

Seder Readings and Activities for The Pandemic

Resources and Options Curated and Suggested by Rabbi Debra Orenstein
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These suggestions follow the order of the Haggadah.

Choose one or more that speak to you, to help you connect the traditional Seder and Haggadah to the modern-day plague affecting everyone right now.

- **Questions, Comments, Stories, and Humor Throughout the Seder:** Encourage people to contribute. Some Seder leaders give out a story card, a question card, and an interpretation card to each person, encouraging them to play each card at least once throughout the Seder. This year, folks will have to make their own cards. And since we all need an extra dose of laughter, collect and share jokes, too.
- **Prepare something extra for your Seder plate:** Many people add an orange to represent women's inclusion and ritual equality. I also encourage folks to add a padlock to represent the 40 million people still enslaved around the world today. This year, choose your own symbol to add – in light of the pandemic and to responses to it. Or just draw a picture of it. If visiting with others on Zoom, “zoom” the camera in on your Seder plates and discuss your chosen symbols.
- **Four Cups of Wine:** Consider dedicating each cup to a different population: 1) for all those suffering from Covid19, 2) for all the family members and caretakers of those afflicted by Covid19, 3) for all those working on the front lines (first responders, journalists, grocery store workers, postal carriers, etc.), 4) for all!
- **Urechatz/Rachtzah/Handwashing:** What is different about washing your hands at the Seders, as opposed to washing for physical cleanliness or decontamination? What are you readying yourself for? How has your relationship to washing changed, if at all: do you see it as holy, protective? Are you just raw and tired of it?
- **Yachat/Breaking the Center Matzah:** Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik taught that breaking the middle matzah paradoxically symbolizes unity. In ancient Egypt, some Hebrew slaves lived under better conditions than others. Those who were fortunate to have more lechem oni (poor man's bread or matzah) would break it and share it with those who had less. In response to dire circumstances, Jews, even in concentration camps, have shared the last of their food. Surely, we – relatively safe and privileged – can avoid hoarding and find ways to share supplies, break bread (even by Zoom), unify while isolated, and extend kindness. Share some ideas and experiences along these lines.

- **Halachma Anya/Declaration:** “This is the bread of affliction...*Let all who are hungry come and eat.*” How do we sustain our relationships in a time of social distancing? How do we open our homes, hearts, and pocketbooks? How can we ensure that everyone has enough food and supplies?
- **Avadim Hayinu/We Were Slaves:** Address the fact that millions of people are still enslaved today. Right now, two things are sure to be on the mind of every Jew: Coronavirus and Passover. One link between them: grocery shopping. Can we get deliveries? Can we get enough kosher-for-Passover food? *And are the products we buy tainted by slavery?* One of the best ways to help liberate the more than 40 million people now enslaved around the world is to be a careful consumer. Buy Fair Trade. Ask corporations to vet their supply chains. Synagogues, Jewish schools, and Jewish homes can practice "holy consumption" - honoring workers and the earth. [Download a flyer about Jewish values around freedom and shopping that you can distribute](#) (the first two pages of the flyer printed back-to-back make a great one-pager to read at your Seder - and the third page of the document is an easy programming guide).

[The Rescue List](#), a documentary about child slavery today, is now showing on Public Broadcasting stations and online. You can see a preview [here](#). The length of this trailer is two minutes, just right for screening at your (Zoom) Seder as a discussion starter about modern-day slavery.

Other resources for your Seder table include these one-page handouts: [Seder Coupon](#), [Passover Prep](#), and [Ending Slavery: Understanding Human Trafficking and What You Can Do About It](#).

- **Vhi-Sheamdah/Statement of God’s Protection:** This section of the Haggadah tells of resilience and overcoming challenges. What challenges are you overcoming during this crisis – or have you heard others overcome? What have you have overcome in your life? Who supported you? Whom have you supported? How have the Jewish people shown resilience, among your ancestors and in your lifetime?
- **Recitation of the Plagues:** Read and discuss this excerpt from Meryl Ain’s [How To Celebrate Passover During the Pandemic](#): “Now, more than ever, it’s imperative that we have a seder, and not allow it to be another casualty of this year’s plague. We may be temporarily enslaved by the coronavirus, but we still have a responsibility to give our children and grandchildren the comfort and strength of ritual and tradition — and the optimism that this crisis will also pass.”
- **Plagues (continued):** The Haggadah “multiplies” plagues (in part because God promised that whatever the Egyptians endured will never befall us). But plagues do have a tendency to multiply. What additional plagues does the Coronavirus pandemic cause: school closings, fear, job loss, loneliness, etc. Take a drop of wine out of your glass for each additional plague you and others can name.

- **Dayeinu:** Add to the list of things we can be grateful for now, even if we are not assured of the last (or next) chapter of the story. “*Since I _____, Dayeinu.*” Since I have a safe home, Dayeinu. Since I have plenty of food and supplies in my home, Dayeinu. Since I am able to be with family in my home (or connect with them via telephone), Dayeinu. Etc.
- **Pesach Al Shum Mah/The Meaning of “Pesach”:** Pesach refers to a paschal sacrifice which required families to come together and eat. It also means to straddle or to “pass over” – referring to the way that God protected our ancestors after they had painted their homes with blood, in anticipation of the plague of the first born. The word “pasach” (passed over) has also been translated as “surrounded with love.” God lovingly watched over us as we stood vigil during the night of the last plague, loins girded, shoes on, and walking sticks in hand. Finally, “pesach” can be rendered as two words: peh sach, the mouth that discusses. The name of our holiday conveys things we need now more than ever: togetherness, protection, love, vigilance, and communication about what really matters.
- **Motzi Matzah/Eating Matzah:** What nourishes you now? What has nourished you – and the Jewish people – to this point?
- **Afikomen:** Let older relatives hide the afikomen in their house and have kids question them about where it is hidden. Hints of “you’re getting hotter” or “colder” can be given for younger children.
- **Leshana Haba’ah Biyerushalyim:** “Next year in Jerusalem” represents hope for a better tomorrow. What acts of kindness or glimmers of progress have you seen during this pandemic that give you hope for better times ahead? What are you committed to doing, to make sure that next year is healthier and more free – for you and for others?

A Few General Resources for Making Great Seders:

- [9 Seder Activities You Haven’t Thought of Yet](#) from Rabbi Leora Kaye
- [Resources from Rabbi Debra](#), including “Seder Solutions: 72 Ideas for Making Your Seders More Meaningful and Fun.”
- Download the book [Creating Lively Passover Seders](#)