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The Largest Seder Ever

“Ven der tatte kumt a heim fuhn shul... When Father comes back from shul, he quickly makes kiddush before the children get sleepy, so they can ask the Mah Nishtanah”



Art: Meredith Miotke. Click and see the details.

These words, recited in [Yiddish](#), traditionally narrate the [Seder](#), guiding and informing each step of the evening.

My eldest son, a wiry and boisterous ten-year-old, stood up on a chair and belted them out. It’s something he’s done every year for our many guests.

But this year, like Jews around the world, we celebrated a decidedly different [Passover](#). For the past 15 years, first as a rabbinical student and later with my family, I hosted Jews of all backgrounds, from all walks of life, for the Passover seder. This wasn’t a secondary decision to the yearly Passover practice, a nice addition that came with the brisket. It was at the very heart of the whole holiday: As the [Rebbe](#), Rabbi [Menachem M. Schneerson](#), of righteous memory, taught, how can we say “all who are hungry, come and eat” if we haven’t done our utmost to make sure that every Jew has a chance to join and partake in the Seder?

This year, [like many of my colleagues](#), we worked to get #PassoverInABox kits to dozens of our community members. But their seders, conducted at the safety of their homes throughout the city, meant that we were all apart.

So this year, with a single table and none of the guests, I prepared to celebrate the festival of liberation with my family as we sheltered in place.

In many ways, I was incredibly lucky—lucky to be able to have a complete Passover meal with [matzah](#) and wine, and even more so, to have the loved ones to share it with. So many other Jews celebrated alone, far from the bustling seder tables and sights and smells of family and comfort.

I mulled over these thoughts—of privilege and connection and loneliness—and made kiddush.

We drank the wine and prepared for the next step when suddenly my three-year-old looked up in a combination of shock and horror, his older brother’s words ringing in his ears:

“Tatty, you forgot to come home from shul!”



The Lightstone children deliver Tech Tribe #PassoverInABox kits

Who Forgot To Come Home?

The story is related that the [Shpoler Zeide](#), Rabbi Aryeh Leib of Shpoli, once asked his son why it was so important that the children stay awake for the Mah Nishtanah?

“Our Father, G-d, comes home from shul—he sees the hard work and preparations the Jewish people put into Passover, their exhaustion and toil, and yet, despite it all, they still go to the synagogue to sing His praises.”

“So our Father in Heaven rushes to say the kiddush, to sanctify us, to draw us near and bring us home, to take us out of Exile.”

“For if He were to delay,” the Shpoler [Zeide](#) concluded, “we would become exhausted—exhausted from the difficulties we have experienced, inured to the suffering of the world— asleep to it all and unable to ask G-d the Four Questions, to ask Him the tough questions—‘Why is this night different, why is the world so dark, so difficult, why do we suffer?’”

And this year there has been a lot of suffering in the world...

Perhaps, one wonders, this is actually the largest Passover ever. At home, unable to come back from shul, unable to rely on the normal experiences of nostalgia, we realize that it was in the simplicity of that moment, the purity of our desire to celebrate, that we are not waiting for G-d to come back from the synagogue and hear us—but rather we celebrated with Him. Each and every place we as a people celebrated, were not Seders done in isolation, but rather were combined parts of one massive, collective, seder with G-d.

We were truly all together.

By [Mordechai Lightstone](#)

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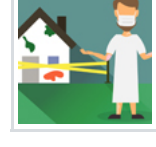
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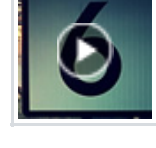
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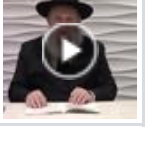
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