



## Chain of Tradition

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Each year we commemorate the historical events of the Exodus from Egypt and the subsequent birth of the Jewish nation. The highpoint is the Seder meal, where we sit down with family and friends and recite the traditional centuries-old Haggadah text which takes us on a whirlwind journey of the senses through Jewish history.

My oldest son is now five years of age and last year he was able to participate in the Seder with some comprehension of what was taking place. Like many of my Rabbinic colleagues, we hosted many guests from around the world. As my children joined in with gusto, I felt a pride and satisfaction in knowing that I was carrying on a long chain of generations of Jewish fathers and their children.

At the end of our Seder, we sung a traditional melody which my own Grandfather taught me. As I taught the haunting tune to my own children, it brought back fond memories of my own grandfather, singing this tune at our seder when I was a child. It brought a feeling of sadness that Grandpa is no longer with us at our Seder, combined with pride that my children will continue these traditions.

I recently read a story about a gentleman who used to sponsor an advert on the front page of the New York Times, informing the Jewish community of the correct time for lighting the weekly Sabbath candles. It cost quite a bit to keep up and around 1999 he was unable to continue the financial commitment.

To commemorate the year 2000, the Times published a spoof '2100 edition'. Amongst the other articles on the front page was a box with the candle lighting times for New York City.

The former sponsor called up the editor – a staunch Catholic – in surprise. “I haven’t sponsored this for over two years, yet you put in the times for 2100!”

The reply he received sums up everything that Judaism stands for:  
“Whatever else is happening in 2100, you can be sure that Jewish women will still be lighting their Sabbath candles.”

When we sit down to a Seder meal, or any Jewish ritual, we know that Jewish communities all over the globe are doing exactly the same, that they have done so for thousands of years, and will continue to do so for many more. The sense of being part of something much bigger, spanning both time and space, is both awe-inspiring and humbling.

My father told me that many years ago he was in an Oxford bookshop and he noticed some Passover Haggadas on sale. The assistant helpfully informed him that it was ‘last year’s edition’.

For us, the Haggadah never goes out of date. Its message is timeless: of the freedom to follow our faith, and of the beautiful traditions and practices which have sustained us for many generations, and the vital importance of passing on that heritage, intact, to the future ones.

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