

Summary: *Below are some thoughts on Passover this year, followed by a minimalist haggadah. It is ideal for those who are celebrating alone this year, those who are struggling with the idea of observing the seder with all the changes in the world, those who don't own a haggadah and can't print one of the free ones available on line, and those who feel that a short service is the most they can manage this year.*

A Minimalist Seder without a Haggadah

This Passover, the seders will indeed be a different night for so many obvious reasons. Many of the people we normally share the evening with may be far away—or even half a mile away. But for all intents and purposes, they might as well be across the world. That will be different. Many of us will be holding our seders by Zoom. That will surely be different.

For all of us who are out of work, or who still have jobs that are not considered essential, we have been in a bit of bondage of our own, restricted in our movement and dealing with uncertainty. So the lessons of freedom are going to take on additional significance this year, and I'd like to imagine that our discussions will be particularly fruitful and rich with meaning.

Simultaneously, some of us will be forced to lead a seder for the first time . On our website, we have provided resources to download seven different haggadahs, all free.

We have tried to provide a wide range of options to meet your needs. [Here is the link.](#) Scroll down to the bottom of the page to find those haggadot.

In these difficult times, many people are questioning whether they should still have a seder, especially those who live alone. I believe it is precisely in such moments that our tradition can carry and sustain us.

I hope you know that this year, it is enough to hold a simple seder—to have some *karpas* (a green herb like parsley), some matzoh, and a seder plate with the symbolic foods like charoset (and feel free to substitute a beet for a lamb shank). To tell the story of freedom and redemption simply.

I also recognize that not everyone has a printer, or wants to use an unfamiliar haggadah. I have in my collection of haggadot a number from the Shoah. In the days of the Holocaust, people heroically observed the seder with few resources, and sometimes lacking even matzoh. Inspired by their intrepid faith, below is an outline of the seder, and some brief commentary for how you can hold a seder without a haggadah.

There are so many resources on line. But for those of us who need a very different way of marking the holiday, I hope the guide below will encourage those of us who lack energy to still celebrate, even in a minimal fashion. Items with a * call for you to pause, think, feel or remember.

These moments will help your minimalist seder still be experiential.

As for those of us who have the capacity, it is good to spend time over the retelling of the Passover story and to discuss it at length.

Let me wish each of you a *chag kasher sameach*, a joyous Passover,

Rav D

A Minimalist Haggadah for Times of Trouble

*Items with a * call for you to pause, think, feel or remember.*

1. KADEISH

Kiddush is both a blessing over wine, and sanctifying our special holidays. Offer some words of gratitude for your wine or grape juice and for making it to this commemoration of both our slavery and freedom

*Drink first cup of wine while leaning to the left.

2. URCHATZ

Ritual hand-washing in preparation for the Seder – no blessing is recited, but we have all been washing our hands.

*Consider the miracle of your hands and what they allow you to do as you wash them.

3. **KARPAS**

Dipping a green vegetable—parsley, celery, some lettuce in salt water and recite:

Barukh ata, Ado-nai, Elo-heinu Melekh Ha-Olam, bor-ay pree ha'adama.

Blessed are you God, who creates a world in which sustaining plants grow from the earth.

*Think of your tears, past and present as you eat the vegetable.

4. **MATZAH YACHATZ**

Have a plate with three sheets of matzah. If you only have two sheets, that is sufficient. Breaking the middle of matzah. As you do so, consider two symbolic meanings of this act:

- a. the brokenness of our world
- b. the three matzohs represent the three classes of Jews—Kohanim, Leviim and Yisraelim.

*This year, hold in mind those who have succumbed to COVID-19; those who are asymptomatic, and those who are disease free.

Place the larger broken half aside. You will eat it at the end of the meal for the afikomen.

5. **MAGGID**

Tell the story of Passover from memory. Whatever you remember is sufficient.

*As you do so, reflect on the ways you have taken your freedom for granted and how in this time period, recall how precious simple freedoms are.

*Consider those who have less freedom than you now.

*Recall the ways you are still free.

*Drink second cup of wine while leaning to the left.

Pesach, Matzoh, Maror

There are three elements that are traditionally essential to discuss:

- a. **Pesach** (the lamb bone, recalling how we were saved during another plague, the death of all the first born. This year, we are all hoping to be spared from the plague of COVID-19, and hoping that all people will be spared. This year, our hopes are deeply universal.
- b. **Matzoh**, a bread which represents how much our ancestors gave up by quickly leaving behind their normal ways of life, including leavened bread. *Think of the many things you have given up to be spared from Coronavirus, and to ensure you don't harm another, whether it is coffee at a cafe, lunch with a friend or shopping without worry.
- c. **Maror**, the bitter herb or a leaf of romaine lettuce. *Ask yourself, what makes you feel embittered right now?

6. RACHTZA

This ritual hand-washing is traditionally recited with the following blessing:

Barukh ata, Ado-nai, Elo-heinu Melekh Ha-Olam, Asher Kiddishanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al n'tilat yadayim.

One way to translate this is: *Blessed are you, God, who has given us moments to experience transcendence, awe and wonder through sacred acts and commanded us to raise up our hands.*

*As the water touches your fingers, consider how you have raised up your hands over the past year, and during the last few weeks.

7. MOTZI MATZAH

The blessing over the meal and matzah. We give thanks to God who brings bread out of the earth, and who commanded us to eat matzoh. We give thanks to God for the farmers and bakers, who are essential partners and essential workers in God's world. We give thanks for simple sustenance, of which matzoh is the most simple.

*Barukh ata, Ado-nai, Elo-heinu Melekh Ha-Olam,
ha'motzee lechem min ha-aretz.*

*Barukh ata, Ado-nai, Elo-heinu Melekh Ha-Olam, Asher
Kiddishanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al achilat matzoh.*

*We eat the matzoh in silence, the better to experience it.

8. CHAROSET and MAROR

A few moments ago, we focused on what we find bitter. That is essential, but then we must move past bitterness, finding first the bitter-sweet, and then that which is all sweetness and joy.

We do this by dipping the bitter herb in charo-set, a mix of some chopped fruit and spices meant to remind us of the mortar used to build Pharaoh's structures. This softens the harshness of the herb.

*As you do so, ask—where are you finding gratitude despite the bitterness? Where do you find your silver-lining?

If you lack charoset, soak some raisins in a little wine or grape juice and use that.

9. KOREICH

We make a sandwich of matzah, charoset and the bitter herb, after Rabbi Hillel who ate a sandwich of matzah, lamb and charoset. This combination removes all sting from the bitter herb, changing it into something fully enjoyable. It is the task of every person of faith to transform their hardship into something of value.

*Reflect on how well you have achieved this goal in the past, and challenge yourself to transform a current hardship or struggle.

10. SCHULAN OREICH

Eat the meal

11. TZAFOON

Eat the Afikomen – while many of us enjoyed hunting for the afikomen as kids, this custom was added to maintain

the attention of children. The main purpose is to end the meal with the taste of matzoh in our mouth.

All true freedom demands some sacrifice. But in that sacrifice we find the secret of life.

*As you eat this final matzoh, savor it and remember how the Hillel Sandwich transformed bitterness. Taste the sweetness in this simple bread.

12. **BAREICH**

Saying grace after the meal.

*Offer some heartfelt words of thanks.

*Drink third cup of wine while leaning to the left. Then pour, but do not drink fourth cup of wine, and a cup of wine for Elijah.

Then call on Elijah the Prophet, who is a harbinger of better days.

*Consider opening your door, and looking out onto our strangely quiet world.

*Remember that Elijah always comes—that better days follow difficult ones. That is a cycle of the universe that is repeated. If you believe in pain, you must also believe in redemption. They are linked.

13. HALLEL Songs of Praise

*Even if you are not a singer, belt out the chorus of a song that speaks about how good life is. I know you know at least one.

*Drink fourth and final cup of wine while leaning to the left.

14. NIRTZAH

We end the seder by thinking about the future and the promise that next year can be better.

*Imagine our ancestors, living in dangerous times and places, who were committed to lives of hope.

*Close your eyes and kindle an image of hope that you can believe in.