

Explaining Judaism To Your Non-Jewish Friends A Father's Seder To His Family

There is an advertisement on TV that says, "We didn't make the soccer uniforms; we made them better. We didn't make the jet skis; we made them better. Judaism takes it to the next level and says, "Judaism didn't make the world... We made it better."

At the core of Judaism, just like every great religion or civilization, there is a story. Buddhism is the story revolving around Buddha. Christianity has the stories about Christ and the Gospels. Our own American story, the story of the American dream, comes from the stories of Columbus, the Pilgrims, and the founding fathers. These stories of America give us the ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Judaism, too, revolves around a story. The story goes like this:

My father was a wandering Aramaean. He wandered down into the land of Canaan and became a family. When the Great Famine came his family and offspring wandered again, down into Egypt. This small tribe grew and became numerous after many years. So numerous that Pharaoh became afraid. He became afraid that we would ally with his enemies and defeat him. He enslaved us, he put us to hard labor, and he set taskmasters over us. We built the slave cities of Pithom and Ramses. And he slew our first-born. We cried unto God, who heard our cries. And with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, he freed us from Egypt. We came to the shores of the sea but our path was blocked. We again cried unto God and the sea split and we crossed. We came unto a holy place, a mountain, where God took us to be his own.

God said unto us, "You shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." And God spoke unto the adults and commanded they should diligently teach their children, saying that not just their ancestors but they themselves had been freed from slavery. And God spoke to the children, for they were the new generation, and told them, "You have the obligation to take the old and make it new, and to take the new and make it holy."

Our people cried out, "All that you have said we will do." And then on the wings of eagles we went unto the Promised Land. That story has given us the ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of Goodness. That story has enabled us to continue; to continue even when history wanted to destroy us. 2000 years ago the Romans sacked the temple, burned Jerusalem, killed the Jews of Judea, and salted the earth so the land would be barren. Our civilization should have ended, like that of the Hittites, and Babylonians; but we obeyed the commandment to re-imagine, and to take the old and make it new, and to take the new and make it holy. Our creativity emerged. Our prophets said, "If our temple, its priests and sacrifices, are gone or forbidden, then our homes shall become our temple. The Holy of Holies shall become our table, and our sacrifices shall become the food we eat.

Each one of us shall become a priest, because it is we who will make these things holy.

So we lived in our homes with a reverence for life. At our tables we prayed for liberty. And as we ate our food, we vowed to pursue goodness. We reimagined; we saved our civilization; and brought ourselves as a People to this day.

But today, we once again find ourselves under attack, this time by changing times. We are no longer part of an Age of Ritual. We live in an Age of Reason. The Age of Rigidity has given way to the Age of Romance. This combination of Reason and Romance has caused questions and doubts to be raised that were never before raised.

There are those who now say that the story never happened, because there is no archeological evidence of the exodus. There are no pottery shards, no charcoal from fires of long ago, and no words written on ancient shrines.

The question is asked, "How can we hold on to something that has never happened? How can we, ourselves, feel that we were slaves when we were never slaves? How can we base an entire religion on made up facts?"

We answer, "Our father was a wanderer. He was expelled from Spain during the Inquisition. He went into Germany and Eastern Europe and started a family. His People became fruitful and multiplied. They became numerous and filled the land.

"After living there for 440 years, a new Pharaoh arose; a Pharaoh who knew not the wisdom and goodness of the Jews. He was afraid of us. He was afraid we would ally with his enemies and defeat him. So he enslaved us. He set us to hard work, set taskmasters over us and we built the slave

cities of Auschwitz and Birkenau. He slayed our first-born.

"We cried unto God, and God heard our cries. And with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm we were freed from slavery. We came to the shores of the sea but the sea was blocked. We again cried unto God and the blockade was split and we went unto the promised land. We crossed on boats from Europe. And from Russia and Ethiopia we were borne on the wings of eagles."

Today the Jews in Israel and the Jews from the four corners of the earth, remain a kingdom of priests and are still a holy nation. For today we remember and observe the obligation that we are to take the old and make it new, and to take the new and make it holy.

(Now you can bless the wine and hold the moment dear.)