



Reading Guide

Only Nine Chairs **By Deborah Uchill Miller** **Illustrated by Karen Ostrove**

The Seder

The *seder*, the key “event” of Passover, is likely the most widely-observed Jewish ritual today, and is carried out in countless homes and community settings around the world each spring. One of the sweetest aspects of Passover is celebrating together as a family and as a People, preserving traditions and creating new ones. The *haggadah* contains the text, commentary and elaborations that provide participants with the ritual’s script and order (“order” being the literal meaning of *seder*); with it, participants navigate the telling and re-telling of Jewish liberation from Egyptian slavery and the lessons to be learned from it.

Speaking of the Exodus and the story of Passover, the Torah instructs: “And you shall tell it to your children...” For this purpose, many Passover practices are meant to engage and delight children, and can be explored both during the *seder* itself and in the days leading up to it. Use your creative powers to plan ways to engage your children in the *seder*.

- Make a concerted effort to have a number of children of various ages at the *seder*;
- When young children are present and participating in the *seder*, divide the evening into segments your youngsters can handle, allowing time for them to move about the house.
- Create a skit based on *Only Nine Chairs* in which your children act out a shortage of chairs (or spoons or napkins) for guests in your home;
- From the Internet or your local Judaica shop, purchase a Children’s *Haggadah* and explore it with your youngsters prior to the *seder*.



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All Are Welcome!

Near the beginning of the *seder* we hear the words: “Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are needy come and join in Passover’s observance.” No one is turned away from the *seder*. Even the youngest children can begin to understand that we are responsible for each other in this world. A beautiful Hebrew adage states that “Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Lazeh.” (All Jews are responsible for each other.) This can certainly be extended to the basic care and respect all people deserve. There is no better time to extend graciousness and hospitality than during the Passover season, as we remember the bitterness of slavery and strive to keep others from knowing the loneliness and misery that are the result of all types of servitude.

“Jewish Hide and Seek”

As the story unfolds in *Only Nine Chairs*, we read: “The night’s filled with *matzah*, we break it and hide it.” This refers to the breaking of one of three *matzot* (plural of *matzah*) and the hiding of the *afikomen* (literally, “dessert” in Greek). Practices vary from family to family and from one tradition to the next, but the hidden *afikomen* is generally searched out and ransomed for a small gift by the children at the *seder*. The *seder* cannot officially end without the recovery and eating of this piece of *matzah*. This part of the *seder* that can be a source of great excitement for children. It is said that one reason for this practice is to help children remain awake until the completion of the *seder*.

About The PJ Library®

The PJ Library is an award-winning initiative of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation in partnership with your local Jewish Community. On a monthly basis, The PJ Library sends out high quality, age appropriate Jewish children’s books to participating families across the country. Through providing these books, The PJ Library’s goal is to help families explore the timeless core values of Judaism and to transmit these values to a new generation. To learn more about The PJ Library visit www.pjlibrary.org or call your local community representative.