



An Extra Seat

All of our seder tables will be marked by absence and loss this year. As we move through the Haggadah, we will be constantly aware of those who can't be at home with their families.

To mark the absence of the hostages, we suggest placing an empty chair at the seder table. This draws on a similar custom which was very popular during the struggle for the liberation of Soviet Jewry.

You can leave the chair empty, but you can also place pictures, texts, or poems on the seat. You can also speak about the hostages, read relevant passages, or sing songs—anything which foregrounds their absence and our responsibility to bring them home.



מישל קישקה, מתוך "הגדה ישראלית"

מה בין הטקסים

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מכון שלום הרטמן



The Passover Seder Amid War and Worry Four Offerings for this Moment

The Passover Seder is a celebratory meal during which we recall and commemorate our exodus from slavery to freedom, from subjugation to redemption. Celebrating freedom is hard this year, with our hostages still held captive. How can we celebrate redemption amid such suffering and pain?

Jews have always known pain, and throughout their history they have held the seder. Even in dark and difficult times, they spoke of freedom and redemption. This year, too, we will perform the seder, and we will emphasize our solidarity and mutual responsibility—may we all merit redemption and freedom.

To this end, we present here four possibilities, four ideas which can be integrated into your seder, and which express the complicated feelings of this year—the pain and the sorrow, the faith and the hope.

You can integrate one or more of the ideas into your seder, or simply take inspiration from them.

May this holiday which celebrates our exodus from darkness to light bring with it comfort and salvation —"I will show him wondrous deeds, as in the days when You sallied forth from the land of Egypt" (Micah 7:15).



“Anyone Who Fails to Say Three Things on Passover...”

One of the more famous lines from the Haggadah, which seems almost to capture the entirety of the seder in three elements, is Rabban Gamliel’s dictum

Anyone who fails to say three things on Passover“ has not fulfilled their obligation, and these are the three things: Pesah, Matzah, and Maror

This saying provides an opportunity for the participants to choose three words which they feel capture the story of this year – as if to say, “Anyone who fails to say three things on this Passover has not fulfilled their obligation **this year**

Attached here you can find twelve cards, each bearing one word which has taken on new meaning in the past six months. Scatter them around the table and invite the participants to select three words which say something about the story of this year for them. (You can also use your own selection of words more fitting for your participants)



'Ma Nishanta' - Thanks for Asking

A child’s main job at the seder is to ask and sing: Mah Nishtana? – “Why is this night different from all other nights?”

This song is designed to capture the attention of those around the seder table and direct it to the story which we retell each year in every generation. This year, the question is quite jarring, forcing us all to think about how different things are from this time last year, and about how much we hope will change in the year ahead.

We suggest pausing after the traditional Mah Nishtana and asking four questions about our present moment, with space for all our pain, for all that is missing on this seder night, as well as for the inner strength which carries us forward this year.

You can choose one of the questions below and ask all the participants to answer it, let each participant choose their own question to answer, or choose four participants to each answer one of the questions.

In each and every generation – What “Egypt” did you leave this year? How did you arrive (physically or emotionally) at the seder this year?

So that you remember the day you left – What do you want to remember from the events of this year?

It has stood – What gives you the strength to keep going through the months of war?

Next year in a rebuilt Jerusalem – What do you want to build and what do you hope will be built in the next year?



Yachatz – Splitting the Matzah

One of the ancient rituals of the seder is “Yachatz,” the formal splitting of a matzah into two pieces, followed by hiding the larger piece (the afikomen).

This year, we suggest that splitting the matzah in two be accompanied by reading the interpretation of “Yachatz” given by the Sochatchover Rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel Borenstein. While he wrote it in the early 20th century, it reads like it was written for us today:

The Sages said, “Matzah is called literally, “bread of poverty” for it impoverished, it is lacking and hopes to be made whole.

Yet God typically uses broken vessels, and hears the cries of the unfortunate...

In splitting the matzah and hiding away one piece, we express the ways we ourselves are lacking... until such time as God will make us whole.

Shem Mishmuel, Passover Haggadah

On this seder night, we are all broken vessels, and we dedicated this broken bread of poverty to the healing of all those in pain, all those whose souls and bodies have been broken in the war.

As we split the matzah, we hope and we pray—may the soil of our broken world blossom, gently and with mutual solidarity. May we walk together—all of us—into a better world.

Envelope

Hostages

Connections

Faith

Heroism

Belonging

IDF

Solidarity

Land

Change

Hope

Home