

Four Passover Perspectives

How many of us remember our Seders from 1987? How about 2003? 2012? Or even last year? I promise you one thing: We are going to remember this Passover – 2020 – for the rest of our lives.

Since Passover is all about four – four cups of cups, four questions, four children – I am going to speak briefly and respond to four attitudes. Four ways folks may be thinking about Passover this year:

The first: PRIORITIES. “Passover is fine and dandy, Rabbi. But I’m stressed. I got no heart for a Seder this year. I got no juice.”

The second: PEOPLE. “Passover isn’t the same without my grandchildren, without my parents, without my friends around the table.”

The third: PREPARATION. “Rabbi, it’s enough to make a Seder under the best conditions. How am I going to get what I need? I got to dress up with these gloves and a fakakte mask – you expect me to find a shank bone on top of that?”

Finally, the fourth: TRADITIONS “The Seder is all about traditions. It’s about these people. And those recipes. On this date – Passover, every year.”

One: Priorities – we’ve got a lot on our minds that seems more important than a Seder.

Two: People – It’s just not the same without our peeps.

Three: Preparation – How am I going to get what I need?

Four: And because I am not clever enough to think of a fourth word that starts with the letter “P,” Tradition. This is how we do it, because this is how we have always done it.

Priorities. I am the first to admit, it has been hard to think about anything unrelated to COVID-19. How many times over the past few weeks have I had a thought about something unrelated to this crisis, only to have that other matter vanish into the ether? All my energy has been consumed by this reality.

It is not good for us. In this singular moment in our lives, Judaism’s power lies in providing an opportunity to transcend our condition. Passover is a gift. Step back. In spite of what we are living, let us remind ourselves: Not only are we free people, we are a part of a master narrative. We are a people and a history that is so rich and so vast, that it is an honor to live and die as Jews.

So, remember that I love you very much. And don’t let the Coronavirus claim another victim in your Seder.

Number two. People. You are right, Passover is about the people. Whether we are talking about our biological families or our chosen families and communities, we do not get to be with each other this year. But we can be – virtually. If the past few weeks have taught us anything, we can learn to use technology quickly and pretty well. So, make a Seder and put your grandkids on your iPad or your friends on your phone. You got this.

Think of it as Jewish evolution. And the rule of evolution is this – when a crisis emerges, organisms either evolve or they die. This is a crisis, and those are our choices. Evolve or die. The Jewish way is resilience and evolution and we are going to do it again.

Three. Preparation. Let's face it, making a Seder is a ton of work. But is the point of Passover setting an immaculate table? No. Is it a picture-perfect Seder plate? Uh-uh. It is not your brisket, either.

Passover is a lot of little things that add up to something special. But a lot of little things can also be a lot of little different things. Make a chicken. Tear open a bagged salad. Make an easy meal. If you can't find kosher for Passover matzah, use the other kind – even though I have no idea why they make matzah that isn't kosher for Passover! As far as the Seder plate, do your best. Substitute a beet for a shank bone. Be gentle on yourself. It's been a rough couple of months. The month of March had 91 days. Do your best. Trust me, God – or your late mother, may her memory be for a blessing – is not up there with a clipboard, keeping score.

Finally, four. Tradition. I confess, I am not a nostalgic person. As a student of history and a lover of Judaism, I respect tradition. But nostalgia is a subjective look at the past. What we have is way cooler. We have a chance to make history this year. To look back on Passover 5780 as the year when we persisted and used our imaginations when life demanded it. So, there it is. Prioritize Passover as a way to step back, rise above, and attach yourself to our people's master story.

Connect to your people digitally this year and help Judaism to evolve in a crisis. In preparing your Seder, go easy on yourself. Perfection is the enemy of the good enough. And ease up on the traditions this year. Instead of looking through glasses fogged up by nostalgia, use your vision to see our opportunity to make history.

Don't give up. We will get through this. We always have. We Jews are at our best under adversity.

Remember: We are Beth El. And so are you.

Shabbat shalom.