Our hearts follow our actions, writes the Sefer HaChinuch. Dipping karpas in salt water, we can almost feel those salty tears dripping down our faces at the difficulty of slavery. Leaning to our sides helps us feel like free people. Throughout the ages, minhagim have been added to the Pesach Seder to help us internalize the story of the Exodus, so that every person can feel as if he or she, personally, left Egypt.

We all know of the custom to dip wine out of our cups when reciting the 10 plagues, or to open the door for Eliyahu at the end of the Seder. But did you know that Yemenites leave the door open for the entire Seder in anticipation of the arrival of Mashiach, or that Hungarian women place their gold and silver jewelry on the Seder table in commemoration of Shemot 12:35: “The Israelites did as Moshe instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing”?

The Seder Plate

The Seder plate also helps us relive the Exodus, from the sticky charoset reminding us of the mortar used in Egypt to maror which helps us feel the bitterness of slavery. In Ethiopia, the Jews didn’t have charoset – instead, they prepared a dip called b’tn, made of ground spices and black pepper, to dip their matzah into. While in most homes there is one Seder plate for everyone, Yemenites provide a personal Seder plate for each participant. Tunisians traditionally place the foods of the Seder plate in a reed basket (like the one baby Moshe floated in). Before reciting Ha Lachma Anya, the matriarch of the family goes around the table circling the basket over the head of each family member while saying “we left Egypt quickly.” They answer, “Yesterday we were slaves. Today we are free. This year we are here. Next year we will be free people in Eretz Yisrael.” Some say this custom originated in Spain, where the leader of the Seder would walk around and tap each family member’s head with the Seder plate (some say only the children’s heads were tapped). After the expulsion from Spain, Jews took this custom with them to Morocco.

Although red wine is preferable at the Seder, many Ashkenazim used white wine in fear of blood libels – they didn’t want to be accused of using Christian blood in their wine. Ashkenazim also set aside a special cup for Eliyahu HaNavi. Some even have the custom of covering the cup after the Seder and using it for kiddush the next day. Moroccans don’t have a cup for Eliyahu, but they set up a special chair for him, decorated with cushions.

Leaving Egypt

One very prevalent custom is the reenactment of leaving Egypt. Iraqi Jews have the following custom: before Ma Nishtana, the youngest child goes outside and knocks on the door. After he is invited in, he is asked, “Where are you from?” “I’ve come from Egypt,” he responds. “Where are you going?” “I’m going to Yerushalayim.” Then he asks the four questions.

Many Sephardim have a similar custom. In Turkey and Greece, the leader of the Seder would leave the room and return with matzot on his shoulder to answer these questions. In Yemenite families, the father or grandfather answers these questions as he walks around the table leaning on his cane, and tells everyone about his life as a slave in Egypt and the miracles of the Exodus. At the end of the Seder, Jews from Syria, Morocco, Iraq, Kurdistan, Djerba and the Caucasus place a bag on their shoulder and get up to leave the house, saying: “So did our ancestors leave Egypt, ‘their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders’” (Shemot 12:34).

Many Ashkenazim also have the custom of reenacting yetziat Mitzrayim. Rabbi Asher of Lunel wrote in his Sefer Minhagot (circa early 13th-century) of some German Jews: “…after eating karpas, they uproot the table and take the matzot, wrap them in coverings and bear them on their
shoulders and walk to the corners of the house, and then they return to their places and recite the *Haggadah.* In other parts of Germany, the *Seder* leader would take the *matzot* and place them on his shoulder and say: *So sind die Kinder Jisroel aus Mizraim gegangen, so war es* ("Thus did the Children of Israel leave Egypt, so it was").

Hungarians had a similar custom at the end of the *Seder*: the leader would wrap the *afikoman* in a scarf, sling it over his shoulder, stand up and say to his family in Yiddish: *Geimir, geimir!* ("Let’s go! Let’s go!"). Some German Jews also have the custom that when the door is opened for Elyahu, a member of the house comes running in, announcing the arrival of Mashiach.

Persians, Iranians, Iraqis and Afghanis have the enjoyable custom of acting out the slavery by whipping each other with spring onions or leeks while singing *Dayeinu.*

**TEN PLAGUES**

Similarly, the 10 plagues have an important place at the *Seder.* In Ashkenazi homes, everyone removes 10 drops of wine from their glasses with their finger while reciting the 10 plagues. But Jews from Turkey and some of the Balkans wouldn’t look at the spilled "plague-wine" lest they be contaminated. In Cochin (India), only the leader would spill out this wine from a special "Pharoah’s cup" and then wash his hands to clean them from the "plagues." Iraqi Jews would spread a second tablecloth over the table while reciting this passage, to protect the food from the plagues. On the other hand, in Libya, the “plague waters” were considered a *segula.* Single girls would wash their feet in the spilled wine, in the hope of finding a *shidduch* in the coming year. Today, many families add props to the *Seder* to symbolize the plagues – a participant might go around offering cups of “blood” (tomato juice) or throw plastic frogs or "hail" (ping pong balls).

**THE AFIKOMAN**

What about the *afikoman?* Many Sephardim, such as Iranian, Bucharian and Afghanistani Jews, keep a small piece of it as a *segula.* Jews of of North Africa and Greece would sometimes carry this piece in their pockets. Syrian, Libyan, Tunisian and Iraqi Jews would take this piece on their travels to protect from *ayin hara* along the way, and the Jews of Kurdistan would keep it in their grains and salt as a *segula.* Some Ashkenazi Jews would do this too – Polish Jews would hang the leftover *afikoman* on their walls.

Despite our different customs, our *Seders* all end with the same hope – כל שנה@Entity with entity type: Location and text: ירושלים bechara b’mi – all of Am Yisrael together!