

# Chicago Tribune PERSPECTIVE



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A Passover Seder in New York on April 23, 2016. The Seder typically brings family and friends together, but in 2020 some downsizing and spacing may be necessary.

## A Zoom Seder? We're adjusting, and there are options for Passover

By PEGGY WOLFF

Today I should be pulling out the Seder plates, the afikoman bag, the best dishes, the silver goblet for the prophet Elijah's wine and 12 Haggadahs. This is the written story of the Exodus, our ancestors' long journey out from under the oppressive Egyptian pharaoh to the promised land.

We've invited family and friends, and if someone wanted to bring a friend or two, we've an open-door policy. A Seder is a lot of people in a pretty close space.

What now? Spread out the seating? Limit capacity?

In keeping with stay-at-home orders to reduce the spread of the novel coronavirus, people are self-quarantining, not traveling, not gathering. To observe the rich feast together is a dangerous tightrope walk. We would be risking life.

There are multiple options. We're recasting the first night of Passover to a bare minimum, our home unit, as it's now called, plus our millennial son who's working from home in Bucktown. What about our daughter in Oakland? "Invite" her in via Zoom?

"That's weird, Passover is about the food," our son said, referring to the feast but also the symbols such as parsley, horseradish, the roasted egg

and more on the Seder plate.

I reached out for some rabbinic wisdom. Rabbi Sidney Helbraun said that he was just starting to make the transition himself into how to do Passover during this pandemic. Helbraun is the senior rabbi of reform Temple Beth-El in Northbrook and president of the Chicago Board of Rabbis. People are viewing Passover through a different lens, he said.

"We're using Zoom a lot. I could invite 100 people to share the Seder with us ... I don't know if we will, but we have those options in the reform community, to bring more people with us to our table." Passover via teleconferencing software. Or Skype. Or FaceTime. Or livestream. I wondered, does rabbinic tradition mandate the kind of innovations that are appearing this year? Is technology a one-off dispensation granted in view of the extreme current circumstances?

"In the days of the Talmud, the rabbis taught that there was a principle called *dina d'malchuta dina*, which means the law of the land is the law. And we're living in a time where the law of the land is that it's not safe to be coming together in gatherings."

Yet COVID-19 is not stopping Jews from having their holiday.

Traditional Passover dinner orders for four, six, eight, 12 and a *la carte*, have come in to delis for curbside

delivery. Just call, your matzo ball soup is waiting. Bette Dworkin, owner of Kaufman's in Skokie, said that although she is getting calls for dinner-to-go, "my sense is that a lot of people aren't going to do anything. The fear factor is huge."

Yet ... you don't have to skip Passover, even if you are solo.

Rabbi Emeritus Harold Kudan, of Glencoe's Am Shalom, said that to fulfill the mitzvah of Passover, "the Torah commands the Jewish people to have these three things: matzo, maror (bitter herbs) and a shank bone."

"And what does each one mean? Well, matzo, to remember this is the bread of affliction. Who has been afflicted? During this time of coronavirus? You could dwell on that." And the bitter herbs?

"The bitterness of us being solitary during this time. You hear about people being in hospice and no one can be near them. Or people who have funerals and you can't comfort them. This is the bitterness."

"And the shank bone is sacrifice. What is it that we have learned of this coronavirus that sacrifices something? The medical workers, emergency workers, first responders, all these people have done sacrificial things. What have we done, what have we been called upon to sacrifice?"

We have some time to think about

that because we have a second chance to observe Passover, to have the Seder we wanted to have.

Passover Sheni, literally "Second Passover," is a day that occurs exactly 30 days after the first night. That's May 7. Google it or read the Torah, Numbers chapter 9:1-14.

One year after the Exodus, it was time again for the Jewish people to bring the Passover offering, the Paschal lamb. But there was a problem. Those in charge of carrying the coffins of Jacob's sons to their final burial place in Israel were ritually unclean by reason of being near a corpse, and thus unable to offer the Paschal lamb. They asked Moses and Aaron, why must we be forbidden from presenting the Lord's offering with the rest of the Israelites?

Moses said, stand by, and let me hear what instructions the Lord gives. "The Lord replied when any of you who are defiled by a corpse, or are on a long journey would offer a Passover sacrifice to the Lord, they shall offer it in the second month (of the Jewish calendar), on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight."

If COVID-19 is under control, we will have a Seder and together take a leap of solidarity back into the founding event of Jewish nationhood.

Peggy Wolff is a freelance writer.