



Conducting a Virtual Seder in the Time of Coronavirus Passover 2020

Why is this night different from all other nights? We ask this same question every year. Yet, we know that Passover 2020 will be different than others that have come before. New questions will emerge. What psychological and logistical difficulties are we facing in preparing for Passover this year? How will we adapt sacred rituals over the internet? How can we feel together when we are separated? We are called upon to ask questions during our seder. This year, there is a particular urgency in exploring questions about our very existence, our fears, our resilience, and our future.

While this resource is a companion piece to the Sisterhood Jewish-Muslim Haggadah, we know that many of us are wondering how to conduct our traditional seder online. We hope this resource will provide guidance for all your virtual sederim (plural for seder). It is divided into three sections. The second section is specific to a seder shared with your Sisterhood chapter, while the first and last sections apply to any seder you conduct.

1. Reflections on seder rituals in the time of coronavirus¹
2. Conducting a seder with your Muslim and Jewish sisters
3. Logistics for running a virtual seder using Zoom

The following sentiment was shared by a sister in Toronto. I don't know the source, but I hope the intention will guide your seder in 2020: "So many times throughout history, Jews have celebrated Passover alone and in secret out of fear. This year, we celebrate Passover alone out of love." May your seder be filled with an abundance of love and may the following reflections help you connect to this ancient and sacred ritual, as you reinvent your Passover celebration in the age of coronavirus.

¹ I am indebted to Rabbi Sara Sapadin, from Temple Emanuel in NYC for sharing her thoughts on a webinar, "Passover in the Time of Coronairus". Her wisdom is woven throughout this first section.



Reflections on Seder Rituals in the Time of Coronavirus

1. **Seder.** Seder means order. The structure is foundational. When chaos reigns, we seek order. Now, when the world is filled with upheaval and unpredictability, we can seek relief, knowing that we can return to virtually any Haggadah and practice the same rituals in the same order. We can find peace and grounding in the structure of the seder. How are finding peace and grounding in your life now?

It's helpful to have everyone following the same Haggadah, so your pages will coincide. Type "downloadable Passover Haggadah" into your internet browser to find one that is consistent with your practice and share the link with your guests prior to your seder.

2. **Kadesh/Sanctification.** The root of the Hebrew word kadesh means to set apart from the mundane world. The same root yields kadosh and kedushah, translated as holy/sanctified and holiness. During this time when we are literally set apart from each other, what is the relationship between being set apart and being holy? What are the challenges of creating separate times during a health crisis? What are the ethical and practical implications? Is it possible to view quarantine, a forced separation, as a holy act?
 - a. **Shecheheyanu.** At this time of heightened awareness, being here is not a given. We cannot take for granted the ability to say the words of the Haggadah together, to pray together, to eat together. As we recite the shecheheyanu, we are literally doing this for the first time. We offer gratitude to share this moment together. What are you grateful for in this time?
3. **Hand Washing (Urchatz and Rachatz).** Both Jews and Muslims wash before doing something sacred, to be worthy of redemption by God. During the seder, we wash two times, first without a blessing, the second time, with a blessing. Ask your guests to have a pitcher of water at their table, a bowl to catch the water, and a towel so that they can partake in the ritual.

Hand washing is a spiritual moment in the seder. This year, our hand washing takes on a completely new perspective. What could be more



important this year? Now, our washing is prescribed by health care professionals and is, in its own way, a path to redemption. Does understanding washing in this way change your experience of the ritual? Can you view hand washing as a holy act?

4. **Hallel.** The psalms of hallel are filled with joy, but also woven within them is the theme of confronting death (Arthur Green). In this vulnerable time, our joy is tinged with anxiety and fear. How are you able to simultaneously hold joy and fear in this time?
5. **Food.** You may not be able to find the ingredients you normally cook with this Passover. Check out these two links for recipes that will inspire you!
 - a. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/the-nosher/how-to-cook-for-passover-during-the-coronavirus-crisis/>.
 - b. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/nosher-category/passover-food/>

Conducting a Seder with your Muslim and Jewish Sisters

During this time of physical distancing, the Sisterhood wants to make it as easy as possible for you to stay connected with your sisters. We encourage you to conduct a virtual seder with your chapter (as well as a virtual iftar during Ramadan---more on that later)!

One possibility is to hold your chapter seder during the intermediate days of Passover, which, in 2020, fall on Sunday, April 12 – Tuesday April 14th. If you do not have your own personal Zoom Pro account or access to other virtual meeting platforms, the Sisterhood has several Zoom licenses you can use to host a chapter seder on a first come, first served basis. Email Nadia at nadia@sosspeace.org with the date and time of your proposed seder and ask her to set up a Zoom meeting on your chapter's behalf. She will then send you a link you can use for your virtual seder. If you haven't hosted a Zoom meeting before, let her know that and she'll walk you through the technical mechanics.

The Sisterhood Haggadah is a compilation of ones written by several individual chapters. You will find the link at: [Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom Passover Haggadah](#). Forward this link to your chapter members prior to your seder. Ask



each woman to print it out (preferable) or have it up on her computer. Resend the link and a reminder the day before the event. Ask everyone to sign on with the capacity for video on a computer, tablet, or phone. Calling in without video is a last resort!

Prior to the seder, it's helpful to identify two women who will:

1. Prepare a traditional seder plate to display on the call.
2. Facilitate the seder experience, ensuring that every guest can share equally, have their questions answered, and manage the conversation flow within your available time.

Let your sisters know that the "Order of the Seder" is the outline for the evening, with rituals and readings designated for each section. Encourage everyone to ask questions! It will be interesting for all to learn that families may observe Passover in different ways, in terms of foods eaten and family customs.

This Haggadah includes text from both Jewish and Muslim sources. It is a perfect opportunity to compare and learn about the similarities and differences in the way our traditions describe the narrative. Do any Jewish readings or rituals from the Haggadah resonate or feel familiar to your Muslim sisters? Do any of the readings from the Qur'an resonate or feel familiar to your Jewish sisters?

The seder is a participatory event. We are called to personally experience an exodus out of the narrow places in our lives, reminiscent of the Israelites' exodus from slavery. With that in mind, consider asking each sister to take turns reading the English. It is up to the facilitator to remind women to unmute her microphone in order to speak, and to mute when she is finished.

There are many ritual foods at a seder. Since it may not be possible for your sisters to put their own seder plate together, consider asking them to bring a paper plate and some markers to her table. After you settle in, guide each sister to draw her own seder plate, explaining that the seder plate is one way we can each experience the Exodus as if we were personally leaving Sinai.

We understand no one is (or should be) making special trips to the grocery store or craft store right now, so we encourage chapter members to use whatever resources



they have at hand if they wish to create their own seder plates. If women would like to create seder plates, feel free to share or use the following links for make-at-home options.

Printable Seder Plate- <https://toriavey.com/images/2013/03/Seder-Plate-Printable-Guide.pdf>

Printable Seder Plate II- <https://www.freekidscrafts.com/printable-seder-plate/>

Paper Seder Plate Craft- <https://joyfuljewish.wordpress.com/2011/04/06/a-paper-seder-plate/>

Accompanying printable food photos-

<https://joyfuljewish.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/pesach-seder-plate-matzah.pdf>

Seder Plate with Edible Components

If chapter members would like to create a seder plate that allows them to participate in the ritual eating of the Passover meal, the following list is a guide.

- Small bowl of salt water
- Small portion of herbs (parsley is popular, or lettuce)
- Small portion of bitter herbs (most often, horseradish)
- Matzah
- A hard-boiled egg
- Grape juice

Logistics for Running a Virtual Seder

After you welcome everyone to your seder, but before you begin, it's helpful to review the tools on your virtual platform. This guide addresses Zoom, but you can also look into other options, e.g. Skype and Webex. Information about these platforms is on the Internet. The instructions below are an overview. If you have further questions, please email nadia@sosspeace.org or janet@sosspeace.org.

Zoom Platform. The Sisterhood Zoom licenses are reserved for chapter seders. To host a personal (non-chapter) seder, you have two Zoom options:

1. Use a free personal Zoom account. This is perfect if you are only connecting with one other computer. You can remain on the video for an



unlimited amount of time. Anyone can set up a free Zoom account by using this link: <https://zoom.us>

2. Purchase a Zoom Pro license for one month. If you are connecting with two or more other computers, the free version will likely cut off after 40 minutes. You can purchase the Pro account for one month. (<https://zoom.us/pricing>). It costs \$14.99 and if you cancel within the first month, you will only incur this one-time charge.

Zoom Etiquette. Before you begin, review some basic Zoom guidelines. Remind everyone that this is new territory for all of us, and the technology isn't perfect! Ask your guests for their patience if there are glitches. It's helpful to designate one "tech" person prior to the gathering to monitor and respond to the features below. Introduce your tech person to guests at the beginning. Tell participants to hover their mouse/cursor around their screen until they find the toolbar and can see the available features. It's most often on the bottom:

1. **Audio:** If you hear feedback, ask all guests to mute their microphones unless they are speaking. Do that by clicking on the mike on the left side of the toolbar until they see a red line. To unmute, click the mike icon and the red line will disappear. If someone is unmuted but others can't hear that person, ask the person to click on the arrow to the right of the microphone. A menu will appear. Try clicking on a different microphone to see if that helps. People can test their speaker and microphone by following the prompts. Unlike in person, you need to give people an extra moment before they speak. If someone is still unable to speak, tell that person to click on the chat button and send your tech person a private note (see below, chat).
2. **Video:** It's very helpful to see everyone, so invite your guests to turn on their videos. If the video icon on the toolbar has a red line through it, ask your guests to click on the camera icon. When the red line disappears, the video will be on. Ask your guests to place their computers in a stationary position and to check that their faces are clearly visible.
3. **View Mode.** If your guests can't see everyone, ask them to find the "view mode" on their screens (might be in the top right corner) and make sure they see the word "gallery mode". If it says "speaker mode," they will only see



the person talking. Before beginning, make sure your guests are in the correct mode and can see everyone.

4. **Chat:** Let your guests know that if the chat box is flashing on their toolbar, they can click on the “chat” icon to read a new message. Your guests can write a note or ask a question to everyone or to one person individually. To send an individual message (i.e. to the tech person), click on the downward arrow in the chat box and select the person to whom you’d like to send an individual message. Ask your tech person to keep an eye on the chat box.

She can either respond in writing or share the comment/question with the group, as appropriate. Out of respect for the current speaker, ask your guests to use other private chats sparingly.

5. **Process.** It is more difficult to read non-verbal cues on a computer screen. Guests not as familiar with Zoom or other virtual platforms may be slower to unmute or speak up. If you notice certain guests are not speaking, you might send them a personal chat to check in. You might also remind participants to leave a little “space” between speakers, to give everyone a chance to gather and then share their thoughts.

We hope this resource makes it easier for you to run your virtual seder. Feel free to send your feedback or suggestions to janet@sosspeace.org, and let me know if you have questions.