

# RANSOMING THE AFIKOMAN

a new approach

When we think of the afikoman, chances are we also think of the joy surrounding the discovery of this broken piece of matzah (probably by the youngest child at the seder). But is this simply a game, or is there a deeper meaning to this custom?

Tzafun, the eating of the afikoman, has tremendous significance. The matzah eaten at the beginning of the meal was symbolic of the past, of our redemption from Egypt. The matzah reserved as the afikoman and put away to be eaten at the end of the meal is symbolic of our future redemption.

“Tzafun” means hidden. In most households, the afikoman is hidden either by the adults or by the children, who then demand a “ransom” for its return. The hiding of the afikoman symbolizes the hidden nature of our future redemption. When will the Messianic era arrive? How will the Messianic era come about? The answers are hidden – yet there are some hints.

The afikoman symbolizes the korban pesah, the Passover sacrifice that every Jew must share. Today, each participant at the seder must, as the final part of the formal meal, eat a portion of the

afikoman. The cooperation of the children and adults – in bringing the hidden afikoman to light and making it available to all – is symbolic of the cooperation we must exhibit if we are to help speed up the arrival of the Messiah.

Only after eating the afikoman can we recite the Birkat Ha'Mazon (Blessing after Meals) and invite Elijah the Prophet, the harbinger of the Messiah, to our seder table.

(Please turn card over)

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism promotes the role of the synagogue in Jewish life in order to motivate Conservative Jews to perform mitzvot encompassing ethical behavior, spirituality, Judaic learning, and ritual observance.



## A NEW CUSTOM

In ransoming or redeeming the **afikoman**, instead of just “paying off” the children, each participant at the seder should also “purchase” his or her share to eat. Money is inappropriate for such a purchase. Let us instead make a pledge of action, vowing to carry out *ma’asim tovim*, good deeds, as well as acts of *tzedakah* (charity) and *gemilut hesed* (lovingkindness). For example, we might pledge to bring food to a homeless shelter or begin to visit the sick at a local hospital. Or, we might begin our search for the Messiah by engaging in Jewish learning or participating in personal and communal prayer.

Think of what you will offer for the **afikoman** this year as it is passed around the table. After Birkat Ha’Mazon, we will then follow a beautiful custom initiated by Rabbi Naftali of Ropshitz, in which each participant pours some wine into Elijah’s Cup. As you pour wine from your cup into Elijah’s, share with those at your seder what you have decided to do this year to grow closer to God and to make the world a better place.

## SUGGESTED DIALOGUE

Tzafun

Leader (to the participants as the **afikoman** is distributed): To share in the **afikoman**, we must each pledge to make our world a better place and to make ourselves better Jews in order to hasten the final redemption. Think about this as we recite the Birkat Ha’Mazon. We will share our commitments when we welcome Elijah.

After Birkat Ha’Mazon

Each participant (while pouring a small amount of wine into Elijah’s Cup from his or her own cup): This year I pledge to ... In this way may I do my share to help bring about our future redemption and hasten the coming of the Messiah.

Leader: As the Sages teach us: “Only through its own efforts will Israel be redeemed.” Just as our ancestors each did their part in preparing for the exodus from Egypt, the historic redemption over 3,000 years ago, so too must we each do our part to bring about our future redemption. We have each made a pledge to better our world in the year to come – symbolizing our cooperative pledge by pouring some of our own wine into the Cup of Elijah. It is only through cooperation, self-sacrifice, compassion, and generosity that we may truly improve the world.

**HAG SAMEAH** From The United  
Synagogue of  
Conservative  
Judaism

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