

QUESTIONS

PESAH'S ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT



Good spices don't just have their own flavor. They make the whole dish taste better! Questions are a lot like that, and they're the essential ingredient of this holiday. Questions help us access information, but they can also activate our sense of curiosity, openness, and empathy. Most basically, questions offer a chance for one party to speak, another to listen, and the two together to discover. This is expressed eloquently by R. Hayyim David ha-Levi, who writes:

He lived from
1924 to 1998
in Eretz Yisrael

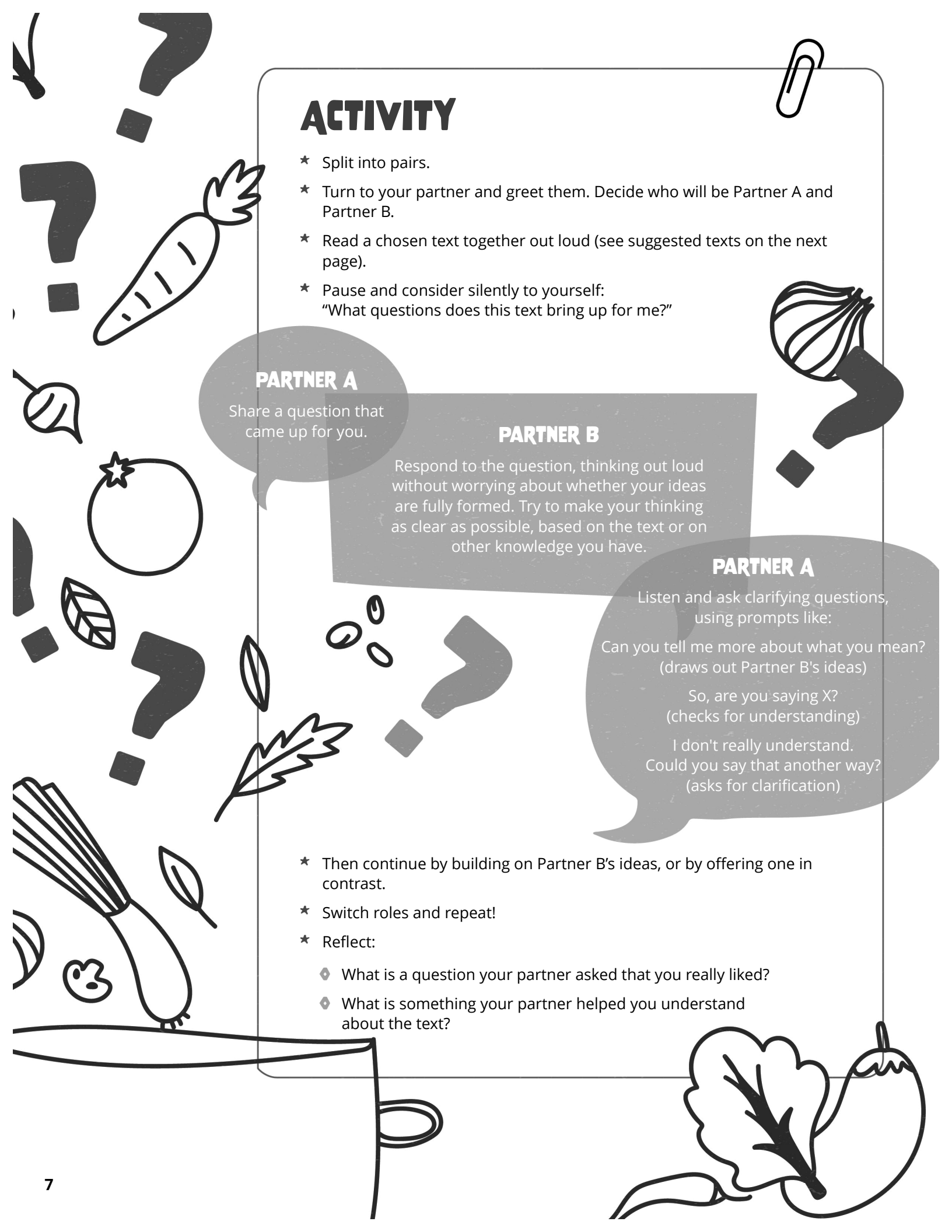
עשה לך רב וילד

כונת התורה שרצה שהבן ישאל
דוקא, משום שכאשר מסבירים
דבר לכל אדם ובמיוחד לקטנים,
אין זה ברור ששמו לבם לשמוע
הדברים ולהבינם ולזכרם כראוי,
משא"כ כאשר התעוררו לפני
כן בשאלה כאשר המעשים
לא היו מובנים להם, אז ודאי
הוא שיתנו לב להבין ולזכור
והדברים יחרתו על לבם.

ASEH LEKHA RAV 6:34

The Torah's intention was that it wanted a child to ask, specifically. Because when people explain something to anyone, and especially children, it is not clear that their hearts are set to listen, understand, or remember what is discussed appropriately. This is not so **when they rouse themselves beforehand, by asking a question regarding something which they themselves had not understood.** In that case, it is certain that they will turn their heart toward understanding and remembering, and the matter will be etched upon their heart.

This activity will support you and those with you to come together in this way, asking questions of the text and each other, activating deep listening, and attending so that we might arrive at new understandings that can be etched upon our hearts. Feel free to use the activity at any time when your Seder is ripe for a good question, such as when reading about the Four Questions or the Four Children, or after people have eaten and can settle into a good discussion!



ACTIVITY

- ★ Split into pairs.
- ★ Turn to your partner and greet them. Decide who will be Partner A and Partner B.
- ★ Read a chosen text together out loud (see suggested texts on the next page).
- ★ Pause and consider silently to yourself:
“What questions does this text bring up for me?”

PARTNER A

Share a question that came up for you.

PARTNER B

Respond to the question, thinking out loud without worrying about whether your ideas are fully formed. Try to make your thinking as clear as possible, based on the text or on other knowledge you have.

PARTNER A

Listen and ask clarifying questions, using prompts like:

Can you tell me more about what you mean?
(draws out Partner B's ideas)

So, are you saying X?
(checks for understanding)

I don't really understand.
Could you say that another way?
(asks for clarification)

- ★ Then continue by building on Partner B's ideas, or by offering one in contrast.
- ★ Switch roles and repeat!
- ★ Reflect:
 - ◆ What is a question your partner asked that you really liked?
 - ◆ What is something your partner helped you understand about the text?

SUGGESTED TEXTS FOR LEARNING

The following passages are from the Mishnah and the Haggadah. They may be new to you, or you may have read them many times. This is a chance to slow down and really get into conversation with them by using the routine above for one or all of them. Feel free to use the routine for any other piece of text you're interested in as well!



משנה פסחים יד

מָזְגוּ לוֹ כּוֹס שֵׁנִי, וְכָאן הֵבִין שׁוֹאֵל
אָבִיו, וְאִם אֵין דַּעַת בְּבֶן, אָבִיו
מְלַמְדוֹ.

MISHNAH PESAHI 10:4

They poured him a second cup, and here the child asks their parent. And if the child does not have knowledge, their parent teaches them.

הגדה של פסח

הָא לַחֲמַא עֲנִיָּא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ
בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם. כָּל דְּכִפִּיּוּ יִיְתִי
וְיִיכַל, כָּל דְּצָרִיךְ יִיְתִי וְיִפְסֹח.

HAGGADAH

This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are in need come and celebrate Pesah.

משנה פסחים יה

בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת
אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא
מִמִּצְרַיִם, שְׁנֹאמֵר, "וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ
בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בָּעֶבְרָה זֶה
עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם"
(שמות יג:ח).

MISHNAH PESAHI 10:5

In each and every generation a person must view themselves as though they personally left Egypt, as it is stated: "And you shall tell your child on that day, saying: It is because of this which God did for me when I came forth out of Egypt" (Exodus 13:8).

