

Bringing the Hostages to Your Seder

Facilitator Guide

How might we integrate hope for the return of our hostages into our Seders this year? How might we meaningfully engage an intergenerational group with the hostage issue at the Seder table?

Info For Facilitator

 This resource is designed to supplement your Seder, and is adaptable depending on the generational makeup and needs of your participants. The activity is interwoven with the rituals of the Seder, and requires only the ritual items typically used at the Seder, plus some peas in a pod or carob, and several mason jars (or other storage containers).



Target Audience:

All ages, intergenerational



Length Of Program:

Based on your guests, you can choose how many elements to include throughout your Seder and how long to focus on each one.



Materials & Prep:

Copies of the Seder Supplement for each participant

List of Ritual Items:

- *Karpas* (parsley, or another dipping vegetable/herb) and salt water
- *Zeroa* (shankbone)
- *Maror* (bitter herbs)
- *Hazeret* (horseradish) and *haroset* (sweet, sticky mixture)
- *Beitzah* (egg)
- *Afikoman* (matzah)
- Elijah's cup (wine)

- *Tarmilim* (pods) You can use whole carobs or any other food that comes in pods (though remember that many of these, such as peas and green beans, are *kitniyot*, not eaten on Pesah in traditional Ashkenazi practice)

Seder Leader Preparation:

- You may want to place each item in a jar or other container, both for hygiene reasons and as a symbolic representation that the item is being placed in captivity.
- For each element of the Seder, arrange ahead of time for the relevant ritual items to be hidden, for the corresponding stage of the Seder (see Seder Supplement). You should only hide the next set of items after the previous ones have been found and used, so that nobody finds Elijah's cup while searching for the *maror*!

According to the generational makeup and needs of your Seder, decide for yourself the order in which each of these steps should take place:

- The relevant ritual items are found and redeemed/returned to the Seder table
- Participants recite the *kavanah* (intention) associated with these items
- Participants reflect on the discussion prompt
- The ritual items are used to fulfill our obligation at the Seder

Additional Resources:

Seder Supplement Booklet

ORDER HAGGADAH & SUPPORT THE HOSTAGE FAMILIES

In addition to this resource, the Hostages and Missing Families Forum has created an original Haggadah, which includes the complete text of the Haggadah and is embedded with messages of hope and inspiration by Israeli spiritual and cultural leaders. Support the campaign by ordering copies of this Haggadah to be shipped to your home.

[ORDER IN THE US & CANADA HERE](#)

[ORDER IN ISRAEL HERE](#)

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Pesah celebrates the quintessential moment of Jewish redemption, the Exodus from Egypt, which has informed Jewish responses to moments of collective suffering throughout Jewish history. As such, there is no more appropriate moment to acknowledge and respond to the suffering of our brethren in captivity in Gaza than during our retelling of the Exodus narrative.

The mitzvah of *pidyon shvuyim*—redeeming captives—is a Jewish obligation... in the same category as the Jewish obligations that we fulfill each year at our Seders: eating *matzah* and *maror*, recounting the Exodus from Egypt, and singing God's praises. This resource offers a practical, adaptable activity to help Seder participants of all ages to make connections between the obligations of Pesah and our collective obligation to redeem our captives.

In this activity, not only the *afikoman*, but several ritual items needed to fulfill our obligations at the Seder, are in turn hidden, discovered, and redeemed. The jarring image of the empty Seder plate at the center of our holiday table serves to highlight the plight of the captives who are jarringly absent from their families' Seder tables this year. The return of each set of ritual items is accompanied by intentions and prompts for thoughtful reflection that connect Pesah's story and rituals to the plight of the hostages, and the gradual replenishing of the Seder plate embodies our deep longing for their redemption.

LET'S EXPLORE

As the American-Israeli poet Marty Herskovitz thought about the upcoming Passover holiday, the prospect of singing "Dayenu" at the first seder since his country was attacked didn't sit right with him. The classic Passover song, whose title means "It would have been enough," expresses gratitude about how much God has done for the Jewish people. But Herskovitz, the son of a Holocaust survivor who has lived in Israel since 1986, thought the words would ring hollow at a time when so many Jews are at risk.

"We have to take the text and find a way to make it relevant and not just say the words that seem so impossible to say," Herskovitz told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "'Dayenu, it's enough.' It's clearly not enough. As long as people are trapped in Gaza, that's not enough. As long as our soldiers are still risking their lives, it's not enough. We can't say 'Dayenu.' It can't be, you know, 'Praise God for this situation.' So we have to find new texts."

[Extract from Can Jews sing 'Dayenu' while there are hostages? The Passover seder gets a post-Oct. 7 rethink. - Jewish Telegraphic Agency](#)

While the text of the Passover Haggadah is perhaps well-established, the Seder itself has a rich tradition of extreme makeovers. Year after year, we approach these familiar texts with fresh eyes and new perspectives, reading into the ancient Exodus story our own journeys of redemption. But only occasionally, perhaps once in a generation, do we arrive at the Seder while so many of our brethren find themselves in great danger and in urgent need of redemption.

How can we celebrate our own freedom at such a time? Only by taking every opportunity to remind ourselves of the freedom denied to our captives, beseeching one another—and God—to heed their plight and take action toward their redemption.

At a typical Seder, the *afikoman*—a broken piece of *matzah*—is hidden away by the leader and later found and redeemed (i.e. restored to its proper place). In some traditions, children would ransom the *afikoman* in return for a prize, since without the *afikoman*—which is the last thing we eat at the Seder—the Seder cannot continue. **Expanding on this practice, we invite you to hide, find, and redeem other ritual items necessary to complete the Seder, while each time recalling our obligation and hope to redeem our captives.**

These intentions and discussions, like the Seder itself, will take us on a journey from the pain and destruction of October 7, to our intense hope for the redemption of those still in captivity.

TAKE ACTION!

It might be excessive to hide and redeem the middle *matzah* before it is broken, only then to hide the larger piece—the *afikoman*—a second time. Consider nonetheless taking a moment to infuse the moment of breaking—*Yahatz*—with a reflection on breaking and brokenness, following in the tradition of feminist Haggadot that understand *Yahatz* as a call to break the shackles of patriarchal systems that restrain women and other groups.

Before breaking the middle *matzah*, consider facilitating a discussion using one of the prompts below:

- Was there a moment on or since October 7 in which you felt entirely broken?
- Is there a belief that you held before October 7 that you can no longer believe?
- How can we raise up the voices of those women who suffered repugnant and inhumane treatment at the hands of Gazan militants on October 7 and in their captivity in Gaza?

CLOSING INTENTION

In addition to those familiar ritual items seen year after year at the Seder, we suggest incorporating an extra ritual item, *tarmilim* (pods), representing the captives held in tunnels under Gaza. For *tarmilim*, you can use whole carobs or any other food that comes in pods. The symbolic acts of redeeming and then physically opening the *tarmilim* to release the seeds at Nirtzah emphasizes the importance of concluding the Seder with our collective hope, this year, for the speedy redemption of the hostages.

Next year, in Jerusalem, may we celebrate Pesah in a world redeemed!

לשנה הבאה, בירושלים הבנויה, בעולם של גאולה שלימה!

