

PASSOVER

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WHY THIS YEAR FEELS SO DIFFERENT



Centuries ago, the Spanish Jewish poet Yehuda Halevi captured a profound sense of longing with his words: "My heart is in the East, and I am in the furthestmost West." Today, many of us resonate with this sentiment, feeling both a connection to and a distance from the land of our ancestors. Although months have passed, the events of October 7th continue to weigh heavily on Jews around the world.

As we come together to recount our journey to freedom, we also pray for the safe return of those held hostage and mourn for all those suffering in the conflict. Amid these divisions, many of us may worry that the conversations around our tables this year will be fraught or even impossible.

But now, more than ever, it is essential to engage in asking questions and to listen attentively to one another.

SHALOM BAYIT

For gatherings where a difficult Israel conversation would threaten peace in the house

When in the Book of Genesis God announces to the aged Abraham and Sarah that they will have a child, God hears Sarah laugh in disbelief: “Now that I am withered, and with my husband, so old?!” But careful to protect Abraham’s feelings, God reports to Abraham only that Sarah referred to herself – not to her husband – as too old. God omits the full truth for the sake of Peace in the House/Shalom Bayit.

Here are some fantastic resources and supplements. The readings included in these supplements can be woven throughout your seder so that our awareness – and our prayers – hold the hostages and innocent Palestinians in our hearts.

RESOURCES AND SUPPLEMENTS:

- [7 Ways to Address October 7th At Your Seder \(Kveller\)](#)
- [Central Conference of American Rabbis - Seder Supplement](#)
- [In Every Generation - A Seder Supplement](#) by Shalom Hartman
- [Seder Interrupted - A Post October 7th Seder Supplement](#) by AJR
- [Bayit's: The Broken Matzah 2024 Supplement](#)

WAYS TO ADDRESS OCTOBER 7 AT YOUR SEDER

Adapted from a variety of resources listed previously

EMPTY CHAIRS AT YOUR TABLE

While some families leave an empty chair for the prophet Elijah, consider leaving more empty chairs this year to recognize those celebrating without lost loved ones. Include images and names of victims or hostages you're honoring.

Before starting the seder, say: "Let's take a moment to talk about the extra empty chairs at our table — they represent people who will not be able to celebrate with their families this year."

AN EXTRA CANDLE - A BLESSING BEFORE CANDLE LIGHTING

Adapted from Rabbi Daniel Gropper

After a loved one passes away—especially a young person—a rabbi may often suggest lighting a third candle every Friday night. Years later, many continue this tradition.

Tonight, we too light a third candle. We light it to remember and never forget, ensuring their memories bless us all. We light it for fathers, grandfathers, husbands, sons, brothers, brothers-in-law; mothers, grandmothers, wives, daughters, daughters-in-law, sisters; cousins, friends, those names newly known to us, and those we must never cease to remember. We light it for them.

We light for children—infants, toddlers, teens—who have yet to experience life's full array. We light for them.

We light for soldiers, concert attendees, kibbutzniks, and those simply waiting for a bus. We light for them.

We light for individuals who sought only to live their lives in peace, and for those who actively worked towards peace. We light for them.

We light for those taken hostage, keeping the flame alive until they can once again embrace their loved ones, until they are reunited with life itself. We light for them.

There are not enough candles to express our grief, anger, worry, or sadness. There are simply not enough candles...

Let us be the light. Let us emulate the sparks that were released at creation's dawn. If there are not enough candles, then let us be the light.



EXTRA MAROR? CHANGING UP YOUR SEDER PLATE

During what feels like an especially bitter time, adding extra maror (bitter herbs) to your seder plate can symbolize that grief. Other additions might include an olive or olive oil as symbols of peace. You can also subtract items to honor those experiencing hunger.

When introducing the seder plate, say: "You will notice the seder plate looks a little different tonight — we have extra maror to note an especially bitter year, and we've added olive/olive oil to remind us of hopes for peace."

A FIFTH QUESTION

The Four Questions are traditionally recited by the youngest guest and are a poignant reminder of Jewish continuity and survival. This year, consider repeating the central question — "ma nishtanah ha'layla haze mikol ha'leylot?" — allowing guests to share how this Passover feels different.

After singing the fourth question, say: "Now we are going to sing the question one more time, and everyone can take a turn answering: How does Passover feel different to you this year?"

FOUR MORE QUESTIONS FROM THE UNION FOR REFORM JUDAISM

- Passover is a holiday of storytelling, and the Haggadah commands us to tell the story as though we had been present in it. What is one story that has shaped how you understand the war in Gaza?
- Passover warns that great suffering comes from hardening our hearts. How are you feeling hard-hearted right now? How are you feeling tender-hearted?
- Passover is a time to ask questions. When you think about the current war in Gaza, what questions come to mind? What is something you'd like to understand, better?
- The seder ends with the aspiration: "Next Year in Jerusalem." What do you hope will be true one year from now? How do you hope you will feel?

THE FOUR PRECIOUS CHILDREN

Discuss the four children and their questions, and express gratitude for all children at Passover tables this year, for their curiosity and the richness they bring.

After discussing the four children, say: "Let us remember that all children — wicked, wise, innocent, and those who do not know how to ask — deserve safety, peace, and space to prosper."

EXTRA PLAGUES

Reflect on the plagues we feel we are experiencing today. Pour out extra wine or juice for them and discuss their significance.

After the ten plagues, use one of these prompts: "What does the plague of darkness mean to us this year? What is one thing we've done to bring in light? Now, let us go around the table and everyone can say what has felt like the biggest plague of these past few months."

A MOMENT OF GRATITUDE

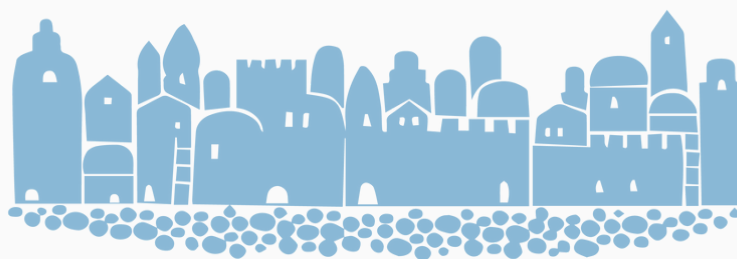
As you finish the meal, take a moment for everyone to express their gratitude, recognizing that not everyone can enjoy such a gathering.

As you near the end of the seder, say: "We feel so fortunate to be able to be together tonight. We feel such a sense of gratitude — 'hakarot todah' in Hebrew — for being able to hold this seder. And yet we think, again, of all those who cannot."

NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM

As you close the seder, reflect on your hopes and dreams for Jerusalem and the coming year. Consider closing with a song that reflects these wishes, like "Oseh Shalom."

At the end of the seder, say: "Before we all say 'L'shanah Ha'ba'ah be'Yerushalayim,' let us try to imagine what we'd like next year in Jerusalem to look like."



PASSOVER RESOURCES

Make a Yummy Seder

- [Delicious Recipes](#)
- [A Passover Cookbook](#)
- [Cocktails to Make Passover More Enjoyable](#)

Make the Seder Fun for Kids

- [Passover Activities for Kids and Adults](#)
- [Download Passover Fun Book](#)
- Bedtime Passover Story for Kids (see on next page!)

Seder Essentials

- [Practice the Four Questions](#)
- [Practice The Blessings](#)
- [Download Unique Haggadot to Enliven Your Seder](#)
- [Remind Yourself: What Goes on the Seder Plate](#)



BEDTIME PASSOVER STORY

A long time ago, there was a man named Joseph who did amazing things in Egypt, like saving everyone from a big famine. Because of him, his family moved to Egypt and were happy there for a while.

But after many years, a new Pharaoh became the ruler of Egypt. This Pharaoh didn't remember all the good things Joseph did, and he didn't like that Joseph's family, called the Israelites, were living in his land. He was afraid they would become too powerful, so he made them his slaves. That meant they had to work really hard all the time, and they weren't treated nicely at all.

Pharaoh was so worried about the Israelites that he made a very mean rule: all baby boys born to the Israelites had to be thrown into the river. But one brave mommy, Yocheved, couldn't bear to do this. She made a little waterproof basket and put her baby boy in it. Then she placed it gently on the river. His big sister Miriam watched the basket float away, hoping he would be safe.

Guess what? The basket floated all the way to where Pharaoh's daughter was bathing. She found the baby and felt sorry for him, so she decided to keep him and named him Moses, which means "pulled out of the water."

Moses grew up as a prince in Pharaoh's palace, but he always felt sad seeing the Israelites being treated so poorly. One day, he saw an Egyptian being really mean to an Israelite, and in trying to stop him, Moses accidentally hurt the Egyptian. He was so scared of getting in trouble that he ran away to a far place called Midian, where he became a shepherd.

While he was looking after sheep in the desert, Moses saw something incredible: a bush that was on fire but didn't burn up! As he came closer, God spoke to him from the bush. God told him to go back to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go free.

BEDTIME PASSOVER STORY (CONTINUED)

Moses went back to Egypt and asked Pharaoh to free the Israelites, but Pharaoh said no. So, God sent ten terrible plagues to Egypt. Each time, Moses asked Pharaoh to free the Israelites, but Pharaoh kept saying no until the last and worst plague. Finally, Pharaoh agreed.

The Israelites had to leave in such a hurry they couldn't wait for their bread to rise. They baked it flat and took it with them, which is why we eat matzah on Passover.

As they reached a big sea, they saw Pharaoh's soldiers coming after them! But Moses stretched out his hand, and God did something amazing: He parted the sea so the Israelites could walk through on dry land! Once they were safe, the water came back and stopped the soldiers from catching them.

The Israelites were free, but they wandered in the desert for 40 years before they reached their new home. Along the way, they learned many lessons and became a strong community.

Every year, we tell the story of Passover during a special meal called the seder to remember the brave Israelites, the wonderful miracles, and how important it is to be free.