

A number of years ago, on Erev Pesach in Chicago, my Mom and I were busily preparing to host seder when the power in my neighborhood suddenly went out. There were frantic calls to the utility company, harried texts with friends in other parts of town, and finally a decision – made with less than 30 minutes until Yom Tov (the holiday) started – to move seder to the home of some guests of ours about a mile away whose electricity, blessedly, had not been affected. We grabbed bubbling pots and pans off the stove and taped on lids for careful transport; across Wilmette my friends Joel and Laurie gamely pulled out dishes and rushed to set the table. It was all-hands on deck for a short, stressful, period of time until the seder began with its familiar comforts and rhythms. We all smiled at each other, took a breath, and agreed that this was the most unusual Passover we had ever experienced. It was also one of the most memorable!

Little did I know that just a few years later, all of us would experience a Pesach whose sense of chaos, disruption, and disappointment would so far eclipse what we experienced in Wilmette. Many of us spend all year looking forward to gathering with friends and family around the Pesach table; Passover is our favorite holiday, filled with special recipes, cherished traditions, and a palpable feeling of Judaism being passed from one generation to the next. On top of the incredible sadness that many of us feel in not being able to physically gather with loved ones this year, many of us will now be hosting seder for the first time with all the questions and challenges that brings. I hope that this email will provide some guidance and resources. I am also always available for consultation and support!

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### **Haggadot**

- [Haggadot.com](http://Haggadot.com) is also an incredible resource filled with make-your-own and ready-made versions of the haggadah including “Greatest Hits Haggadah,” “Seder for Young Children,” “A Haggadah for Justice,” “Comedy Seder,” and more.
- Kveller has a free, downloadable [haggadah](#) “for curious kids – and their grown ups.”
- My two favorite (print) *haggadot* are *A Different Night* by David Dishon and Noam Zion and *A Night to Remember* by Mishael and Noam Zion. Both can be purchased on Amazon and delivered in time for the holiday, including resources to help seder leaders plan in advance.

### **Seder Basics**

The Haggadah is not meant to be a script that is followed word for word but rather an anthology of resources that allows each leader to create a ritual of learning, telling, questioning, and reciting tailored to the ages, stages, personalities, and dispositions around the table. Here are some links that might be helpful in creating a basic outline for the evening:

[Kveller - How to Prepare a Seder \(hosting, food, and practical concerns\)](#)

[My Jewish Learning - How to Conduct a Seder \(order, ritual, figuring out the Jewish pieces\)](#)

[Congregation B'nai Jeshurun - For the Small or Solo Seder](#)

## **Seder Not So Basics – Rabbi Tucker’s 15 Ideas for Enhancing the Seder Ritual**

1. Creative Introductions: Ask each guest to come to seder with an object that represents freedom. Begin the seder by going around the table and sharing these selections.
2. Paper-bag Dramatics: Place paper-bags filled with a small number of random household objects underneath the chair of each guest (or each child). As the seder continues, the goal is to find a way to connect each item in the bag to something in the seder with creativity most certainly encouraged! (For example, one could pull out a paper fastener as the group starts to talk about *matzah* because this is the food that “binds our people together as Jews.”)
3. Assignments in Advance: Give each guest a small task or piece of preparation that s/he is to bring to seder in order to enhance the ritual. For small children, this could be as easy as drawing a picture or practicing a song; for older children, preparing a short skit (or rap or haiku) or researching a modern day freedom-fighter to which we might dedicate one of the cups of wine. Adults can also be given homework in advance, ideally assignments which connect to their particular areas of interest or expertise (i.e. a history professor could be asked to research archeological/other evidence that exists regarding the events in Egypt whereas a feminist could be asked to come up with ways to incorporate women’s voices into the seder ritual).
4. Tweeting the Exodus: Send the following [video](#) to participants before seder night. Encourage each guest to write (and bring with them) the story of the Exodus in 140 characters or less.
5. Food, Glorious Food: Extend the *karpas* (green vegetable/appetizer) course by having lots of hors d’oeuvres out on the table during the first part of the seder so that participants don’t get hungry (or hangry).
6. Mad Libs (this idea is courtesy of the Feldstein family of Princeton): In advance of the seder put together a Mad Libs style version of the Exodus story, strategically removing key nouns, adjectives, and verbs from the narrative and asking guests to supply such words. On seder night, read the story complete with the participants’ substitutions – much humor will ensue!
7. Pesach Jeopardy: Check out the following [website](#) which contains Jeopardy style questions and answers that can be printed in advance and used to inject the seder with a little friendly competition.
8. Chad Gadya (this idea is courtesy of the Feldman family of Princeton): Assign each guest a particular verse (and character) of the song Chad Gadya. As the group comes to that line, the guest is responsible for making a sound that corresponds to his/her character. For extra fun, purchase (or make) masks that also correspond to each character and have guests wear them during the song.
9. Multiple Haggadot: In addition to the haggadot that you, as a group, are using, have copies of other books on the table and encourage guests to use/peruse them at will. Invite participants to share interesting tidbits that they find and especially places in which different haggadot seem to have different approaches to a particular element of the seder.
10. Order of the Seder: Find a creative way of depicting the 15 different steps of the seder ritual and marking one’s progress through them. My professor, Rabbi Steve Brown, designed 15 different baseball caps that he would successively pile on top of his head. Others have used bookmarks, flip charts, hand-motions or other methods to indicate one’s movement through these different stages.

11. Inject Some Humor: Is it too soon to laugh about the particular challenges of the day? Check out the Forward's [list](#) of favorite Jewish COVID-19 memes, many of them having to do with Passover, to be printed out and read aloud at seder.

12. Afikoman Scavenger Hunt: Rather than simply hiding the afikoman, design a scavenger hunt for children that eventually leads them to this piece of hidden matzah. Bonus points for using clues that come from the Bible such as "Lot's wife looked back and she thereupon turned into a pillar of salt" (near the salt shaker), or "The altar of burnt offering, its copper grating, its poles and furnishings..." (next to the oven). Extra, extra bonus points for having children decide together on a charity to which they would like to donate in lieu of (or in addition to) receiving a gift for finding the afikoman, extending the haggadah's message of social justice into our day.

13. My Most Memorable Pesach Ever: Have guests - especially older ones - share the most unique or memorable Passover seder that they ever experienced (besides this one).

14. Include Voices from Afar (this idea is courtesy of TIC's own Pavane-Kenter family): In advance of the holiday, ask friends and family to send a photo along with a few sentences about what they've been thinking of while moving towards Pesach this year. Then, on seder night, include these words and pictures as a way of welcoming others not physically present.

15. Share it Out: Post your best seder hosting ideas on Facebook or in our TIC What'sApp group, let me know what you've tried and how it worked, crowd-source friends for their ideas. We're all in this together!

### **"Live" Resources**

#### **Preparing Your Kitchen for Passover: A How-to-Webinar**

*Monday, March 30, 12:00-1:00 pm*

Are you having Passover at home for the first time? Or do you simply need a refresher? In this webinar, JTS's Rabbi Marcus Mordecai Schwartz will demystify the process and review everything you need to know to make your home kitchen kosher for Passover. Time will be allotted for a Q & A, so please bring your questions or submit them in advance. (Note: This is not a TIC but rather a community program, co-sponsored by JTS and the Rabbinical Assembly.)

Register [here](#).

#### **Virtual Seder Webinar**

*Tuesday, March 21, 1:00-2:00 pm*

Being confined to our homes brings with it a special kind of challenge for tens of thousands of Jews all over the world: how to actually lead a seder and where to find resources online. In this highly accessible webinar, attendees will learn how to use online resources to customize their family or community's seder. (Note: This is not a TIC but rather a community program being led by Hazzan Sheldon Levin and Hazzan Marcey Wagner, sponsored by the Rabbinical Assembly.)

[Zoom link](#) here.

#### **Parent (and Grandparent) Class: Leading a Child-Friendly Seder**

*Thursday, April 2, 9:00-9:45 pm*

Join me for a workshop designed to share ideas and resources on creating engaging, fun, and interactive seder experiences for children.

<https://zoom.us/j/921831346>

**TIC Community Mock Seder**

*Sunday, April 5, 5:00-5:45 pm*

Kick off Passover as a congregation as we join with our shul family! Plus, take ideas back home that you can use around your own personal seder table.

<https://zoom.us/j/774721951>

**Art of the Four Children**

*Tuesday, March 31, 4:00-4:30 pm (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> edition) and 4:30-5:00 pm (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> edition)*

Ok, this one is technically for teens but maybe they'll be willing to share what they've learned and created.

<https://zoom.us/j/718715999>

That night in Chicago many years ago we joked that our ancestors left Egypt *b'hipazon* – quickly, with little time to prepare – much as we had done with our own seder that evening. And this year I find myself thinking that perhaps we are a bit more attuned to the blessings of freedom, living, as we are, under conditions of such supremely restricted movement and assembly. To be sure, Pesach will feel so very different this year and we enter the holiday with a bit of maror's bitter taste on our tongues. We hold back our salt water tears.

Still, I hope that we can find what to celebrate this Passover – the blessing of family and friends, even those from whom we're physically apart; the blessing of technology that allows us to connect in unexpected new ways. We might feel grateful for the blessing of good health, at a time when so many are suffering; the blessing of community, when so many feel alone; the blessing of being part of an ancient tradition that constantly reshapes itself to fit the ever-changing realities of the moment.

As you prepare for Pesach, please know that our clergy team is here to be of help in any way that we can! We remain TIC – together in community.

Shabbat Shalom and an early *Chag Sameach* (Happy Holidays),  
Rabbi Annie Tucker