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Celebrating Passover in the Shadow of Coronavirus



Painting by Lola Lieber

Usually, I start my [Passover](#) preparations about a month before the holiday begins. Our goal is to invite as many young professionals as possible to attend our communal [Seder](#), which involves getting the word out through social media, messages and emails. Sometimes, I have out-of-town family members who join us here in Florida. I usually make sure that my kids have something nice to wear and new shoes.

What were your plans for Passover? Were you going to visit family? Were you going to host friends? Were you going to go to a hotel for a relaxing Passover getaway?

What were your plans for Passover?

Who would have thought that an invisible enemy, the coronavirus, would turn all of our plans upside down? With our very lives at stake, perhaps that last thing we are worried about is our Passover plans.

But it's still Passover. The clock doesn't stop ticking for the coronavirus.

It's going to be a new Passover experience for me to be alone with my family. A part of me thinks, *This won't be an especially uplifting Seder. It's a compromised Passover experience this year.*

But then another part of me thinks that if this is G-d's Master plan, there is an opportunity here. If I let go of the disappointment, the loneliness, the unfamiliar turf, I'll be open to the unique experiences and possibilities of this Passover.

Every holiday has a body and a soul. The body of the holiday is the external dimension, our expectations of what the holiday should look like. The soul is the core of the holiday, the connection to G-d that is accomplished through all the [mitzvahs](#) of the holiday. So yes, the body of my Passover is certainly less exciting or glamorous than usual. But hey, I'm almost forced to focus on the soul of the holiday, the part that doesn't change under any circumstances.

There's an incredible story of three friends who held a Seder in the Muhlendorf concentration camp in Germany in 1945. [Moshe Goldstein](#), [Yaakov Friedman](#) and [Yekusiel Halberstam](#), the Klausenberger [Rebbe](#), watched their friends and relatives being murdered every day. Towards the end of the war, the Allied forces bombed the train lines near the camps, and the Germans sent Moshe to clear up the tracks. Moshe found a freight car that was turned over on its side, filled with sacks of wheat. He knew if he lugged a sack back into the camp, he would be shot on the spot. He rummaged through the freight cars and found a pair of pants, which he put over his own pants, and he poured as much wheat as he could in the space between the two pairs of pants.

He and his friends found an old mill, ground the wheat, and sifted it. They gathered sticks and made a fire under a metal can, which they used to bake their matzahs. The group made a Seder, and they all had a small piece of [matzah](#). Moshe says he will always remember that Seder and how they sang with utter hope, "Next year in [Jerusalem!](#)"

So, my friends, there is no such thing as a "fake" Passover Seder. The connection to G-d that is accomplished at the Passover Seder is happening whether our kids have new clothes or not, whether we're at a large Seder or a solo Seder. Maybe when we're on our own, we become even more focused on the fact that making the Seder and eating the matzah brings G-d tremendous pleasure and impacts our lives in a very positive way.

And did you know that at the first Seder that ever occurred, 3,332 years ago, the Jews were also in a "quarantine" of sorts? On [Rosh Chodesh Nissan](#), 15 days before the plague of the firstborn and the [Exodus](#), [Moses](#) instructed the Jewish people to bring a lamb into their homes in 10 days' time, and four days later to slaughter it, roast it, and eat it with matzah and bitter herbs. Every subsequent Passover, a lamb was also slaughtered, but it had to be brought to the [Tabernacle](#) or the [Temple](#) to be offered and eaten. Yet the first Seder had to be done at home.

Why was it so important for each family to have this Seder together at home? Because on that day, the eve of the 14th of Nissan, every single person experienced a rebirth. From a group of slaves, they became free men and women. From a tribe, they became a nation with an important mission, to be ambassadors of light to the entire world. And rebirth happens at home. When we are in public, we tend to follow the pack or lead the pack, because that is what other people expect of us. But to become more real, more aligned with our personal mission, that happens most often when we are alone or with our closest family. We don't need to put on any show for them. G-d says as much in the [Torah](#): "Make for Me a dwelling place so that I can dwell within each and every one of you."

Why was it so important to have the Seder at home?

Every year after that until the destruction of the Temple, we continued this [mitzvah](#) and brought a Passover sacrifice. But it could never again be slaughtered at home. It had to be eaten in the Tabernacle/Temple.

And this is so relevant this year because we are all forced to be at home for the Seder. And even if we were planning to do the Seder at home anyway, this year the Seder may be a lot more homey, with just our immediate family or just by ourselves. The food will not be the focus of this year's Seder. The focus will be on the home.

So this Passover, we can have a real Seder, a happy Seder, a Seder that will bring healing to those who really need it. And a Seder that will help us reinvent ourselves.

Interestingly, the Baal HaTurim, Rabbi Yaakov [ben Asher](#), explains that just as in Egypt the Jews were commanded to stay home and eat the Passover sacrifice, so, too, in the future redemption, we will be commanded to stay home and eat inside.

May we merit to celebrate Passover this year in Jerusalem!

By [Rochel Holzkenner](#)



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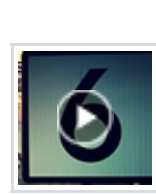
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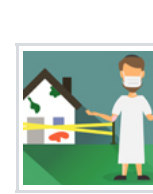
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