Israelis celebrate Passover in one of two ways: either by closely sticking to laws of Passover related to hametz and the Seder, or by nature hikes and joining family for a relaxed festive meal. I never liked this dichotomy, and yearned to integrate both the more traditional and easygoing aspects of the holiday. Shopping for kosher for Passover food could not be my main experience leading up to the holiday. I wanted to experience the family Seder meal as a celebration of a new beginning, and to find personal meaning in the story of exodus from Egypt.

Some 20 years ago New Age spirituality started to permeate Israeli society. Indeed, all over the Western world many, not only Israelis or Jews, were searching for a meaningful connection to the world of spirituality. Seeking to renew their connection to nature and search for magical experiences in their daily lives, they draw inspiration from many traditions – from Native American Shamanism to ancient Egypt, from Kabbalah to Sufism. The New Age spirituality emphasizes experience and feeling, bodily enjoyment, and strives to expose feminine aspects of spirituality.

This new concept undermines the religious-secular dichotomy. People inclined tend to view themselves as spiritual but not religious. This phenomenon is so widespread that it is defined as SBNR (spiritual but not religious) in academic works.

Coming back to Passover, how does New Age spirituality enable a new holistic connection to the holiday? There are, in fact, several ways in which New Age spirituality offers a new interpretation of Passover both in Jewish practice in Israel and overseas. While seemingly far from mainstream Judaism of today, they represent a return to lost traditions.

• The Passover Seder was formalized during centuries of exile, however, now it is easy to connect to nature in the Land of Israel. The laws of Passover are based upon nature - the ripening of barley and wheat, the trees blossoming and the plants blooming. The Talmud states that when Rabbi Judah saw trees blossoming during the month of Nisan in spring, he would recite the blessing: "Blessed be He who hath not left His world lacking in anything and has created in it goodly creatures and goodly trees for the enjoyment of mankind." Try it during the Seder with a blossoming tree branch!

• As it is written in the Haggada: "In each generation, each person is obligated to see himself or herself as though he or she personally came forth from Egypt." Therefore a personal story can be shared, used to connect one to the holiday in a spiritual, as opposed to a historical, manner. For example, how should I be freed? Who is the internal Moses who can liberate me? What are the internal voices that enslave me like Pharaoh? Such questions can provide the spiritual preparation for the holiday or even replace the traditional Haggada.

• According to the outlook of New Age spirituality, inspiration from other religions is legitimate and desirable. For example, Michael Kagan’s Holistic Haggadah relates the Israelites’ enslavement in Egypt to the Buddhist concept of an attachment problem: the existential suffering that we experience originates from our attachment to objects in this world, which makes us enslaved to them. Thus Buddhism offers us another perspective upon the significance of slavery.

Do you feel that this is much more appropriate than previous seders you have experienced? Then you belong to the present-day spiritual renaissance!

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A spiritual Passover

By MARIANNA RUACH-MIDBAR

ISRAELIS ENJOY the Passover holiday with a hike and picnic. The author yearns to integrate both the more traditional and the easygoing aspects of the holiday. (Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)