

Passover 2020

We are pleased to share this crowdsourced resource with diverse suggestions about the Pesach seder. Enjoy these expressions; compatibility with Jewish practice varies. We offer them without editing in the spirit of unity and love across the whole Jewish community.

Mayberg.org

DOs

- 1 Consider postponing seder to Pesach Sheni (this year: Thursday evening, May 7).
- 2 Have candy and props for the kids! Act it out.
- 3 "Seder Theater." Write a fun play about some aspect of the Pesach story and assign a role to everyone at the table. The biggest parts, of course, should go to the children, since they're natural actors.
- 4 Be silly with the kids. Throw things (marshmallows or ping-pong balls for hail, little plastic frogs and bugs, "dragonflies" for locusts, that sort of thing).
- 5 Know your audience; change it up to ensure that everybody around your table is engaged.
- 6 Have every guest or family group bring one personal story and accompanying object (that symbolizes that story) in answer to some Pesach-themed prompt. Throughout the story call upon people to share and collect the objects on the table as an additional plate of symbols of people's personal experiences that inform the Pesach experience.
- 7 Make it fun, interactive and add games to ensure everyone stays engaged. My favorite seder was one where the hosts created a list of hand motions and responses that connected to parts of the Haggadah. When a number was read, we counted up to that number in the voice of Sesame Street's The Count. When Pharaoh's name was read, we sang part of "Pharaoh, Pharaoh" and when *Mitzrayim* was read, we cheered like
(continued)

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DON'Ts

- 1 Don't convene with people outside your family for a collective meal this year (except, perhaps, over Zoom).
- 2 Don't just sit and read. It's boring.
- 3 Don't just read every word in the Haggadah; it gets boring fast.
- 4 Don't say too many *Divrei Torah* for your crowd. Take the time to figure out who will be there and don't talk over their heads.
- 5 Don't lead a seder that only you want to follow.
- 6 Don't shut down any questions (particularly kids' questions).
- 7 Don't buy Tam Tams that aren't kosher for Passover. Every year someone shows up with a box of Tam Tams that are clearly labeled "This is not kosher for Passover." Don't be that person.

DOs

Arsenio Hall. It was silly, but a lot of fun and certainly memorable.

8 Ask everyone to share one section of the Haggadah that speaks to them personally and touches their heart. Must speak in first person. Also, when people begin to fade, ask everyone to turn to the person next to them and share a moment they felt the presence of God in their lives. In private, no need to share with the whole group.

9 Invite everyone to ask a question! It can be great to offer prompts (ex: What does this symbolize?) and let the guests choose when to ask it.

10 Bring something contemporary to the seder. Check out these two blog posts that spell out how we brought two things alive at the seder: [CLICK FOR LINK](#). Have the children ask an inter-generational family history question to the eldest members present. For example, my children ask my mother every year where her father was during WWII. He was smuggling children out of Nazi Germany. It is a great story to revisit every year and a great dynamic of inter-generational questions and answers about liberation.

11 Do serve lots of veggies and fingerling potatoes and yummy things that can be dipped during karpas! This will give people fuel to make it through the seder until dinner rolls around!

12 Invite someone to join—a Dichpin/Ditrich.

13 Have fun and see the seder as an opportunity to unify yourself with the Jewish people and our heritage throughout time, space and generations over 3,000 years.

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DON'Ts

8 Don't start at the dining room table. Sit on couches, pillows, beanbags.

9 Don't be afraid to take it seriously! If you show that you think the ritual is meaningful, people will follow your lead.

10 Do not be limited by the Haggadah and do not limit the children to the four questions.

11 Don't read the whole Haggadah eyes down without making eye contact with people at your table! The seder is a chance to come together with family and friends, to tell old stories and create new ones. This is a chance to connect both with our history through the language of the Haggadah and with the people sitting around our table.

12 Don't talk about politics.

13 Don't make it boring and don't miss the opportunity to dive deeply into discussions about personal Jewish identity during the famous section of the seder, B'chol dor vador, that notes how every generation should feel as if they were personally rescued from Egypt. Determine what was your Egypt this year.

DOs

- 14 Prepare a jar of gummy candies to encourage participation.
- 15 In this time of crisis for our People, it is essential to emphasize that Pesach is the celebration of our deliverance from danger and adversity. Similarly, today – as we find ourselves in a crisis from dangers of a different sort – Hashem, who loves His nation, will be our Salvation. We must only speak to him as one speaks to a loving father and state our requests in heartfelt supplication. Then, we must trust in Him to do what is in our best interests, even if we do not realize or recognize it at the moment. Stress the relevance of the Pesach story and the symbolic actions and recitations of the seder to each one of us, today.
- 16 Tell personal stories about your own struggles in life.
- 17 Drink 4 full cups of red wine.
- 18 Now that schools are closed, children can create new games and *Divrei Torah* for the Seder. The more involved they are in the preparations, the more they will enjoy the seder.
- 19 Put "Paintings of the Exodus" into a search engine and photocopy a few different paintings. Give everyone at the table a copy and invite them to interpret what they see and how it relates to the larger story. A picture is truly worth a thousand words and visualizing how we left Egypt can help you leap straight into the story in ways that words rarely can.
- 20 Prepare at least one idea to share in advance. The internet is a great resource and it will enhance the seder and your participation.
- 21 Ask participants (who are capable of it) to prepare a question or a thought relating to the seder. It's best to suggest or give them copies of Haggadah that the host feels will help them. (This achieves great prep for the seder and greater involvement during the seder.)

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DON'Ts

- 14 Don't start the Seder too hungry or tired. Eat lunch and rest the day of.
- 15 Don't be negative. Negativity is the antithesis of Jewish thought and belief. We must always accentuate the positive, especially at the seder celebration of our deliverance.
- 16 Don't have a seder that exceeds 50 people.
- 17 Don't talk too much.
- 18 Don't dwell on the usual seder attendees who are unable to come to your seder this year.
- 19 Don't simply read and translate the Haggadah. Act it. Sing it. Argue it. Bring in relevant current events.
- 20 Don't try to move the seder along, as a guest, if you feel it is taking too long. A lot of time and thought goes into seder preparation. Better to let your hosts know in advance you may leave early.
- 21 Don't expect participants to pay too much attention to the host or necessarily get along with all the guests. This is especially true for guests who are kids.

DOs

DON'Ts

- 22 Include everyone and read some key passages in English to make sure the story is told and understood.
- 23 Begin the seder with intention. Use name cards at the table so people know where to sit, put names on both sides of the seating card so that others can see the guest's name, and say up front as you begin that the Haggadah and everyone is a valuable participant even if they are not leading the seder, even if this is their first seder ever.
- 24 Tell everyone to eat in advance so they don't want to rush through the Haggadah. Invite non-family guests to encourage even your most cynical family member to be at their best.
- 25 Enjoy the Haggadah in your living room. Everyone can relax and recline on couches and comfy chairs and no one gets table fatigue. Only sit at the table for the meal and return to the living room to conclude the seder and sing on into the night.
- 26 Make the seder a sensory delight. Think how the words and rituals of the Haggadah can be augmented by activities that call on the five senses: have ready things to touch (a pail with mud and straw), smell (flowers that grow along the Nile, like lotus), hear (songs, of course!), see (photo books of ancient Egypt; books of Jewish art) and taste (charoset recipes from all over the world).
- 27 Open the bottles of wine ahead of time so they may breathe.
- 28 Include something exciting, new and engaging, like acting things out, a game, songs or jokes and riddles.
- 29 Prepare some open-ended questions that relate to the themes that most resonate with you. Take the time to talk them out (even if they are not in the Haggadah). I like to put questions in a bowl or under people's plates and periodically ask someone else to open up a new conversation.

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- 22 Don't complain. In 2020, we're truly blessed as a People; let's truly remember that we were once slaves and what that means.
- 23 Don't worry. There will be enough food. People will have an amazing experience. You got this. A teacher of mine always begins her seder by standing up and spilling red wine on the beautiful white table cloth. She wants to show everyone present that we are here to relax, to be free, to celebrate freedom. So don't cry over spilt wine, and don't worry.
- 24 Don't let the meal become the focus.
- 25 Don't overfeed your guests for dinner. It's late and everyone has had "appetizers" at the seder and already 2 cups of wine. Don't serve more than 3 courses and keep the food light.
- 26 Don't ask your guests to sit from Kaddesh to Nirtzah - come up with reasons to get up and move (clearing dishes doesn't count!).
- 27 Don't take too long to get to *Shulchan Orech*.
- 28 Don't speed through it. That clearly sends the message that this is a waste of time and not a meaningful activity. When you put effort into it, people know it's important. That's what they will remember.
- 29 Don't be a slave to your meal! I learned over the years to make food that won't get dried out if the conversation is rich and dinner is really late.

DOs

DON'Ts

30 Assign a fun question to every member at your seder 1 week in advance!

31 Be sure to "relationalize" your seder: Create opportunities for smaller groups or 1:1 conversations throughout the seder using prompts or *Chevruta* questions.

32 Ask participants in advance what they want to add to the seder in terms of an idea or question to ensure that each person feels included but not put on the spot. Also consider having challenge cards for people to take, with challenges on them to do during the seder (like 3 jumping jacks while singing the frog song).

33 Tell your children before the seder that some of their wonderful *Divrei Torah* can be said at lunch meals so that they know in advance that they will have a chance to share all they want to, just not all at once at the seder.

34 Serve a number of vegetables (just after eating the *karpas*) before you move on to *Yachatz*. It gives time to talk more about the first seder sections and gives guests a chance to get to know each other a bit.

35 Find ways to make the Seder meaningful and relevant to today. Take time to discuss and ask questions about how the words apply to us today.

36 One thing that we did for years was to have everyone prepare *Ma Nishtana* in a different language and to recite in that language. Our *Ma Nishtana* included not just Yiddish and German, but Mandarin, Polish, Swedish, Ukrainian, Creole, Vietnamese, and Hmong.

37 Have a list of conversation starters for the different parts of the seder. These questions should be based on what is going on in the seder, but be relevant to today and be provocative. For a sample list of questions you can see my article on aish.com: [CLICK FOR LINK.](#)

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30 Don't serve a lot of courses!

31 Don't focus so much on the food and ritual that you forget about the PEOPLE who will be at your table.

32 Don't forget to be present; do not spend so much time worrying about food that you miss the moments. Also, do not throw those squishy frogs on a white ceiling, because they stick... and then fall and leave a mark!

33 Don't mumble through the sections without a famous tune. Say those parts out loud with people taking turns reading in Hebrew or English.

34 Don't forget to make time well in advance to plan for the seder itself based on who will be participating. It's easy to get so focused on cleaning, turning around your house and cooking that crafting a meaningful seder takes a back seat.

35 Don't have too many guests. Put a limit on the guest list.

36 Don't put anyone on the spot by either insisting that they read a section or that they must contribute some thoughts. Everyone is a free person on Seder night and must be made to feel that way.

37 Don't *schlep* or get too bogged down in any one conversation. It drains your energy and makes the evening feel dragged out.

DOs

DON'Ts

38 Bring lots of small wind-up toys, fidget toys, and visual toys to include in the storytelling.

39 Use the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous Haggadah Supplement. It highlights the heroism of Melpomeni Gianopoulou, a rescuer from Greece, who the JFR reunited with two of those she rescued (and the descendants of all those she rescued) at a tear-jerking event in Israel this past November. [CLICK FOR LINK](#)

40 Encourage questions. Have a big bowl of candy for all the kids to see and announce: whoever asks a good question gets a candy. Ask people to dress for the period: Egypt 3500 years ago. Give everyone a copy of the **FREEDOM GAME**: [CLICK FOR LINK](#)

41 Insist that everyone sleep, or at least rest, in the afternoon as critical preparation for a meaningful, if long, evening.

42 Pick a personal story about resilience to share with the kids at your seder. Use Moving Tradition's 2020 seder supplement: [CLICK FOR LINK](#).

43 Leave plenty of room for thoughtful conversation.

44 Take 20-30 minutes the day before the seder to think about who your guests are, what their interests and personalities are, and who they should sit next to. The more comfortable everyone feels around the table, the more they'll get out of the seder.

45 The leader should wear some kind of costume or thought provoking outfit that piques the interest of the kids.

46 Use interactive toys for the *makkot*—ping-pong balls, Jell-O for blood, plastic frogs, etc.

47 Read through *Magid* at a reasonable pace as to avoid unhappy family members.

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38 Don't read the entire Haggadah with translation out loud.

40 Don't expect it to go smoothly and plan accordingly. The things people remember are the things that go wrong. Prepare for the mistakes and use them to show how to have fun when things don't work out.

41 Don't be tied to a language that you do not understand as you strive to transmit our history and heritage to the next generation.

43 Don't try to inhibit silliness. Take Judaism's wisdom and guidance seriously, but not yourself or your desire to have a certain kind of seder.

44 Don't just go around the table taking turns reading from the Haggadah. Have the leader plan out who will read and when; put some intention behind who is reading which part of the story, and why.

45 Don't lose sight of the goal of the evening – engaging the kids. Therefore, don't talk too much or too high above their level. It's not about how much you want to say, it's about how much they want to listen!

46 Don't think this is the time for "fantastically deep wisdom," as Rabbi Kelemer reminded. This is the time for simple telling of the story of Hashem's loving relationship and *Emunah*.

47 Don't drink the first two cups filled with strong red wine while you have an empty stomach.

DOs

- 48 Israeli Balagan, all kinds of Jewish music
- 49 Encourage guests to bring their own readings, or give guests a prompt in advance to sprinkle throughout the seder.
- 50 Have little candies or toys (and questions) to throw at the kids (or adults...) when their attention seems to be drifting.
- 51 Encourage your family to come in costumes, and hold your seder seated in a circle before going to the table for dinner.
- 52 Encourage questions; that's the point!
- 53 Send out assignments to each participant in advance! They should be light enough that they don't feel onerous, but meaningful enough that everyone spends some time learning and bringing something to contribute.

Yakir Englander

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DON'Ts

- 48 Don't wish to see only people like you.
- 49 Don't assume guests know all the lingo and choreography – explain but don't patronize!
- 50 Don't leave out the reading or song that somehow made its way into the rotation and has stayed a fixture for so many years. Even though everyone groans when you start it, people would miss it if you left it out!
- 52 Don't forget EVERY person has something to contribute.
- 53 Don't go through the entire Haggadah word for word.