
And Jacob said to his brother Esau,

“...seeing your face is like seeing the face of God, and it is pleasing.”

Genesis 33:10

CLAL - The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership

CLAL—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership was founded in 1974. A leadership training institute, think tank and resource center, CLAL is dedicated to enhancing Jewish life to ensure that it is spiritually vibrant and engaged with the intellectual and ethical challenges of the wider world. CLAL's faculty of interdenominational rabbis and scholars links Jewish texts and intellectual traditions with cutting-edge contemporary scholarship, and provides the innovative tools, materials, and resources to help meet the needs of the next generation. As a partner in leadership and community development, CLAL's unique approach, connecting Jewish tradition with modern experience, addresses the challenges individuals, families and institutions face. Working with established and emerging leaders, rabbis, professionals, scholars, and decision-makers, CLAL has earned a reputation for compelling programs that embody the principles of pluralism and build vital Jewish communities across North America.

CLAL - The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership:

Stimulates volunteer, professional and rabbinic leadership to build responsive Jewish communities across North America.

Helps individuals to imagine new Jewish possibilities.

Promotes inclusive Jewish communities in which all voices are heard.

Convenes interdisciplinary seminars that explore the Jewish and American futures.

Enhances Jewish participation in civic and spiritual life in North America.



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Strong Communities.
One People.*

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GUESS WHO'S COMING TO Seder?

FEEDING A STRANGER IS EASY. For most of us, nothing could be more Jewish. Listening carefully to strange ideas, however, is less so. This Passover continue the ancient tradition of doing both.

Long before the Academy Award winning films *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Six Degrees of Separation*, the rabbis who composed the *Haggadah* appreciated that many of life's most important questions are raised at the family table, and that raising them properly means including a wide range of guests and an even wider range of ideas.



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The seder begins

with our declaration that all who are hungry may come and eat. But the real power of our invitation lies in asking those at the table not only to share our food, but also to share their ideas with us, even those with which we may deeply disagree. How strongly might we disagree? Strongly enough that one of those questioners is actually called evil – *rasha* – by the *Haggadah*! Evil he may be, but according to the *Haggadah* he is regarded as a member of the family, one of our children, and his questions are taken seriously.

Most of us assume that upon finding evil in the world, our first response must be to destroy it. And while that may ultimately be necessary, it is not the first choice of our tradition. Instead, we are told that anyone who is willing to be at the table of Jewish life is part of our family. Anyone willing to ask a question, no matter how seemingly abhorrent, deserves our genuine consideration.



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According to a *Hasidic* tradition from Belz, that is why this person is called *rasha* in Hebrew. This three-letter word begins with the letter *reish* and concludes with the letter *ayin*, which together spell *rah*, evil. But in the middle we find the letter *shin*, symbolic of the name of God as a source of complete love and nurturing. Our challenge in listening to the evil one is to see through to the inner core of the question being asked, to learn from it even if we never agree with it, and to see that person as holy for being willing to ask the question. Such openness to others is the hallmark of the freedom that Passover celebrates, and affirms the dignity of each human being that slavery strips away.

At your seder,

invite one or more people to ask what might be considered a *rasha* question – about Israel, Jewish identity, American politics, etc. After discussing what makes this question a *rasha* question, try to locate the *shin*, the holiness, in that same question. How does finding that wisdom affect your thinking about the issue at hand, the person asking the question, and the relationship between you?

This year, let's come to the table prepared to ask the toughest questions of ourselves and of our story, and let's make it safe for everyone gathered to do so. By asking such questions we can create the kind of spiritual and intellectual community that both we, and the rest of the world, so desperately need.