



4. Season of Freedom, Season of Rebirth

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

1. Think of your own memories, as either a child or an adult, of preparing for or celebrating Passover or Easter. What are some customs observed in your family that you associate with the feast? How does the celebration of the day relate to your identity as a Jew or a Christian?

This ice-breaking question will hopefully elicit some memorable experiences from participants. One form this may take is the recounting of specific ethnic customs during Passover or Easter. It is possible that for Christians the issue of the "commercialization" of Easter with bunny rabbits and egg hunts, customs that were originally religious adaptations that became secularized, will arise. It might be useful to discuss this issue briefly, but avoid getting too preoccupied with it. The final part of the question sets the stage for question 3 below.

2. The video mentions some differences and similarities in the major Christian and Jewish springtime rituals. Did any of these strike or surprise you in some way? What would you most like to know about the other community's practices?

This conversation could unfold in many different ways depending on the interests and perceptions of the group. Both traditions focus on themes that are shared in common (liberation, new life, gratitude, etc.), but do so with varying degrees of emphasis. Jews tend to stress that the full redemption of the world lies in the future, while Christians tend to focus on the salvation that has already come. Both, however, acknowledge that God's redemptive power has been experienced in the past, and both look forward to the full completion of redemption in the future, albeit with very different degrees of emphasis. Another major difference that should not be overlooked is the family-centered character of Jewish seders. Christians also have special customs associated with the home, Easter

dinners for example, but the main acts of prayer occur in churches, not the home. Facilitators might ask participants to glance over "The Passover Meal" and "The Easter Triduum" handouts from the [Information Sheet](#) as they consider what they would most like to know about the other community's practices.

3. Both communities' rituals seek to make present today the foundational moments of their faith traditions and also to pass on their stories and identities to the next generations. How does this occur in your own community? What impresses or puzzles you about the other community's customs?

The use of ritual to make the past a lived present reality, or to reactualize the past in the present, is a concept shared by Jews and Christians. Christians refer to this with the Greek word *anamnesis*, while Jews use a cognate Hebrew term *zecher*. Although it is unlikely that such a living symbiosis with one's tradition throughout time can be created or sustained at every liturgy, participants in the dialogue may have personal experiences of really feeling connected with their Jewishness or their Christianity at moments during their springtime observances. Participants could be asked how they might seek to share such moments with their children. Be alert to opportunities to make connections across the faith traditions.

4. The video referred to Christian assaults on Jews over the centuries that occurred during the Passover/Easter season. What factors triggered these occurrences? What have been their consequences? How can the future be different?

The video mentions several relevant points. Drawing on episode 2, the facilitator might recall at some midpoint in the discussion that the gospel passion narratives tend in different ways to minimize the Roman role in Jesus' death and to challenge fellow Jews who do not share the gospel writers' faith in Christ. When later read in the entirely Gentile church, the passion stories have lent themselves to what Pope John Paul II has called "erroneous interpretations" that blame Jews collectively for the crucifixion of Jesus. This dynamic lies behind much Christian hostility toward Jews over time. In medieval times, Jews were sometimes accused of needing Christian blood to make *matzah*, a perverse distortion of the the theology of the Eucharist that seems to have led to the opening of doors of Jewish homes so Christians could see that no sinister actions occurred during the seder. Given the Torah's prohibition against consuming blood, as a number of popes noted, this "blood libel" charge seems unfathomable. The video also suggests how things can be different today, both in terms of revised liturgical prayers and because of the efforts to build the dialogue and mutual respect that will shatter inherited stereotypes.

5. Christians usually feel quite at home at Jewish Passover observances (to the extent of sometimes inappropriately using seder rituals in Christian congregations), while Jews often feel uncomfortable and perplexed at Good Friday or Easter liturgies. Why do you think this is? On the other hand, the video noted that both communities' springtime rituals share in their distinctive ways the themes of thanksgiving, liberation, new life, and messianic hope. Is it desirable and how would it be possible to encourage Jews and Christians to respect such commonalities-with-differences in one another's acts of worship?

Christians have their own "passover" in their celebration of the "passing over" of Jesus from death to life. The fact that Christians draw upon Exodus and prophetic traditions means that Jewish ceremonies and themes are somewhat familiar. Jews do not share the Christ-centered faith of Christians and so are entering into an alien environment if they are guests at Christian worship. Combined with the "residual fear" mentioned by Prof. Lee because of past persecutions around Good Friday and Easter, this means that the Jewish and Christian experiences of one another's worship are very asymmetrical. The second part of the question addresses whether or not this asymmetry can be overcome. An ability to appreciate the faith perspective of the other, even if one doesn't share it, would seem to be essential.