

## A Different Pesach: Ideas for the Solo Seder

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### Introduction

Pesach will be uniquely challenging for everyone this year. This is a different time, in very different circumstances. The following document is a bit of a choose-your-own adventure for those who will be making Seder **on their own** this year. Some of these suggestions also work great for **uber-tiny Sedarim**.

One very important thing to remember is that each of us will deal with Pesach in a very different way this year. Please bear in mind that your seder might look a lot of different ways - from extremely bare-bones and low-key, to more elaborate - and that all of those ways are okay.

**In this spirit, a few things to keep in mind as you read on:**

- The right Seder for you this year might involve matza and cream cheese, a good book, and sleep. **That might be all you're up for, and that is totally okay.** You're certainly not alone in that. Check out the book list below for some ideas.
- Below, there are some ideas to enhance your solo seder. But please bear in mind that this is **not an attempt to re-create your usual Seder**. This year will inevitably be very different. The below is simply a toolbox of ideas for you to use to enhance or supplement your personal experience of this year's seder as you choose. Let this year be different, however it needs to be.
- Many of us might be grieving what can't be this year, and that is natural, and of course, very okay. But one way to look at this year's seder, specifically, is to ask: **what becomes possible when you have this kind of Seder?** Maybe you'd like to wear your most comfortable pajamas, or sing at the top of your lungs in your kitchen, things you might not otherwise do at a communal seder. There might be loss in this year's experience, but there might also be space for what feels most deeply personal.

So, if it's helpful, this document can be one of your companions in preparing for your seder this year. It contains ideas for spiritual framing that might be most salient this year, some logistical resources for how best to prepare, and a whole menu of ideas for solo or uber-tiny seder content. (Please note: this particular document doesn't contain ideas that rely on digital platforms, but please feel free to use this to enhance your Zoom seder, as well!)

## A Seder Alone? Ugh.

Yes, we agree. Ugh is right. We want to be surrounded by friends and family and raucous singing and beautiful feasting. But solo seders are not unprecedented. If you're having a solo seder this year, remember that history has many examples of these, and that you're part of a long line of people making meaning on Pesach on their own.

The Exodus story involves many moments--from the narrow straits, to expansive redemption. The story of Yetziat Mitzrayim embodies all parts of the process, and our **Seders are meant to be a timeless container** to tell that story.

The Talmud (Pesachim 116a) says that if no child is there to ask, the person uses "Mah Nishtana" to ask themselves, since the seder must have *she'eilah uteshuva* (*questions and answers*). Maimonides codifies this into law, noting that if a person is alone, **they ask themselves.**

The Kimcha Diavishna (R' Yochanan ben Yosef Treves, 16th century, Italy) composed a how-to-guide for the Seder. He was concerned about how his community would be able to lead their seders, many of them exiles from Spanish Inquisition. Many exiles from Spain and other places of persecution were part of families that were split up. In the beginning of Magid, he says that most people say that the word Magid is based on verse והגדת לבנך (*tell your children*). This explanation would not resonate with people who were alone.

He offers a different interpretation to the word "Magid". He says that the word "Magid" is not about "Telling your Children" but from the word "**Agadah**" - the spiritual story like parts of Talmud. In other words **Magid is about inspiring yourself and learning lessons.**

Furthermore, in his instructions before Mah Nishtana, he explicitly says that Mah Nishtana was instituted for someone who does not have a child! This means that Mah Nishtana is a formula to help ask yourself questions **when you are solo**. To help make it meaningful. (It is not about a cute moment between grandparent, parent, children.)

Let's go.

## Before Yom Tov

**Preparing your home and table:** This is not a document with a lot of logistical or halachic guidance, but there are resources out there for those who want to prepare their homes for the holiday according to Jewish law. Please see our *additional resources* section below for these.

**Countdown:** Because we are limited in our ability to actually *be* together for the seder, one way to deepen the experience is to ritually count down to the moment of seder alongside your friends, family, or loved ones. Make each day of the week leading up to the seder an opportunity to check in about one aspect of the preparation.

**Sharing rituals from afar:** What are the rituals that are most important to you? Is it possible to build them into your preparations for the Holiday? Have a video call before the night of the seder where everyone shares and remembers family/friend rituals together. Decide on a few things everyone will try to do at the same time during their seders, even in separate places. **(For example, everyone will sing dayeinu ‘together’ in funny voices at 10:30PM.)**

**Cook ‘together:’** There is no need to make anything fancy, but if you want to cook something for seder, consider ‘cooking with’ members of your family. This can take the form of cooking together on a video call, or simply just *cooking the same recipe*. This can be a new recipe, or a recipe you’ve shared together before, and it might even be an opportunity to share reminiscences about this recipe. Of course, everyone will need to be considerate of limited/pantry ingredients, but this is a moment for collective creativity.

**Group good yontif call:** Do a video call right before the seder to send everyone into Pesach with one another’s voices in their ears. Ask each person to share one blessing or wish they send to everyone else as we go into this holiday.

**Seder by mail:** One way to get words and messages to one another right now is through the mail, and this is a nice change of pace from the digital. Before the Seder, use the mail (safely!) to enhance your seder (If you prefer it, these can also be done by email, and then printed).

One way to do this is to have each family member or friend write a paragraph, thought, or idea for each one of the 15 steps of the seder. This way, as you sit down to your own seder this year, you can read new, handwritten words from each of your family members for **every step of the seder**. This can function as its own family commentary on the haggadah, and as ‘conversation’ at your table.

Another way to do this is to have each member of your family or group of loved ones write a letter to another, and mail it (safely!) in advance of the seder. Pick a theme for these letters. Maybe they are each person’s reflection on the past year, or reflections on opportunities to

create the conditions for liberation in the year to come. Maybe each letter is a recounting of a past seder, along with three wishes for this year's seder. Maybe it is a personal message to a friend or family member. Pick moments of your own seder to read each one of these letters. Read them aloud, to bring your family members' voices into the room.

**Make a collaborative haggadah or haggadah supplement:** Google docs makes collaborating on a haggadah or haggadah supplement quite doable! Create a doc and send an email out to friends and family, asking everyone to contribute. It might help if each person has a page, or each person is responsible for a section. Each person can print out the document before the holiday, and use it at the seder.

**Pre-seder group study:** Pick a night or a few nights leading up to the seder that a family or group of friends will get together on Zoom and pick some elements of the seder to study directly from the text. Instead of predetermining how you'll handle each of those elements at the actual seder, approach each with the spirit of chavruta - encounter and engage each element together, and let new ritual ideas emerge from the conversation. For example, take *kadesh*, the wine. Everyone can bring stories about their experience with kadesh, ideas about kadesh. Everyone can look at the blessing together, or that part of the haggadah, and discuss, as a group, what this year's *kadesh* ritual might be, even as everyone is in separate places. <https://www.haggadot.com> is a great resource for finding new Haggadot or creating your own!

**Pre-seder salon:** Invite a group of friends or family to come together for a virtual/online pre-seder salon - a space where people can share creative pieces inspired by or connected to the seder. Have everyone come up with a song, a story, a poem, a meditation, a dance, a movement or stretch - something they can teach and share online in advance of your separate seders. Hold a Zoom call where each person takes a few minutes to perform their piece (song, dance, poem) and then teach it (or just share/discuss it) with the other people in the group. Then, each person can take these elements into their solo seder.

## At the Seder: General

**Pace Yourself:** Divide the Seder into its component parts, and put activities/letters (generated either by yourself, or by friends or family, in one of the ideas above) into envelopes that you close, and only read the contents when you arrive at that part of the Seder. If you've sourced letters/reflections from friends and family, put them in different envelopes and open them at different times.

**Front Porch/Stoop/Threshold L'Chaim:** If you live in an urban area or close enough to the next house, make a time before Yom Tov to go outside and have a L'Chaim or share one part of the Seder. You don't have to share exactly the same religious practices as your neighbor. This is a perfect moment to come together in spirit, but please be sure you're at least six feet apart and on separate stoops/porches, and not actually congregating.

**Lean, baby, Lean.** Haseiba. The moment where we awkwardly lean in mid-air as a nod to "royalty" and "comfort" can actually be done on the couch. Or pillows on the floor. A yoga mat, a hammock, a lawn chair! This is an example of where a solo seder can actually be more comfortable and luxurious than usual. You won't be crowding anyone else out this year! Where do you feel the most royal in your home?

**No Haggadah Loyalty:** Switch through Haggadahs throughout the Seder! Embrace the chaos. Let this be a low-prep Haggadah adventure. Just stack them on the table before you begin, sit down, and go for it. An idea: use a different haggadah for each step of the seder or for each part of Maggid.

**Stay Moving:** Create little movement prompts for yourself to shake things up and get you to move throughout the seder. Walk from one space to another. Stretch your body. Open the door for Elijah and look up at the moon. Also, find ways to be in physical contact with your own body, if that feels right to you. Put your hand on your heart during certain readings or sections of the seder, or hold your own hand. Take intentional breaths, and experience your body that way.

**Afikoman: Some solo ideas:** Our fave is hide it while you're prepping for the Seder. You'll probably forget where you put it. Who knows your house/apt really well? Get them to "hide it" and check in afterwards. Hide it from a relative and during *Chol Ha'Moed* do a Zoom scavenger hunt with clues. Get some boxes, all except for one of them will stay empty or have some sweet treats in them, while the real afikomen is only in one box. Hide all these boxes in your apartment. Searching for the Afikoman then will be a bit more engaging as you won't know when and where you'll actually find it.

**What Do I Eat?** Let the meal part of the seder be flexible this year. Make yourself something yummy, but be kind to yourself - no need to make it fancy, if you don't want or have the capacity to. Jewish law permits cooking on Yom Tov, so you can make scrambled eggs and call it day, if you want to. If you prefer to cook more elaborately, lean in to that as well - nothing wrong with a sumptuous holiday feast for one, if you have the energy and desire to dream one up. Whatever you prefer, if you'd like more ideas or resources, you can join cookbook author Leah Koenig for [A Pared Down Pesach menu planning workshop](#) on 3/26.

**Literary companionship:** If eating alone with just you and your plate is a little much, try finding a **book on the theme of “yetziat mitzrayim”** to keep you company and read it over your dinner. This does not need to be a Passover-themed book! Fiction, non-fiction, or poetry about themes of liberation, or leaving the “narrow place” (the literal translation of the Hebrew word *mitzrayim*) can be wonderful dinner or after-dinner companions. For some specific ideas, please check out (and add to!) [this crowd-sourced Pesach reading list](#).

**Spending time during a long yom tov day:** Solo seder is one thing, but for those observing the holiday, sometimes a whole day alone can feel long. Use the time to go for a walk outside (staying safe and socially distanced), wave to friends across the street, or lay on a blanket in the sun in your backyard, if you have one. Curl up with another good book. Meditate, nap, look out the window and daydream. If you're a Hebrew/liturgy nerd, compare Haggadot, and pay attention to differences and similarities between the translations, illustrations, commentaries, etc. Or cook or bake something delicious for Pesach - it's Yom Tov, so cooking is allowed!

## A Little Bit More: Extra Activities and Guiding Questions

**Karpas:** Why is it important to acknowledge the sadness during a day of freedom? What power does it have to begin the night from the tears of slavery? What are the different types of tears you have in life? What do we need to purify ourselves from? What are we purifying ourselves for?

**Rachtzah:** What is different about washing your hands to prepare yourself “do something” as opposed to washing away something?

**Motzi Matzah:** What nourishes us in this season? What has nourished us to this point?

**Maror and Korech:** Lots of the steps of the seder are reliant on our senses, and on experiencing the story of the seder in our bodies. Spend some time thinking about sensations, and on how the sensory nature of the seder helps us think more deeply about empathy.

**Four Children:** How is each of the four children present within each one of us? This is a relevant question to ask when we’re flying solo at the seder. Check this out by Jordan Namerow [The Four Children and COVID-19](#), and use it to have this conversation with yourself, or to discuss it before the seder or after Shabbat ends with someone else.

**Kol Dichfin:** Who would you want to invite to your seder this year? How can you invite their qualities to join you at the seder? What are stories of theirs that you want to remember?

**Vhi-Sheamdah:** is a story of resilience and overcoming challenges. What are challenges you have overcome in your life? Who supported you? Who have you supported?

**Dayeinu:** Make a list of all the things you’re grateful for in your life. Use the liturgy to list them out: *Since I have \_\_\_\_\_, Dayeinu.*

**Mah Nishtana:** Try standing on a chair and singing the four questions as if you were 8 years old. What other important, challenging, or nourishing questions are arising for us this season?

**Korech:** Sandwiches are fun. Crunch as loud as you want! Get crumbs everywhere. No one is watching.

**Afikoman:** What are we hiding from ourselves? What would be possible if we allowed ourselves to find the truth? Why is it important to finish the meal with “being found”?

**Nirtzah:** Experiment with solo singing challenges. Sing all of Ha’Gadya in one breath. Sing Who Knows One in English and Hebrew with the hand-motions. Sing your favorite song about freedom or happiness. Don’t be afraid to move, clap, snap, or dance!

## Additional Links and Resources

- [The Minimalist's Guide to Passover and Seder, by Rabbanit Leah Sarna](#) - This document has some good resources for creating a Pesach shopping list, and preparing your home for Pesach and seder during a challenging time.
- [Picking a Haggadah](#) - This document has some resources for finding Haggadot at this stage of the game.