

PASSOVER SEDER SUPPLEMENT 5780/2020

by Rabbi Judy Schindler

The Haggadah is a tool for imparting the lessons of the past to the next generation. We are meant to apply the Biblical stories of oppression to the present so that we can create a future of equality, peace, and justice for all. Jewish tradition teaches: “Whoever expands & expounds upon this story is worthy of praise!” Here are options from which to choose to enrich your Seder experience:

Order & The Fifteen Steps of the Seder

We know where we are going in the Seder – there are fifteen steps from the Kiddush to the conclusion. In the same way, we have taken steps to move forward from the global pandemic toward global healing. We have walked away from nonessential businesses and school campuses to make ourselves and others safe. We have parted the sea of daily life so that healthcare workers can have the greatest chance of success in their battle to heal those who are suffering. Our personal financial foundations are showing signs of cracking. We have taken the step of having this small Seder or even of having a Seder in solitude. Each step has been taken with the goal of moving toward a more promised place – where all will be healthy, where all will be free.

Washing of Hands

We wash our hands twice in the traditional Seder: once without a blessing before eating parsley, a symbol of spring, and once with a blessing before eating the matzah. Today, in the face of COVID-19, washing takes on new meaning. Our washing of hands can be a spiritual practice not only at Passover but every day. For the twenty seconds we lather our hands with soap we can offer a prayer:



[Photo by Nathan Dumlaou]

*We wash our hands
for protection, in preparation, in prayer...
for ourselves and our health,
for our families and those we love,
for the wellness of those providing healthcare services
and other essential needs, for our world and its wellbeing.*
ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו על נטילת ידים
*Barukh atah adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al netilat yadayim.*
Blessed are you, O God, sovereign of the universe,
who has instructed us on washing hands.

The Four Children

The goal of the Seder is to teach. This year we teach virtually. As there are four types of children, so are there four types of online learners:

The wise one is the focused learner who embraces the vast web of opportunities for education at a distance.

The wicked one is the resentful learner, who can't set aside the pain of so many missed in person opportunities, or the distracted learner, who gets drawn away by all the digital diversions.

The simple one sits back and passively watches the lessons being transmitted.

And the one who does not know how to use technology and the one who does not have digital access are altogether removed from the learning opportunity.

To all these learners we try to teach the lessons of liberation in whatever creative ways we can.

Lessons on Liberation from Holocaust survivors

by Talli Dippold

Liberation is the act of setting someone free from imprisonment, slavery, or oppression. When we refer to liberation during the Holocaust, the term can be deceiving as survivors were free but still afflicted as they had nowhere to go and no one to go back to. Many survivors mention liberation as a tunnel separating the daily struggle for survival from their future lives.

Yitzhak Zuckerman, a member of the underground who fought in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, described his liberation day: “[It was]...the saddest day of my life. I wanted to cry, not from joy but from grief... How could we be happy? I was completely broken! You'd kept yourself going all the terrible and bitter years, and now... we were overcome by weakness.”

Shmuel Shilo, a Polish survivor who immigrated to Israel in 1946, described returning to his city: “Suddenly I'm standing in the middle of the city and I ask myself, “So what? Home – gone, family – gone, children – gone, my friends are gone, Jews – gone. Suddenly I realized that my whole struggle had been pointless, and I didn't feel like living.”

From this dark tunnel emerged light...young people had the drive to move on and to rebuild. The revenge was to repopulate the world with Jewish children. Although survivors were scattered throughout the world, they created lives full of purpose and meaning.

Survivor Eliezer Ayalon sums up by stating: "I feel that I accomplished what I wanted. My life, my children, and grandchildren, I couldn't be happier in any other place. I am always saying to people: the fact that I survived as a decent man and a believing Jew, who can laugh and love and look on the world's bright side, is nothing less than magnificent. My whole life has changed, but my life is still a continuing defeat for Hitler and the Nazis who hoped to destroy us, but '*Am Yisrael Chai*' ['the people of Israel live']."

The Plagues of Today

To the list of our Haggadah's plagues,
we add contemporary plagues:

Domestic Violence

Racial Injustice

Lack of affordable housing

Unemployment

Food Insecurity

Climate change

Mass Shootings

Hate (antisemitism, Islamophobia, etc.)

Natural disasters

The COVID-19 Pandemic



photo by Yoksel Zok

The Moses Award and the Pharaoh Award

A conversation during dinner

At some Seders, during dinner, participants reflect on nominations for the annual Moses of the Year Award and Pharaoh of the Year Award. Who, from last Passover until now, created the greatest good and who created the most devastating damage?

Hallel – Gratitude



Photo by Luis Melendez

To our neighbors, friends, and community members who are healthcare workers,

Thank you.

For leaving your home in a time of social distancing. For doing your sacred work of healing. For subduing your inevitable fears to do your job.

For your minds that find treatments. For your hands of healing. For your hearts of service.

For the sacrifices you have made throughout your lives and careers and for those you are making today and tomorrow.

May God grant you strength in your weary hours. May God grant you wisdom for the tough decisions you must make. May God grant you patience for when what you need is not readily available. Most of all, may God grant you and those you love health and long life.

May you be blessed to rejoice in the recuperation of your patients and may we all be able to celebrate together the end of this pandemic (in crowds of the size of our choosing).

We do not need to wait for Time Magazine's 2020 Person of the Year for we know you are it.

A Letter to Elijah



[Photo by Markus Spiske]

Passover 2020/5780

Dear Elijah,

Our tradition has so much to say about you. We call you at the end of each Shabbat to bring about a time that is all Shabbat, when we will be one with each other and with the environment. We call to you at each bris and baby naming, to speedily arrive so that our newborns will know a world of peace – where gun violence and poverty are unknown. We call to you now on Passover, as we have done throughout our lives, opening the door and praying you will walk through and tell us that redemption is on its way – redemption from hate, from scarcity, from illness.

Elijah, this pandemic has pushed everyone to the edge – economically, physically, emotionally. If ever we understood our oneness and global connectedness it is today.

We know that bringing about a messianic time requires our readiness to receive you. Our Rabbis taught that you could be garbed as any homeless and hungry stranger on the street or as any patient in a hospital bed. That could be any one of us today. We see you in each other. We see you in ourselves.

This year, may you enter our doors and our hearts. For if we see our common humanity and set global healing as our collective goal toward which we daily work, then indeed you will come.

We hope to see you soon.

The Seder's Conclusion

In just a moment, we will end the Seder with words which our people have spoken for thousands of years.

Yet first we say:

this year online, next year in person;
this year with uncertainty, next year on solid ground;
this year in exile, next year in Jerusalem.

לשנה הבאה בירושלים