

## **Hide. Seek. Return. Repeat.**

*The Hidden Harmony and Rhythm of the Seder*

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We gather around the Passover table every year and retell an ancient story. It unfolds through a series of precise, familiar steps, leading to the question: “When do we eat?” But beneath the steps and songs lies a more textured message.

This message is illuminated by Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson’s mystical letters to his son, the Lubavitcher Rebbe. His teachings reveal that the Seder is more than a ceremony or a script; it is a spiritual journey, encoded with layers of meaning. What follows is a reflection shaped by that perspective, a guide to a Seder that is not only recited but lived.

Like a carefully composed melody, the Seder has its unique harmony and rhythm. It begins with wholeness. Then breaks. It hides what matters most. Then waits for us to seek and return it. And in doing so it carries us to a new kind of wholeness shaped by the journey itself.

The Seder asks us to remember the Exodus. Even more, it invites us to live it, to move through its steps as if we ourselves are being transformed. This transformation includes a journey through broken pieces, hidden truths, and the quiet, powerful return to something deeper.

The Seder intertwines emotion with intellect, heart with mind. Wine brings joy and emotional connection. Matzah offers a kind of stark, simple clarity—discipline, knowledge, and essence. The night holds both: feeling and understanding, trust and inquiry. The contrast isn’t a conflict; it’s a song.

Throughout the night, the themes echo again and again. But they don’t simply repeat. Each time, they unfold with greater force and meaning. The brokenness becomes a gateway to growth. The patience to sit with what’s hidden sharpens into attentiveness. The return of what was missing transforms into an act of redemption. These ideas are embedded in the very structure of the Seder itself.

We begin with Kadesh, the sanctification of time. Reciting Kiddush reminds us that we are at the entry point of the journey. It connects our past, the redemption of our ancestors, to a future we’re still building. We start whole, with a clear structure and intention.

The joy represented by wine reflects a readiness to receive and feel. It is also a reminder that joy isn’t always something we generate. Sometimes, like the wine at the Seder, it’s

poured for us. That first cup encourages us to open up emotionally, even before the story begins.

Wine also corresponds to understanding and reflection, creating a more immersive experience. The Seder asks us to bring our awareness to our rituals.

Before the story begins, we pause and reflect. What are we bringing to the table tonight? What do we hope to gain, to feel, to understand? These questions echo through the night, opening us up to the experience ahead.

Urchatz is a hand-washing without a blessing. It's an understated act that sets the tone. Not every kind of preparation is visible. Some readiness happens in silence. Some cleansing begins before we even know what we're preparing for.

Karpas follows—a small green vegetable or potato dipped in salt water, a simple act that sparks curiosity. Why this? Why now? We're not into storytelling yet, but already, questions bloom. Like a whisper of insight before explanation, Karpas is that flicker of wonder that reminds us how much we don't yet know.

With Yachatz, the middle matzah is broken. One half remains visible; the other is hidden. We began the Seder with a sense of wholeness, but now we introduce intentional brokenness. This isn't destruction, it's an opening. Wholeness, the Seder teaches, emerges through return—through what we do with the broken piece.

Life has its broken places. Instead of discarding them, we hold onto them, trusting they still have something to teach. The soul, too, journeys through a world where some parts are revealed and others remain concealed.

The Jewish people live in exile, carrying fragments of experience that are hidden and waiting to be uncovered. The Afikoman is such a truth. It is not lost, but waiting, and it matters more when we are the ones who bring it back.

In Maggid, the storytelling portion of the Seder, we remember the Exodus. The Israelites left Egypt without knowing where they were going. It was an act of faith as bold as planting a seed. You trust the unseen, believing that with care and protection, something lasting will grow. The Haggadah reminds us of that trust and the strength it requires.

We retell a story we never lived. Yet somehow, it lives through us each year. That's the heart of faith: trusting in a narrative more enduring than the one we can prove, trusting that hidden things will be revealed in their time, whether redemption, understanding, or even the Afikoman.

The two cups of wine in this section frame the experience. They surround the matzah's simplicity with emotion and depth.

Then we wash again. This second washing is more than hygiene. It's a moment of physical and spiritual readiness. We prepare ourselves to receive something simple and sacred.

Matzah is known as the bread of simplicity and the bread of faith. In eating it, we're entering into a kind of union. The food must be kosher, fit to be eaten. And we, too, must be fit to receive it. It's a relationship that calls for intention, for presence.

In this moment, we join body and soul. We reach back to the past, forward to the future, and try to align ourselves with both. What does it mean to be ready to receive something holy? Not just to go through the motions, but to make space for transformation.

Maror, the bitter herb, brings sharpness associated with memory and strength. We don't hide from bitterness. We name it. We taste it. We recognize it as part of the process. In doing so, we begin to move through the pain. The breaking of the matzah wasn't an accident. Neither are the hard parts of our lives.

Korech combines opposites, the bitter maror with the matzah, wrapping struggle and simplicity into one bite. Though called the 'Hillel sandwich,' it's more than tradition. It's an edible paradox: wisdom and emotion, pain and hope, intellect and faith. Korech reminds us that freedom emerges through integration, when we absorb what we've lived and carry it forward with purpose.

Shulchan Orech, the meal, is a time of joy, physical satisfaction, family, and presence. Yet even amidst this lively swirl of conversation and connection, the more layered journey continues beneath the surface.

Like the wine and matzah, the food on the table symbolizes the balance of mind and body, seen and unseen. Joy, food, and laughter are all part of the arc. And even as we eat, the Afikoman waits quietly, still hidden.

Tzafun marks the return of the hidden Afikoman. It is the same piece we broke and concealed earlier in the night. But here's the truth: wholeness doesn't come just from finding what was lost. It comes from returning it. From placing it back on the table. From completing the story together.

The Afikoman is a turning point. It began in brokenness, spending the night hidden. Now it returns, not just to the table, but to us. It matters more because it has been hidden and because we are the ones who bring it back.

We raise our third cup of wine during Barech, giving thanks for the journey so far. This is a moment of gratitude for what we've received and managed to return. Understanding deepens. Experience roots itself within us. The joy is more grounded now and it lingers longer. It has weight.

Hallel is our song of praise. The fourth cup is poured, and with it comes the recognition that we've been through something. We started with questions, confusion, and anticipation. We end with harmony—not perfect, but real.

The Seder's rhythm has carried us here, and in that rhythm we find meaning. The wine we drink at the close is deeper and fuller. Not because it's a different wine but because we have become different drinkers.

And finally, Nirtzah, the closing. But it's not really the end. It's a threshold. We've brought the hidden back. We've made something whole. And we say: "Next Year in Jerusalem." We acknowledge that we haven't finished the journey; we're now ready to continue.

The Seder reminds us that what's hidden isn't forgotten, and what's broken isn't beyond repair. It gives us a way to practice return. To reclaim the parts of ourselves we've set aside and begin weaving them back into something stronger. By the time we reach the night's end, we're no longer where we started. We've changed. That's the quiet power of the Seder: it makes space for the journey and invites us to bring back what matters most.