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Passover is a time when the seder table becomes a place for everyone to find their seat at the table. Children of all kinds ask the four questions, and people of diverse backgrounds see themselves reflected in the hagadah - from the wise to the troublemakers, from the outgoing ones to the quiet ones. The challenge of the night lies in how we bring everyone together, ensuring each person is seen and heard, and fostering a shared sense of wonder, belonging, and connection.

In this spirit, I hope these tools help transform your seder table into a space where everyone feels welcome and valued, making it truly 'the seder for me!'

Please let me know which tools you find most helpful, and I welcome your ideas to enrich this list.

Wishing you and yours a happy Passover!

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*\*See the following pages to review the list and see what feels right for your table.*

*The 13 Inclusion Tools for the Passover Seder were inspired by Leora Ashman, with the initial focus on adults with aphasia. However we intentionally broadened these tools to consider and apply to wide range of communication dis/abilities (i.e. stuttering, dyslexia, ADHD, language processing, auditory processing, etc.)*

## **13 Inclusion Tools for the Passover Seder**

by Uri Schneider and Leora Ashman

Contributed to Empowering Seder Conversations - Passover Haggadah

by Eitan Ashman, edited by Leora Ashman - [Urim Publications](#)

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To emphasize the importance of inclusion, we encourage you to read through the following list of tools, to learn how to better include those who may find the Seder difficult, daunting, or lonely:

- [1. Put Yourself in the Other's Shoes](#)
- [2. Who's Who at the Seder](#)
- [3. Inclusion Elements](#)
- [4. Setting the Social Table](#)
- [5. Partner Reading](#)
- [6. Active Listening](#)
- [7. Interactive Participation](#)
- [8. Timeless Story, Simple Language](#)
- [9. Pictures Speak More Than You Think](#)
- [10. It Takes Two to Dialogue](#)
- [11. Don't \(Always\) Finish My Sentences](#)
- [12. One Mouth Needs Two Ears](#)
- [13. Celebrate Participation and Communication Efforts](#)

## 1. Put Yourself in the Other's Shoes

After the immense preparation for Pesach, most of us look forward to Seder Night, sitting around together, talking, and discussing the Haggadah. However, there are those around the table who may not be looking forward to it and would rather skip it. There can be many reasons for this, and it is up to us to try to put ourselves in our guests' shoes, understand what they are going through, and learn how to better include them to be a part of this important night.

## 2. Who's Who at the Seder

Everyone can be more inclusive (and included) when we are open about who's who around the table and their specific needs. Don't assume people know what they need to know, and don't assume they know what to do. Instead, tell them. Try to be very matter-of-fact, and give practical suggestions of some dos and don'ts. Generally, people are grateful to be informed, and this results in a more inclusive atmosphere.

This can be accomplished by composing a written message in advance or a brief introduction at the beginning of the Seder; it is suggested to discuss the following points:

1. Your goal(s) for the Seder night.
2. Who are your guests?
3. How they can help co-create the most successful Seder with you.
  - Example: Welcome to our Seder. As I host the Seder tonight, I want to invite you to be partners with me. We can create the most enjoyable and engaging Seder experience for everyone at the table. Please take into consideration the different ages and backgrounds of our guests. I have spoken to [Cousin Sam] and he would like me to tell you that you may/may not know that he has Aphasia [substitute Aphasia with any other challenge your guest may have]. He understands what's going on around him and he wants to be involved in the Seder. He has difficulty putting ideas into words, and he has difficulty reading. Here are suggestions for ways to include him more:
    - Improve the turn-taking around the table to be more defined and predictable, with one person speaking at a time.
    - Use language that is more concrete and easily understood.
    - Allow extra response time for him to express himself and for you to verify understanding on his part.

### 3. Inclusion Elements

Inclusion is easier than you might think. Try these next two points, and you'll be amazed to see the difference you can make: Practice patience (allowing extra response time), and engage with respect (address the person, not the problem). Below are suggested ways to engage people with different abilities and impairments:

<b>DON'T</b>	<b>DO</b>
Skip their turn.	Give them the choice of whether to take a turn.
Finish their sentences.	Be a better listener to hear what they have to say.
Enable cross conversations and talking out of turn.	Take responsibility for one person talking at a time, to allow everyone a turn to talk and a turn to be heard.
Talk down to them.	Speak with them at their level of comprehension and knowledge while making eye contact.
Just speak to the person assisting them.	Look at them and converse with them directly.
Rush the Seder along.	Linger a little longer to allow enough time for them to understand and express what they want to say.
Depend on them to initiate discussion.	Partner with them to achieve successful communication through eye contact, curiosity, and follow-up questions.

### 4. Setting the Social Table

Just as we adorn the table with silverware, we can design the Seder table to be inclusive and engaging. Bring the Haggadah, Seder plate, wine cups, Matzot, and bitter herbs within reach, and with whatever accommodation would make it easiest for everyone to participate as fully and independently as possible. Plan seating arrangements that are conducive to participation and comfort. Consider positioning supportive individuals strategically, to better see (and be seen) and to better hear (and be heard).

## 5. Partner Reading

We all need somebody to lean on. Consider pairing individuals with supportive partners and allies who can assist with reading, if they wish to participate in that manner. Consider calling out page numbers to keep all participants in sync, as well as using the “Seder Partner” to help as needed with page turning and finding the place to maximize engagement.

## 6. Active Listening

Active listening is the art of being a partner in conversation without “monopolizing the microphone.” You can make a difference in bringing people into the conversation and drawing them into the collective experience when you offer nonverbal feedback (eye contact, body language). Attune yourself to being present; show interest through facial expression, demonstrate curiosity with questions, and be attentive with sensitivity to engage the overlooked. Overall, when you offer mutual respect, value, and interest, people will be drawn into the Seder night.

## 7. Interactive Participation

People participate differently. Some people want to stand on the chair and sing Ma Nishtanah, while others prefer less of the spotlight. Find ways to engage each person so that they feel comfortable. Here are some tips:

- Invite participants to request parts ahead of time.
- Brainstorm in advance, together with the individual, to select which parts highlight their abilities, and offer ways to prepare and practice for a successful experience.
- Find out if they are willing to be called upon to read aloud.
- Song – use familiar tunes of the Haggadah as much as possible as singing can lead to others joining in.
- Assign non-speaking parts if possible – like pointing to the Matzah, Pesach, and Maror; breaking the Matzah; bringing the washing cup and bowl; pouring the wine; even announcing the pages in the Haggadah, etc.
- Use a variety of talking formats, such as: reading, partner reading, explaining, answering yes/no questions, acting out parts of the Haggadah. These suggestions turn the table into a “choose your own adventure,” with more people participating.

## **8. Timeless Story, Simple Language**

If we do it well, the Passover Seder can be truly memorable and an annual highlight of shared experiences. Focus on keeping your speech clear and loud enough to be heard. Keep your language simple so as to be easily understood. Speak slowly and break down complex sentences or concepts into simpler points. Instead of overly elaborate language and abstract ideas for intellectual stimulation, speak to the hearts and souls around the table to connect everyone to the shared experience.

## **9. Pictures Speak More Than You Think**

When it's multisensory, it's much more memorable. There's an educational saying, "show me, don't tell me." Most people do better with visuals. This is especially true for people with language barriers and communication impairments. Pictures bypass barriers and make an impact. Point out the icon instructions throughout the Haggadah. Examples to create a multisensory Seder may be to prepare drawings, pictures, and timelines to share; integrate gestures (e.g., act out the plagues) and movement (dress up or walk around the table like the Jewish people in Egypt).

## **10. It Takes Two to Dialogue**

Successful conversations take two: a speaker and a listener. Consider how you can share the success of conversations as a listener. Be a strong conversational partner with these tools. Clarify what you hear. Confirm and verify that everyone at the table understands what is being said or asked of them to do. As a listener, ask for clarification for what you don't understand. Offer to repeat yourself or rephrase what you just said in order for the person to better understand. One person can talk to the wall but two people can share a conversation – share questions, thoughts, and feelings.

## **11. Don't (Always) Finish My Sentences**

When two people engage in conversation, they connect beyond words. The speaker and listener complete one another. The fit is measured by: To what extent do they share interests? How much do they know and trust each other? How familiar are they with the topic? When the fit is right, both the speaker and the listener share a healthy exchange, with some balance

between predictable turns, as well as some unpredictable novelty. For people with communication impairments, we need to be mindful to accommodate these conversational ingredients to get the best fit. Whereas we often anticipate and complete people's sentences, we need to press pause – and allow the other person to say what they want to say. In some cases, if the speaker gives permission, you may speak up for them or even complete their sentences to complement their abilities and support their interests. But generally, it's best to speak less for them and listen more to what they say.

## **12. One Mouth Needs Two Ears**

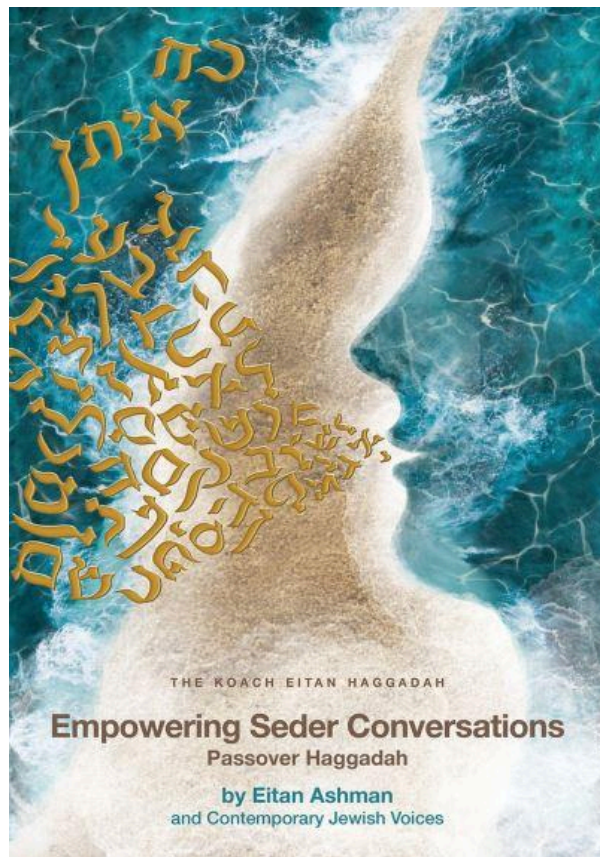
If we want people to speak freely, we need to create a listening space. When the table is a mix of people talking over each other, it's harder for individuals to find their turn to speak and to follow what is being said with the other voices in the background. When the volume is high, it's harder to hear the softer voices at the table. The following is a practical recipe to create open listening spaces:

- Be explicit (e.g., “Now, I am focused on listening to what [person's name] wants to share”).
- Respond more, react less. Whereas responding is a choice, reacting is a reflex. So, instead of reacting to, it's better to process what was said, and then respond with consideration.
- Listen longer. Notice the talk-balance (how talking time is split among conversationalists). A simple rule would be: listen more than you speak.
- Sometimes it's helpful to rephrase a question or an idea into more concise sentences and shorter and simpler language.

## **13. Celebrate Participation and Communication Efforts**

Acknowledge and celebrate the individual's participation and communication efforts rather than focusing on fluency. Allow for messiness. Generally, the very best comes from imperfection. Instead of expecting perfect speech, perfect wording, or perfect ideas, try to welcome courage – to “take a chance.” The Seder will be better when more people feel comfortable enough to take chances. Praising their courage and ideas helps build confidence.

For some, the Seder can be long and tiresome. Acknowledging the time one participates, even if they leave the table before the end or need to take a break during, can make the person feel connected and proud of their efforts to participate.



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