

Order of the Seder Supplement

Seders in Seclusion II: This Night Is Different!

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Suggestions for Ritual Symbols and Seder Activities...Whether We're Together or Apart.

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Introduction

Re-telling the Passover story this year, I can't help but wonder how similar to, or different from, last year's Seder celebrations this year's will be. A few more of us together than before? Most of us still separate making use of Zoom? Zoom was new to us last Passover and now exhausts us.

I wonder what will be new and enduring from this year's Passover experience. Just like I wonder what new from our entire experience of stay apart months, more than a year now, will endure and become part of how we live tomorrow.

I want to read our experience into that of our Israelite ancestors. They, too, sensed they were at the beginning of a very long end to their enslavement. At least they all hope so as they begin journey to freedom.

Remember how it unfolds. God commands the Israelites to take the blood of a lamb and put it on their home's doorposts, as we read, "And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you; when I see the blood I will pass over you, so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt."

It is interesting. The focus of that commandment is on the people performing it. Rashi and other Torah teachers imagine the blood was placed inside of the slave's huts or homes, only for them to see. Think of that. Try to imagine the courage it took for a group of slaves to defy their taskmasters and anticipate better days. Or, try to imagine how this act portrays their openness to God's call, to accept the responsibilities of their impending freedom.

Now think of us. Think of what's been going on inside our homes. Perseverance to keep ourselves busy and healthy. Patience to manage children and school, partners and work. Anxiousness and we long for the freedom of normal days. Angst as we worry about the passing of precious time, days, weeks, and months we will never get back. Sadness in confronting illness and death. Hope in looking forward to our impending freedom. Of course the Israelites placed the lamb's blood inside their homes. Inside is where we live and strive, sleep and dream.

1. Kadesh: We celebrate Passover with Four Cups of Wine

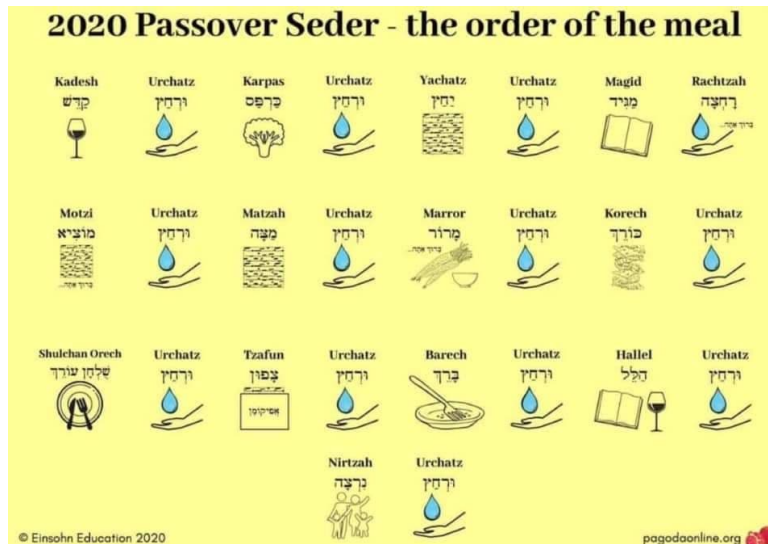
Tradition teaches us, in the Babylonian Talmud, that our four cups correspond to the four expressions of God's deliverance in Exodus 6:6-7.

"Say, therefore to the Israelite people: I am the Eternal God. I will **free** you from the labors of the Egyptians and **deliver** you from their bondage. I will **redeem** you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary plagues. And I will **take** you to be My people, and I will be your God."

At this year's Seder, looking back on a pandemic year filled by staying at home much of the time we may also interpret our Four Cups of Wine to reflect these phrases in Exodus 12:21-23.

"Moses then summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go, pick out lambs for your families, and slaughter the Passover offering. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts. **None of you shall go outside** the door of his house until morning. For when the Eternal God **goes through to smite** the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and the Eternal God will **pass over** the door and **not let the Destroyer enter** and smite your home."

2. Urhatz: A symbolic ritual hand washing



As we wash our hands:

In this time of pandemic and fear of sickness, we take as much responsibility as we can by observing the obligation to wash our hands thoroughly, for as long as it takes to say this prayer, or to sing a chorus of Dayenu. It's enough already with this virus!

3. Karpas: A Springtime Appetizer

Customarily, we dip a green vegetable in Saltwater. Our green vegetable symbolizes spring, freshness, and growth. The Saltwater suggests the tears of the Israelite slaves and impoverished people everywhere. The act of dipping represents the elegance of hor d'oeuvres at our holiday meal.

At this year's Seder, we may also interpret Karpas. The green vegetable represents the fresh produce and groceries we bought in limited quantities while being properly physically distant in the Grocery Store. Saltwater represents the tears of those afflicted with COVID-19 and their loved ones.

4. Yahatz: Breaking the Middle Matzah

Early in the Seder ritual, we break a piece of Matzah, wrap it in a cloth, and hide the larger portion of it for after our meal. Breaking the Matzah and hiding the larger portion is a poignant symbol. Slaves and those who live in poverty don't know when they'll eat next. They ration what they can, saving more for later rather than using it all up. They must conserve. They must think about how to sustain their lives and their families.

Early in the Seder we're re-enacting slavery. After dinner, we're rejoicing in our freedom. Even then, in the comfort of our celebration as free people, **we know that more about life is hidden from us than revealed.** We, too, must consider how to sustain our welfare and our values, our health and our loved ones, our community and our world, unaware of, and preparing for, what may happen next.

We are free, but we remember when we were slaves. We are whole, but we bring to mind those who are broken. The larger part of the Matzah is hidden as a symbol that we hope the future will be greater than the past, tomorrow's Passover greater than yesterday's Exodus.

At this year's Seder, in addition to breaking the Middle Matzah, let's hold up a whole Matzah, symbolizing our hope to be reunited soon with those whom we love, or celebrating who we aer with tonight for the very first time in quite a long time, and to be whole again in the social closeness and relationships of our lives.

Another Yahatz Idea: Tell all of the children to break their own piece of Matzah, wrap it up in an extra napkin and place it in a paper bag. Before Seder be sure to write each child's name on a bag. Then place their bag into a big Afikomen sack.

Secret: If you are together with the children this year, before the Seder hide a different paper bag with each child's name on it and with half a piece of matzah wrapped in a napkin inside it around the house. At some point, get up from the table and tell them you are hiding their bags/pieces for them to find later on. When it is time to find the Afikomen, ask the children to find the bag with their name on it, and help others to find theirs. Use the "real" Afikomen you made to end the Seder. Don't give away the secret of your magic trick!

5. Maggid: Telling the Exodus story

It is now time to tell our people's story of redemption. Many people are surprised to discover the actual story of the Exodus is not published in the Haggadah. Instead, the Haggadah is a collection of rabbinic Midrashim (interpretations and legends).

More than 1,800 years ago, the rabbis of the Mishnah began recounting the story of Israel's freedom from Egyptian bondage by expounding on the Exodus story as told in Chapter 12 of the Book of Exodus and Chapter 26 of the Book of Deuteronomy. The result of this process continued through the generations and the rabbis' teachings were compiled into the Haggadah we use.

The Passover Haggadah is a resource and prompt for us as we celebrate the Seder. Many of us can explain the symbols of the Seder. In some form, all of us know the Exodus story. We can wonder about and answer ours and our children's questions and refer to the Haggadah for more information and insight when we need it.

6. Ha Lahma: Defining Matzah and the purpose of our Seder

Display the broken Matzah and recite: "This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are needy come and celebrate the Passover. This year we are here; next year may we be in Israel. At present we are slaves; next year may we be free people."

At this year's Seder, in addition to reciting the paragraph above:

Display the whole Matzah and recite: "This is the bread of health and wholeness that we used to take for granted. Let all who desire, anticipate and behold. Let all who are waiting, be patient and calm. This year many of us are still separated; next year may we be together. This year we are still sheltered at home; next year may we be free people."

Now discuss or consider what tzedakah you can give to those who are hungry or who need assistance at this difficult time and, if appropriate to your circumstance what acts of loving-kindness or community service can you offer.

7. The Four Questions...among many others.

The Four Questions aren't really questions at all! They are four statements about how different a Seder celebration is from other meals. Passover is about much more than dipping, reclining, or even eating Matzah.

This year's Seder is our second during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Consider these four questions for yourself:

1. How is this intimate Seder a meaningful one for you without some of your usual relatives and friends present around the table?
2. How do you understand freedom this year, after a year of isolation, physical distancing, and limited public gathering?
3. What insights from the Haggadah and Passover story resonate for you tonight?
4. What does Matzah symbolize to you this year?

The ability to question is the mark of a free person. We tell the story of our People's freedom from slavery by asking and answering each other's' questions about what we are doing and why. What questions would you like to ask or consider tonight?

Consider these. Here are things only free people can truly think about:

1. What do you want to do differently or better when normalcy returns?
2. What do you want to leave behind?
3. What do you want to change?

Imagine the Hebrew slaves in Egypt wondering about these questions.

1. If/when we're free, how are we going to build our lives?
2. How are we going to cherish and protect our freedom?

Isn't that actually what Torah and Jewish tradition are about? With our lives on hold:

1. Does that help us feel a sense of slavery different than in a normal year?

By the way: What's one of the most difficult questions you ever had to answer? What did it feel like to find the words or the necessary explanation?

8. Telling the Story

For our children to talk about:

Pretend you were a slave in Egypt. What is your worst memory of slavery? What do you hope for most in freedom? Did you ever think you would be free? How do you think it happened? What makes you feel sad or mad today? What do you do when you have those feelings?

Another way to tell the story:

Think of a person or object in the Exodus story. Retell part of the story from that character's or prop's point of view. For example, what might it have been like to be a child walking through the water walls of the Sea of Reeds? What did it feel like to be the basket in which Moses floated down the Nile River? How did a frog understand what was happening during the plague? (Here's a list of possible people and objects: Miriam, Aaron, Pharaoh's Daughter, A Slave, Moses, Pharaoh, A Taskmaster, Matzah, Moses' Rod, Miriam's Timbral.)

More Fun Ideas for Children or Adults:

- When I heard I would be free, I sent a text message to my friend. I told her I was feeling _____, and that the first thing I would do as a free person is _____.
- Imagine you are an Israelite living next door to an Egyptian family. When they ask you why you are painting lamb's blood on your doorframe, what do you tell them? What feelings of theirs do you want to be sensitive to?
- Now that you have been freed from Egypt, you want to tell everyone about this amazing event. You decide to post something to Instagram to help other people relate to what you went through. What would you post?
- You are one of Moses' advisors. Moses senses the slaves are tired of taking orders and as they become free don't want too many rules imposed on them. How do you recommend Moses explain the Ten Commandments to the newly freed Israelite slaves?

9. Physical and Spiritual Enslavement

For Children:

Collect a bag of props, silly clothes, toys, and household items. Ask each child to reach into the bag, select an item or two.

Ask the children to act out being a character in the Passover story and guess who they are pretending to be. (Roles can include Moses, Pharaoh, Taskmaster, Slave, God, Miriam, Pharaoh's Daughter, etc.)

Thought question: If you had to leave home quickly, just like the slaves did, what would you take with you?

For Everyone:

Pretend you were a slave in Egypt. What is your worse memory of slavery? What do you hope most for in freedom? Did you ever think you would be freed? How do you think it happened?

How would you answer this question: Can you describe a time when you didn't have your smart phone with you and really missed it? Can you describe a time when you had your smart phone with you and missed out on something else?

For Adults:

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught:

The decisive event in the story of the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt was the crossing of the Red Sea. It was a moment of supreme spiritual exultation, of sublime joy, and prophetic elevation for the entire people.

"Then Moses led Israel onward from the Red Sea, and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah they could not drink the water because it was bitter. And they murmured against Moses, saying: 'What shall we drink?'"

This episode seems shocking. What a comedown! Only three days earlier they had reached the highest peak of exaltation, and now they complain about such a prosaic and unspiritual item as water.

Think about our world, suggests Rabbi Heschel. Think about those still enslaved to poverty, insufficiency, and need.

(Think about the limitations on our movements and freedoms, and the suffering the Coronavirus has caused for people all around the world.)

The prosaic demand for housing without infestation, for adequate schools, for gainful employment, for so much that people seek, seems so trite, so drab, so banal, so devoid of magnificence. Learn this, reminds Rabbi Heschel.

God is concerned with everydayness, with the trivialities of life. That equality is a good thing, a fine goal, may be generally accepted. What is lacking is a sense of the monstrosity of inequality.

10. The Four Children...and their parents

We've spent a lot of quality time together in close quarters this past year. It's been a blessing for some, and a struggle for others. Parents, to be sure, loving their children seek a return to normal routines as soon as safe. So let's learn about ourselves.

Ask children and adults what adjective they would use to describe themselves? Ask them why. If safe, ask someone who knows them, and who will be kind toward them, to choose a different adjective in response to what they said.

11. The Ten Plagues

The Torah views occurrences of nature as symbols of God's design and purpose for humanity and society. For example, the plagues brought against Egypt in order to secure the freedom of the Children of Israel are understood by the Biblical authors to represent God's moral response to Egyptian cruelty. Plagues are linked to the morality of justice, or as the plagues are often translated, judgments. Nature gone awry is a metaphor in the Torah for an immoral human society, one that is imbalanced or out of order.

The Coronavirus plague is not an act of God. It is, however, a danger nature presents us these days. A virus with origins in animals in one part of the world entered the human community and has spread around the globe.

May we now realize how all of us are bound together, equally vulnerable and responsible. May we also sense that within each of our souls is the God-given ability to cope, to choose, and to determine how to be in this circumstance we confront. As we remember the Biblical Ten Plagues brought by God to free our enslaved ancestors, may we live today fully and carefully, sensing we

are cared for and caring for others. May we turn our anxiety into compassion and be careful with our health and well-being.

As we spill wine from our full cups and recite the names of each of the plagues, we symbolize our sadness and sensitivity to the loss of Egyptian life as the Torah tells the story, and to the loss of lives and well-being brought on humanity today by COVID-19.

12. Dayenu...our popular song of appreciation

The song Dayenu offers repair for our ancestors' ingratitude while wandering in the wilderness. Where they complained about the food, or lack of water, or the harsh environment, or the challenge of entering the land, we give thanks for their experience. Instead of letting their complaints stand, in freedom and relative comfort, we proclaim how grateful we are for each and every moment in the drama of our People's redemption.

Dayenu says, "It would have been enough for us." Is that true? Would it have been? Would it have been enough for us to be brought out of Egypt and left in the desert? Would we have been satisfied camping at Mt. Sinai and not receiving the Torah? Would you and I really find it sufficient to arrive at the border of the Promised Land and not enter?

Will it be enough these days for us to return to our lives' routines before the spread of this virus is under control? Will it be enough for us to be restored to life and financial well-being while others remain unemployed or not personally whole?

Human beings are impatient. We are anxious awaiting what comes next. We don't always remember what came before. It's hard to pause and express gratitude on the way to an elusive or unfulfilled goal.

Dayenu urges us to be, thankful for each moment we experience. Before we sing Dayenu let's ask for what are we grateful? What is enough for us?

13. Rabban Gamliel...Passover's special symbols

Point to or hold up each item and ask participants to explain its Seder symbolism. As well, be creative.

This year the Shankbone also represents... (an ill person being treated, and hopefully recovering, or...)

This year Matzah is... (a sign of comfort. Our seasonal food and holiday is here, time will move on, or...)

This year the Bitter Herb suggests... (our fears, frustrations, or other emotions, or...)

14. Tzafun...concluding our meal with the Afikomen, if we can find it!

While some go searching around the house for the Matzah Afikomen, others may participate in a different search. Especially those of us in different homes, celebrating a virtual Seder. Play a game of Twenty Questions.

The Seder leader "hides" the Afikomen in some part of the Passover story, perhaps in the basket baby Moses was placed in to float down the river. Perhaps hidden in the mortar used by the

slaves to make bricks. The leader then asks virtual guests to ask questions which can only have yes or no answers. Take turns among participants and see how long it takes to find the Afikomen.

A Word About Prizes

In some homes, children attempt to steal the Afikomen and negotiate for a prize later in the evening when it is needed. In other homes, the leader finds a moment to leave the table and hide the Afikomen, later asking children and other Seder participants to search for it. Again, the one who finds it may negotiate for a prize. Still other people, especially if no children are present, don't actually hide the Afikomen. Instead they play a guessing game, asking the leader where in the Exodus story he or she has placed the Afikomen.

It is fun and proper to encourage our children to participate in "stealing" or finding the Afikomen. Their reward, however, should be something consistent with our holiday celebration. Simple toys, games, puzzles, or books that encourage questions, thought, and involvement with others are appropriate. The promise of a family activity or the chance to enjoy a new responsibility and special privilege are appropriate. Money or expensive gifts seem inconsistent with the symbol of a slave's hidden provisions and the meager possessions of the Israelites whom we remember tonight.

For virtual Seder prizes, perhaps order them from an online source for delivery before or after Passover, as you prefer.

15. The Cup of Elijah...we will seek the Prophet Elijah's spirit at our Seder

Afraid for his life, the Biblical Prophet Elijah goes into seclusion. He isolates himself from others in the wilderness. Nervous and unsettled, he walks forty days and nights, hiding himself in a cave.

Chapter 19 in the first Biblical Book of Kings reads: Then the word of the Eternal God came to him. "Why are you here, Elijah?" He replied, "I am moved by zeal for the Eternal, the God of Hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant...I alone am left..."

"Come out," God called, "and stand on the mountain before the Eternal God." And lo, the Eternal God passed by. There was a great and mighty wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks by the power of the Eternal God; but the Eternal God was not in the wind. After the wind, an earthquake; but the Eternal God was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, fire; but the Eternal God was not in the fire. And after the fire, a still small voice.

Elijah found spiritual comfort in the calm that followed his fear and isolation. His seclusion and the problems he faced did not end with noise and drama. They gave way to the next phase of his life quietly and calmly.

As we open our door to welcome the spirit of Elijah the Prophet, we seek that same calm and comfort wondering how our current physical distancing and stay at home experience will end.

We imagine Elijah's entrance in order to imagine for ourselves how we might live together. Elijah is a Biblical character whose stories teach care for others. Elijah offered help to those whom he met. Elijah was engaged in responding to the challenges of his own days. He worked in the neighborhood. He acted on what he believed with conviction and passion. He discovered God in the quiet of every moment and gesture.

We open our doors for Elijah, not because he needs us to, but because we need to do it. We open our doors to others. We open our doors to bring the world's needs into our homes. We open our doors to be part of what is happening around us. We open our doors to show that we care. We open our doors, pretending that someone is coming in, to open ourselves to the real people we meet and greet every day.

In freedom this Passover let us learn the lesson of Elijah's entrance. How we choose to treat one another determines the value of everything else.

If you're in the same room, pass an empty cup around the table, symbolic of Elijah's presence at your Seder. Each participant pours some wine from their own cup into Elijah's and states, or thinks quietly about, what they will try to do in the months ahead to "bring Elijah the Prophet into our world." If you're not in the same room, have the same discussion virtually without passing around Elijah's Cup.

Concluding Our Seder

This current disruption has now lasted more than a year. We've been apprehensive about our health, our employment, and our personal security, Let's see this Passover as an opportunity to enjoy a Passover of *unusual* meaning and blessing. Let's find the strength and hope to be optimistic.

Every year on Passover ours is a vision for a better future, a time of health, peace, and goodness. Let's do our best to make this the mood we bring to our Seder experiences and holiday week.

As we celebrate Passover, may we enjoy our precious holiday time, appreciate the values of our heritage and the privilege of being the Jewish People's storytellers. Let us also be sensitive to the quests for freedom and justice all around us. Enjoy a Passover of *unusual* meaning and blessing.

***Next year in Jerusalem, or at least together again with our families and friends!
Hag Sameah! Happy Passover!***



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