

A Seder Companion in the COVID-19 era (for those with more than just 4 questions)



Mitzrayim – the Hebrew word for Egypt – derives from the word metzar – a narrow or constricted space. For more than 100 generations, Jews have dramatically retold and relived the events of the Exodus. We have sought to explore the “Egypt,” the constraints, in our lives and how we can make a personal journey towards a place of greater expansiveness – our Promised Land.

During Temple times the Jews packed into Jerusalem, and joined with friends and neighbors to eat the Pesach lamb. This year, it will be a very different night of social distancing. However, the steps of the seder continue to represent movement towards greater freedom and appreciation. On Pesach we examine what enslaves us, taste freedom and take steps towards it, and have an opportunity to give thanks for the blessings and miracles in our lives.

Maggid, the central prayer of the Haggadah, closes with the following: “May God enable us to enjoy future sacred seasons in peace...and may we find acceptance. With a new song let us give thanks, confident in our deliverance, and may the Ultimate Redeemer restore harmony to our soul.”

With Pesach blessings,

Daniel Coleman

Acknowledgements

The Santa Cruz Haggadah and Chaplain Fred Klein

A Haggadah Companion

The haggadah's text and rituals encourage questions that allow us to look at ourselves, each other, and the richness of our tradition in new ways. The questions below are intended to acknowledge and help you identify things you may be struggling with, providing bridges towards wholeness, healing, and freedom on individual, family, and communal levels.

Bedikat Chametz: Soul searching

Passover preparations involve a final search for leavened products (bedikat chametz) the night before the Holiday using a candle or flashlight.

What is my leavened bread, my "chametz": what are my behavior patterns and beliefs that keep me from being the best that I can be?

What would it take to enable me to feel liberated - free of constraints?

What part of my personality, my life, or my world needs the light of faith/renewal or the light of loving-kindness shed on it right now?

THE SEDER

1. Kadesh: L'Chaim

Kodesh indicates that something is "set apart." Tonight we recognize both the uniqueness of this holiday and our forced separation from loved ones and community. As I raise my cup of joy in thanks to God, I connect to millenia of Jews that have thanked God for their freedom despite being in the midst of exile. Especially when things are difficult, can I find things in my life for which to be grateful?

2. Urchatz: Embracing life and hope

In these times, we frequently wash our hands to disinfect. At the seder, we wash with water - a symbol of life, to embrace hope and prepare ourselves to be conduits for holiness, like the Priests before their Temple service.

What are the underlying belief systems that keep me in my *Mitzrayim*? Which of these would I like to let go of, to *rechatz*, to wash away this year?

3. Karpas: nexus of life and death, growth and stagnation, freedom and slavery.

As we celebrate our national birth we submerge a symbol of life - a vegetable - into a symbol of grief - salt water. *Karpas* represents transition to spring & renewal, and we acknowledge that transitions come with opportunities as well as loss. Can I embrace and accept both?

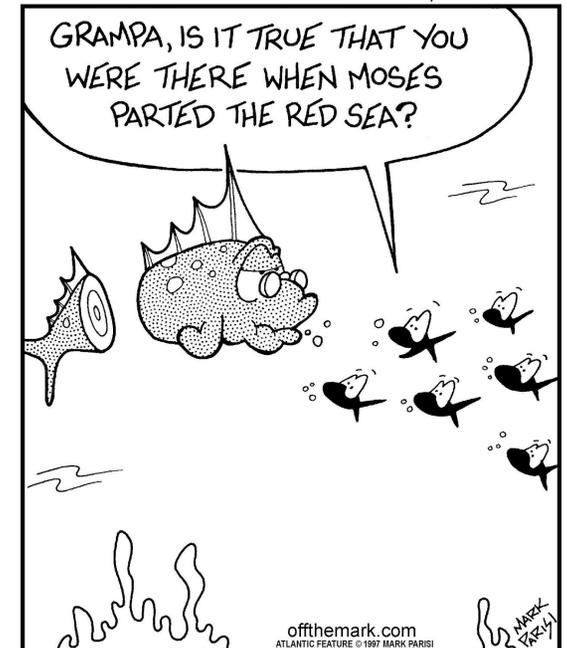
What new opportunities have been given to me that were not there before? What losses have I experienced? Do I allow myself to grieve? Who am I grieving for?

4. Yachatz: Recognition of Present & Future

We break the matzah in half to recreate the poor person's bread: poor people eat some now and hoard some for later. When I break the matzah, I recognize my own brokenness and that there are times in our lives when all of us need to hoard things for the future.

Having demonstrated that we are poor, and this is our bread, the haggadah immediately invites others to share. In the midst of my life's challenges, have I been able to reach out beyond myself and still share? Whether we feel rich or poor, what can we share with others?

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Am I emotionally available for my friends, family and loved ones?

5. Maggid: Telling our story

-Mah Nishtana: Reminding ourselves to question

What are some of the questions that I rarely allow myself to ask or to be asked?

How do we respond to tough questions?

Do we allow ourselves and those around us to question?

What do these times ask of us?

Studies show that those that are curious tend to live longer. In what ways do I allow my “Ma Nishtana”, my child-sourced wonder, curiosity, and creativity to manifest?

-Avadim Hayinu: Enslaved

Labor can be ennobling and give us purpose. It can also be consuming and burdensome.

With vacations curtailed this Spring, is it an opportune time to reexamine how I rest. Do I vacation like I work (frenetically)?

How can I build more rest and play into my life?

Our Sages teach us that the Jews volunteered to build cities for Pharaoh and quickly became enslaved to meaningless labor.

Are we the first to volunteer? Do we need to say yes/no more often?

Do I ever use work as an escape? Do I feel challenged and that my work has meaning? If not, what changes can I make?

How am I caring for individuals in my community and beyond that are among the hundreds losing their jobs each day of this global pandemic. If my livelihood is in jeopardy, can I access and accept help from others?

-The 4 Children: The child within

All four children - even the *rasha* (the wicked one) - are at the table. How do each of the four children manifest in me?

Have I held myself back from loving any of those parts of myself? Have I overdeveloped one aspect of my personality at the expense of others? Are there parts of myself that I need to further explore?

-Mitechila: The beginning

If I were telling the story of my life, what events stand out? Why? What/who are our idols today? What new story do I want to emerge for myself or my family/community from the COVID era?

-Vehi Sheomdah: Behind the scenes

What internal or external reserves/resources can I draw on to get me through difficult times?

-Plagues

Upon mentioning each of the plagues we take a little wine out of our cup to recognize our diminished joy. As COVID-19 plagues the world, I take a moment to recognize the grief and despair that it has wrought on families and communities worldwide - and that it has touched me too.

What other *makot* (plagues) have befallen me, my people, my country, other people, other countries, or planet earth this year?

-Dayenu: Enough

What are the areas of my life where I appreciate the blessings I have been given and can proclaim “Dayenu.” In which areas do I need to ask for more?

6. Motzi Matzah: A taste of freedom

Matzah is both the bread of affliction, and the bread of freedom!

As we eat our matzah and celebrate our collective future, what things/freedoms do I look forward to in the coming year?

7. Marror: Bitterness

What bitter experiences am I faced with? What have I faced in the past and how have I changed because of them? What has helped me face the bitterness? How can I help others through the bitterness they are facing, yet acknowledge that some of the bitterness may linger?

8. Shulchan Orech: The Set Table

Is my “shulchan aruch” – my table set? Do I eat with conscious awareness? Are there those who should be at my table who are not? How can I still ‘set the table’ in light of what I am missing?

9. Tzafun: Seeking wholeness

The Talmud describes “geulah,” redemption, as a process like sunrise - almost imperceptible at first. While we are in the thick of suffering from COVID-19, China is recovering and starting to put the pieces back together. Our redemption is just around the corner; while it may be hidden from sight, like the hidden matzah, we know it’s there.

How have I hidden my light and what can I do to “let it shine”? Who can I enlist to help me find, uncover, and develop the Divine gifts hidden within myself and others? Who can (I) help to pick up the pieces?

10. Barech: Acknowledging the Source

Do I only seek out the root cause when something negative happens? Can I seek out more of the good/blessing?

Who do I need to acknowledge more in my life?

To who/for what do I feel a deep sense of thanks?

Have I appropriately expressed my gratitude?

What is my connection to God, the Source of all blessings and how can I intensify that sense of connection?

-Elijah: Comings & Goings

As doors and borders around the world remain mostly closed, we look forward to the redemption when we can feel safe to open our doors and welcome others into our homes.

What “doors” in my soul are currently closed, e.g. the door of trust, the door of love, the door of forgiveness?

What can I do to help to open them as we open the door to Elijah?

Do I have an outlet or person on whom I can safely “empty my wrath” and make space for the feelings and things I treasure?

What else do I wish to let go of as the door opens for Elijah?

11. Hallel: Psalms of Praise

We know the world remains unredeemed and yet, confident in the promise of ultimate salvation, we praise God.

Am I better at giving praise, *Hallel*, or giving criticism? Is there anyone, starting with myself, to whom I have to make amends either for having withheld praise or for having extended criticism?

-Min Hametzar: God responded to my call

Do I truly call to God, or are my prayers rote and superficial?

How can I create space within me to hear the voice of God speaking to me? If I could truly listen, what might God be saying to me now?

12. Nirtzah: Acceptance

What are my challenges around the concept of acceptance?

What else do I need to feel Nirtzah, to feel complete? In these difficult times, how can I help others feel more at ease?

Mah Nishtanah?

By inviting the youngest among us to ask questions we instill the value of questioning from an early age and demonstrate to all the important role of questioning as a path towards spiritual growth. Below, poets, philosophers and others contemplate this ancient Jewish practice:

There are four questions of value in life... What is sacred? Of what is the spirit made? What is worth living for? What is worth dying for? The answer to each is the same. Only love. - **Johnny Depp**

There is frequently more to be learned from the unexpected questions of a child than the discourses of men. - **John Locke**

Live your questions now, and perhaps even without knowing it, you will live along some distant day into your answers.
- **Rainer Maria Rilke**

The simplest questions are the most profound. Where were you born? Where is your home? Where are you going? What are you doing? Think about these once in a while and watch your answers change.
- **Richard Bach**

There are years that ask questions and years that answer.
- **Zora Neale Hurston**

Judge a man by his questions rather than his answers. - **Voltaire**

It is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers.
- **James Thurber**

Take the attitude of a student: never be too big to ask questions, never know too much to learn something new. - **Og Mandino**

I don't pretend we have all the answers. But the questions are certainly worth thinking about. - **Arthur C. Clarke**

In the final analysis, the questions of why bad things happen to good people transmutes itself into some very different questions, no longer asking why something happened, but asking how we will respond, what we intend to do now that it happened.
- **Pierre Teilhard**

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