

# SOLO SEDER

A ONETABLE GUIDE



Three days after the United States entered WWI, the National Jewish Welfare Board was founded; among their first large scale projects was the Solo Seder kit.

Containing a Haggadah, grape juice, soup mix, and matzah, the kit was shipped to overseas military personnel so that they could celebrate Passover alone.

For many, the idea of Seder alone is anathema to everything Passover represents: performance, participation, peoplehood. After all, at the core of the practice is storytelling, ritual, and symbolic reenactment. Don't these things require an IRL experience?

This year, just like in 1917, the answer is no.

Meaning can be made on your own, with the right intention and the right tools. **This is not a Haggadah, but rather a real time supplement that offers first person introductions — poetry, lyrics, mindful reflections — for you to read before each section of the Seder.** Choose the Haggadah that works for you, and use this resource to add meaning, set personal intention, and make your Seder of One a testament to the timeliness and power of ritual.

## KADESH: SANCTIFYING TIME

### The Space Between Us

Yes, the space between us is scary.  
It is odd and at odds,  
an area unoccupied where all things exist.  
But the space between us is also liminal,  
a threshold between old and new.

And so, in this space anything is possible:  
to grow without gathering,  
to connect without congregating,  
to create without convening.

Which means the space between is sacred.

Yes, the space between us is scary.  
But scared and sacred are so close —  
and we need to make space for both.

—Rabbi Jessica Minnen

## URCHATZ: HAND WASHING

The beginning of the seder seems strange. I started with Kiddush as I normally would when I begin any festive meal. But now I am going to wash my hands without a blessing, dip vegetables in salt water, and break matzah without eating it. What's going on here?

It seems that the beginning of the seder is kind of a false start. I act as if I am going to begin the meal but then I realize that I can't. I can't really eat this meal until I understand it, until I tell the story of the exodus from Egypt. So we interrupt our meal preparations with *karpas* (vegetables), *yachatz* (breaking matzah), and *maggid* (storytelling). Only once I have told the story do I make Kiddush again, wash my hands again (this time with a blessing) and break matzah and eat it. The meaning is clear: In order to savor this meal, in order to appreciate the sweet taste of Passover, I must first understand it.

— Adapted from Rabbi Rona Shapiro



## KARPAS: VEGETABLES

### Lines Written in Early Spring

I heard a thousand blended notes,  
While in a grove I sate reclined,  
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts  
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,  
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;  
And 'tis my faith that every flower  
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,  
To catch the breezy air;  
And I must think, do all I can,  
That there was pleasure there.

If this belief from heaven be sent,  
If such be Nature's holy plan,  
Have I not reason to lament  
What man has made of man?

-William Wordsworth

## YACHATZ: BREAKING MATZAH

### Anthem

The birds they sang  
At the break of day  
Start again  
I heard them say  
Don't dwell on what  
Has passed away  
Or what is yet to be

The wars they will  
Be fought again  
The holy dove  
She will be caught again  
Bought and sold  
And bought again  
The dove is never free

Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in

-Leonard Cohen





## MAGGID: STORYTELLING

### Four More Questions

Why is it that people around the world still live under oppressive regimes that limit their intellectual, religious, and economic freedoms?

Why is it that people in my own wealthy nation go hungry, with no bread, or matzah, or vegetables, or bitter herbs to eat?

Why is it that so many people still fight against our right to choose whom to love and whom to marry?

What can I do, in my own way, to fight the scourge of oppression, the slavery of poverty, the limits imposed by prejudice and intolerance, and to empower more people to be free?

—Adapted from [The Good Men Project](#)

### Before the Ten Plagues

I am isolated, but as tempting as it is to lean into the imagery of the plagues, I do not want to do so. Because COVID-19 is a terrible pandemic, but not a plague. The most dangerous part of associating COVID-19 with the ten plagues is not about the malady's origin, but about our response. When the Israelites sequestered in their homes and painted blood on their doorposts, they did it to distinguish themselves from the Egyptian households. When I stay home, it is instead a recognition that there are no distinctions to this disease; whatever I do is not primarily for me, but for my neighbors and coworkers and others I do not know. My house has no blood on the doorpost, neither for protection nor identification. I await not a personal salvation, but an all-clear for everyone. Unlike that midnight in Egypt — we, all of us, are in this together.

—Adapted from [Passover and the Pandemic](#) by Michael Bernstein

# WHAT CAN COVID-19 TEACH ME?

## RACHTZAH: HAND WASHING

It is reminding me that we are all equal, regardless of our culture, religion, occupation, financial situation or how famous we are. If this disease treats us all equally, perhaps we should too.

It is reminding me that we are all connected, that the false borders we have put up have little value — this virus does not need a passport.

## MOTZI: BLESSING MATZAH I

It is reminding me that life is short. What is most important for me to do is to help others, especially the most vulnerable in my community.

It is reminding me that my true work is not my job — that is what I do, not what I was created to do.

## MATZAH: BLESSING MATZAH II

It is reminding me to keep my ego in check. No matter how accomplished I am or how much control I think I have, a virus can bring my world to a standstill.

It is reminding me that the power of freewill is in my hands. I can choose to look only after myself, or I can choose to cooperate, share, and give.

## MAROR: BITTER HERBS

It is reminding me, by oppressing me for a short time, of those in this world whose lives are spent in oppression.

## KORECH: SANDWICH

It is reminding me that this can either be an end or a new beginning. This can be a time of reflection and understanding, where we as a global society, learn from our mistakes.

It is reminding me that after every difficulty, there is always ease. Life is cyclical, and this is just a phase in this great cycle. Gam zeh ya'avon — this too shall pass.



## SHULCHAN ORECH: FESTIVE MEAL

And the people stayed home.  
And read books, and listened, and rested,  
and exercised, and made art, and played games,  
and learned new ways of being, and were still.  
And listened more deeply.  
Some meditated, some prayed, some danced.  
Some met their shadows.  
And the people began to think differently.  
And the people healed.  
And, in the absence of people living  
in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways,  
the earth began to heal!  
And when the danger passed,  
and the people joined together again,  
they grieved their losses,  
and made new choices, and dreamed new images,  
and created new ways to live  
and heal the earth fully,  
as they had been healed.

-Kitty O'Meara

## TZAFUN: AFIKOMEN

That Which Comes After

The thing is, the Passover Seder is Hellenist,  
Modeled after the Greek symposium.  
Synagogue, **afikomen**: Greek words.

We are indebted!  
Yet we talk about tradition as if it is singular,  
Judaism as if it is One Thing.

In reality, it is Many.  
And so tonight, a symposium of One  
Among the Many.

I cannot hide the afikomen from myself.  
Instead, I will seek to remember  
How much is borrowed, how much shared.

Afikomen is a loan word,  
Greek for **that which comes after**.  
We inherit more than we know.

-Rabbi Jessica Minnen



## BARECH: GRATITUDE

It's a remarkable thing that Jewish tradition seeks to inspire me to be present before I eat, and all the more so that I am then directed to acknowledge my gratitude after I eat — gratitude not for the food itself, but for the incredible feeling of being full.

What does it mean to truly be fulfilled?

In Hebrew, the root of the word for fulfillment — to be whole, to be complete — is shalom, the same as the word for peace. May I find peace, a whole and complete peace. May I be fulfilled, not only by my food, but by my actions and my words.

## HALLEL: SONGS OF PRAISE

Amen

The betrayer who is betrayed.  
The deceiver deceived.  
Away! Away!  
What away?  
Away to where  
in the yellow air?  
To the meadow that was?  
To the lambs just birthed?  
To the falling birds?

In our standing up, though a little bent — dayenu.  
With our eyes seeing though blurred — dayenu.  
With our ears almost hearing — dayenu.  
Upon our lying down and our rising — dayenu.  
On our remembering our beloved's name — dayenu.  
On our kneeling down — dayenu.  
By the skin of our teeth — dayenu.  
In our heart that expands and contracts — dayenu.  
In our worried heart, fearful and afraid — dayenu.  
Amen.

-Tuvia Reubner

Translated by Rachel Tzvia Black





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