are going through the divorce process, with specific focus on parenting and guidance, as well as the emotional fallout of separation and divorce, visit www.frumdivorce.org.

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