

PASSOVER 2020

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A few thoughts on why this year's seder is different from all others—

Thought #1: A seder during this time of social distancing is actually similar to the very first seder ever – the ritual meal the Israelite slaves ate on the eve of their departure from Egypt. On that long-ago night, in a rather *intimate affair*, each family sat by itself and ate home-roasted lamb, home-baked matzah, and bitter herbs. (Only if they couldn't finish the lamb by themselves were they permitted to share the meal with a neighbor.) And right before sitting down to their meal, they smeared a touch of blood from the lamb on their doorpost. Why? So the tenth and final plague would “pass over” them while they ate. Right.

Thought #2: Being cooped up for weeks (or months) makes us feel very unfree. But on the flipside, we're doing it for the sake of the greater good – so that we, and people we know, and many people we don't know won't get sick. This gets to the heart of Passover and the meaning of freedom. The Jewish idea of freedom is not “doing whatever we want.” It's bigger than that. Being free is the freedom of choice *combined with* the freedom to serve something greater than ourselves. That's why, in the story of the Exodus, the Israelites crossed the sea and less than two months later found themselves at Sinai receiving a blueprint for an ethical society. Living in the time of the Coronavirus can remind us of this deeper truth – that freedom is about both independence and interdependence.

Thought #3: Or to say it another way— Perhaps the greatest take-away from Passover is this biblical teaching: “Treat the *stranger* fairly, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt.” In recent weeks and months, though, even as we physically distance ourselves from each other, no one feels quite like a stranger. The world has shrunk. Vulnerability and compassion connect us. The timeless tension in the Passover seder – *are we free? or are we only free “next year”?* – permeates humanity today. That feeling will certainly affect the way we share the Passover story with our family this year.

Thought #4: As parents of young children, we've all been trying to make the best of it over these recent weeks. Crafts and yoga. Movies and baking. We've all been in the trenches together. That's the perfect segue into Passover, which is the one Jewish holiday we're meant not simply to celebrate in symbolic fashion but actually to *recreate* (“In every generation we should see ourselves as if we personally came out of Egypt”). Since it's an unusual year anyway, why not try something new and unusual? Bake your own matzah (just flour and water). Set up a tent in the living room and pretend you're Israelites at the first seder. Hold the pre-meal part of your seder around a coffee table, sitting on couches or on pillows on the floor. Break into a family dance, just the way Miriam did after crossing the sea. Many families are already Zooming the seder, so why not go further and make it a Passover experience your children will always remember?

A few fragments of Israeli poetry to put us in the Passover spirit—

Everybody needs
an Egypt...
And one long journey
that they'll remember
forever on the soles
of their feet
(Amnon Ribeck)



Two walls of water are on
my right and my left
Behind me are Pharaoh's
troops and in front of me
the desert
And perhaps the promised
land. That sums up my life.
(Yehuda Amichai)



Not with a “strong hand”
and “outstretched arm”—
But with gentleness,
devotion, intention,
precision, love—
I leave Egypt
(Hagit Ackerman)

