

Dear Anshe Sholom,

The very first mitzvah that was given to the Jewish people (Exodus 12) was the obligation to sanctify the new moon. Even as slaves in Egypt, we were given the gift of being able to mark our own calendar and to partner with God to endow days with special sanctity. Two weeks later, on the first Passover eve, we gathered in our homes, sheltered from destruction outside, and demonstrated our faith in the coming redemption.

From that Passover until this one, we have gathered in both good times and in hard times to celebrate Passover. Come what may, the 15th of Nissan is a day that is set apart. If Passover is a night that is different from all other nights, this Passover is going to be different from all other Passovers.

Many of us have memories of celebrating Passover with large extended and multi-generational families. Many of us have memories of favorite Passover foods and recipes passed down from our grandparents. All of us at ASBI can take pride as well in our community's long tradition of extending hospitality to one another to ensure that there is a seat at the seder table for all. None of these cherished traditions can be implemented this year as we have done in the past.

It is absolutely crucial that each of us follow the guidance of public-health officials and thereby demonstrate that our mitzvah observance and Jewish identity is rooted in a religious humanism that understands the sanctity of each human life created in God's image and the grave responsibility to protect and promote human health.

To be as clear as possible: If, as we have every reason to expect, the current social-distancing guidelines remain in place or if they are strengthened, it will be an halakhic imperative not to share holiday meals with people outside of your household.

ASBI is committed to helping each one of you celebrate Passover under circumstances that none of us could have imagined just weeks ago. Please visit asbi.org/Pesach to view the available resources to help you prepare, including Seders-To-Go from Zelda's Catering; guidance about how to have a minimalist Passover at your own home; our updated Laws and Customs of Passover Document, newly edited for 5780; and more.

Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, author of the collection of Hassidic teachings known as Sefat Emet, writes that the obligation on Passover night, that each one of us should see ourselves as though we personally were redeemed from Egypt, reveals to us the potential for freedom and redemption itself.

וכפי אמונת האדם כאילו יצא, נתגלה בחינה זו ומרגיש ביציאת מצרים של עתה. ויכול לצאת כל אחד ממצר שלו.

By believing that God took us out of Egypt, he writes, we see the possibility of being freed from the constraints in which we find ourselves today.

With my best wishes for a joyous Pesach,
Rabbi David Wolkenfeld