

# Running a Virtual Seder

In this time of Coronavirus (Covid19), concern over the health of attendees, who are often of an age which contracting the virus may pose significant health issues.... we have to adapt

**In short, we've been afflicted by another plague!**

## Note

There is no **right** or **wrong** way to do a ‘virtual Seder’ since we’ve never had the ability and the need to do such. Most Jewish ritual/observance developed over significant periods of time (*3-4 weeks are not considered significant periods of time*). And **your family** and ideas are what are important.

**Thus, your ideas are welcomed, encouraged, and appreciated!**

*Make the Seder your own this year. One of the main challenges of a Seder leader is usually to ensure that everyone at the table remains engaged and participates in the ritual. This year we are mostly free from that burden. You have the rare chance to engage in the Seder in the way that works for you. There is no shame or anxiety about what works for others. Do you have a family that usually reads only in English, and you wish they would slow down and wait for you to read the Hebrew? Now is your chance. Does your family skip sections you wish they would include? You can read everything. Does your family read through the seder liturgy quickly in Hebrew without stopping to translate or discuss? Now is your chance to move as slowly as you want. Stop and read from multiple Haggadot. Sing all the songs. Use this opportunity to experiment and do something you've never done.*

*Rabbi Avi Killip at [ejewishphilanthropy.com](http://ejewishphilanthropy.com)*

Early on March 25, 2020, an article held that an a group of Israeli rabbis had ruled that a Virtual Seder with Zoom was halakhicly acceptable. Within hours of this ruling, Haredi authorities condemned the decision. Read the on-line article here.

*[Warning! Things change quickly.]*



אגוד חכמי הנהגים בא"י

**שאלה**

נשאלנו על ידי יהודי תלמיד חכם, האם ניתן להפעיל חובנת זום בגיל הסדר, המתברת בין זקנים ובני משפחותיהם, אשר אינם יכולים לשהות במחיצתם, עקב הפצת הנגיף. על מנת שיוכלו לעשות את הסדר בצוותא דרך המסך.

מסק אחד נמצא בבית התקן ומסק אחר בבית המשפחה, והם מתחברים יחד בראיה ובדיבור ושמע. התוכנה והמחשב מופעלים מערב החג ואין צורך לעשות דבר ביום טוב. השאלה היא, האם למרץ עשיית הסדר אפשר להשתמש בתוכנה זו כהיתר לשעת חרום בלבד.

**תשובה**

ג' בעשית מרכזית קיימות בשאלה זאת.

א. המעלת המכשיר ביום טוב.

ב. עובדין דחול.

ג. חשש שיבואו להשתמש בהיתר בזה בימים טובים שלא למרץ זה.

א. באשר להיתר הדלקת חשמל ביום טוב, ידוע כי חלוקים בו חכמי ישראל הספרדים וחכמי צפון אפריקה, רובם ככולם מתירים נהגם הראשון לציון הרב בן ציון עובדין, הרב רפאל בן שמעון, הרבנים יוסף ושלום משאש, הרב משה מלכה והרב דוד שלוש זצ"ל ועוד. והרבה מחכמי אשכנז ואוסרים (מדרבנן).

ברם, בעניינם אין צורך להפעיל את המכשיר, כי הוא מופעל בערב חג. רק שיש חשש שמא יבכה ודליק אותו. ובחשש זה נראה דאפשר לסמוך על המתירים לכתחילה.

ב. אשר לשאלה של עובדין דחול והפיקת החג לחול, נראה שאפשר להקל למרץ מצוה, כשם שהתירו שבות דשבות במקום מצוה, וכשם שהתירו למדוד מקוה ביום טוב למרץ מצוה.

ג. אשר לחשש שיבואו להשתמש בזה בימים טובים אחרים שלא למרץ זה, בחר לכולם שכל ההיתר הוא לשעת חרום בלבד. מה גם שחג הפסח הוא חג מיוחד, ובפרט ליל ההגדה שכולם רואים בו ארוע מיוחד שהוא ברית בין ה' לישראל. עוד נראה, שרבים מבני ישראל הנהגרים, אילולי הקשר שלהם עם הסבא והסבתא, אפשר שכלל לא יסבו לשלחן הסדר, ורק הקשר עם הסבא, יגורם להם להשתתף במצות ההגדה ואכילת מצה. ובדור זה חשוב מאוד ענין השבת לב הבעים אל אבותם.

זאת ועוד, ענין נוסף יש בזה, והוא המרץ להסיר עצב מן המתגוררים והזקנים, לתת להם מוטיבציה להמשיך להאבק על חייהם, ולמנוע מהם דבאן ורפיון נפשי, אשר יכיל להביא אותם להתייאש מן החיים.

על כן נראה לנו להיתר, תוך הדגשה שזה רק למצב חרום, ורק לצורך ליל הסדר תש"פ ולמי ששוקק לה. וכשם שמתירים בשבת, רפואה לחולה, שאינו מסוכן, על מנת לרפא ממחלתו כך זה.

**יתקיים בנו הפסוק והסידור מולה מקרבך.**

עול זה באנו על החתום

הרב יהודה שלוש רב שכונת מנחת מנצח	הרב אליהו אברול האג"ד ירושלים	הרב שלמה בן חמו רב העיר קרית גת	הרב משה אלאחר רב העיר שלמי
הרב דוד זנז רב מושב שלווה	הרב רפאל דלויז רב בי"ב אוהל יצחק	הרב אהרון בן ראש המרכז החינוכי הספרדי	הרב איל ודר ר"מ במכון מאיר
הרב יוסף בן חמו רב בי"ב שנת אחים	הרב ד"ר דורון דגני בית מועצת י"ד	הרב משה מסיסה חברי ספרי שערות אבות	הרב דוד לנקרי רב בי"ב שמש"ש ומנ

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/277764>

**This presentation assumes the following:**

- The family and guests have some technical skills, they have a computer / tablet, and can download / install an application and then launch it from the link provided with your email to them.
- They don't expect you to provide all the foods, special or otherwise, which is part of the Seder experience (they'll need to do some preparation).
- Depending on the length of the Seder you want, you'll need a Zoom account
  - The FREE account allows for a 40 minute Seder.
  - The Monthly (\$14.99 a month) allows for the Seder to last as long into the night as you wish.

**Zoom**, the program I'm suggesting to use, allows for a up to 100 participants.

- Go to [www.Zoom.us](http://www.Zoom.us). [If you type in Zoom.com, it will take you to Zoom.us.]
- Zoom is the platform used by the FJMC, many of its Regions, and lots of businesses. (*My son has an account, which we'll use for our Virtual Seders.*)
- Zoom, as opposed to Facetime and Skype (or other similar programs) gives you a full screen of faces on your laptop/tablet screen, which is a larger monitor and more enjoyable an experience.
- Even if you have to pay for a month to get the unlimited service, from the likely money you'll save on food, the month fee of \$14.99 will be small.

## Using the free Zoom

- Even if limited to 40 minutes, you can set up multiple 2-3 40 minute sessions. Somewhat awkward, but doable.
- While Zoom claims that the 40 minutes begins when the first person signs on to the link, one of our Past International Presidents used the free app and was able to have a longer than 40 minute session with multiple parties.

## Structure of the Service

- Since the participants may have to download software when they click your Seder link (prior to the Seder), the sooner you get your invite out, with the link, the better.
- This one is real easy. The Haggadah of your choice is what you will use..... However
- Since everyone isn't coming to your house, mailing copies to them doesn't seem like a great option.



## Options:

**Everyone uses a different Haggadah (whatever one they have at home.** Readings, although slightly different, will lead to interesting discussion by the participants. AND, the different Haggadot have different illustrations, and the technology allows for sharing these illustrations with all

**Maxwell House Haggadah.** Ask them to pick up a copy – in advance of the Seder - at their local grocery store which carries Maxwell House. For the most part, stores are more than willing to give them to people, since after Pesach they throw them out.

**Sixty Minute Seder** – downloadable. My family has been using for more than 5 years, as it provides the basic structure, and which we supplement with additional readings.

**Create Your Own** – with the basic structure in mind, ask attendees to find a reading / original take on a section which they'll share during the night.

## Creating Your Own

- This doesn't stop you from sending a reading to a guest.
- Scan it, might be a pdf and describe, with detailed specifics, what you want them to do.
- Realize, that since this 'Virtual Seder' is new to everyone at your Seder, you're likely to get a lot of 'slack' in leading such an experience.
- And, if your Seder adds a bunch of levity to the situation, it will be most appreciated, since.....
- Many of us will have been self-quarantined for **two or more weeks.**

## Sites to Download versions (free to use, not copyright protected for home use)

- [www.jewbelong.com/Passover](http://www.jewbelong.com/Passover)                      [www.mezuzahstore.com](http://www.mezuzahstore.com)
- [www.afikimfoundation.org](http://www.afikimfoundation.org)
- [www.haggadot.com/Passover-seder](http://www.haggadot.com/Passover-seder)
- [www.Chabad.org](http://www.Chabad.org)
- [www.jewishboston.com](http://www.jewishboston.com)                      Just search 'download Passover Haggadah'
- [www.jewishmag.com](http://www.jewishmag.com)
- [\*A Different Night classic edition.\*](#) The Family Participation Haggadah
- [\*A Different Night compact edition.\*](#) *A smaller version, including most but not all of what made the original\_a success*
- [\*Night to Remember.\*](#) The Haggadah of Contemporary Voices

\*Special Thanks to Greg Gore, Past Regional President, Seaboard Region, who kept bombarding me with additional sources of information, which required me to modify this presentation.

## While we hope that all of our family & friends will be fully invested in this Seder....

- ‘some’ may not be as involved, and we have to get and keep their attention.
- The International Kiddush Club, a fun group of FJMCers who have raised tens of thousands of dollars to help distribute tefillin and other religious items around the world in less prosperous Jewish communities has invented.....

### ***Passover Bingo***

- Which is downloaded at <https://kiddushclub.org/pesach-bingo.php>
- There are 13 cards, so each ‘family’ can have a unique card, and as they pay attention to the service, maybe they’ll also become winners during the holiday!

*Due recognition should be given to Stan Greenspan, one of the two co-founders of the IKC. The site also has a long list of Kosher for Passover Spirits, if one of your guests wants to consume a drink of a Passover approved beverage.*

- **The Four Cups of Wine** —easy enough, as each household has to supply it's own liquid libation (and you don't have to worry about the hechsher.)
- **The Seder Plate** — they can be creative as well
  - **Egg.** Everyone should have one in their kitchen.
  - **Parsley** — Yes, they can substitute a different green vegetable.
  - **Shankbone** — we often have 25+ guest for the first night – all wife's family, and four (4) Seder plates. In lieu of 4 shankbones, I have a shankbone link on some of the plates, [www.shankbone.org/USA/MD/ResnickFamily](http://www.shankbone.org/USA/MD/ResnickFamily). RA has indicated that a roasted beet and rice can be substituted for the shankbone and egg
  - **Charoset** - nothing will substitute for the taste of a traditional nut, fruit and spice mixture, but they can put a little almond butter w/pinch of cinnamon or nutmeg if they are unwilling to make some for their meal.

Suggest some creative ways that they can make charoset, beyond the traditional Ashkenazi variety of copped apple, cinnamon, wine, and walnuts. For ideas of different charoset.....

Tune in to my webinar about Charoset

**Thursday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>**

**8:30 pm**

**(link will be on FJMC website)**

- **The Seder Plate** continued.

- Chrain / Maror / Bitter Herb – sprinkle some hot sauce onto a piece of celery or other vegetable. RA has indicated any vegetable or fruit that brings a tear to the eye will do, including hot peppers, fresh ginger, mustard greens or raw lemon. In Israel, romaine lettuce it used.
- Elijah (or other cup of wine) -

Depending on the creativity of your guests, ask them to be creative, and when you're describing the items of the Seder plate, ask them what they used.

[Reference Jewish Food in America, Joan Nathan, 1994. Passover in Camp: A reminiscence of the Civil War. And Matzah On Both Sides of the Conflict, pp 391-392.]

## Some 'singing' suggestions during your Virtual Seder

- If your family sings Chad Gadya, is to voice out the different verses by different participants.
- There are lots of humorous songs which have taken well know tunes and put Passover Related lyrics to them.
  - <http://www.templerodefshalom.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Sedersongs2012-all.pdf>
  - <https://www.heyalma.com/a-definitive-ranking-of-passover-parody-songs/> (site has videos which might be used)
  - <http://kosher4passover.com/passover-song-parodies.htm>
  - <https://www.humortimes.com/67005/passover-parody-songs/>
  - <https://jr.co.il/humor/pass01.txt>
  - [www.passoversongparodies.com](http://www.passoversongparodies.com).
  - [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=maccabeats+passover](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=maccabeats+passover) The Maccabeats have done a number of Passover melodies, and this search finds them.

As with any video which you might use from the internet, make sure the video is appropriate for the audience, and if possible, there are a number of programs which would allow you to download such to your computer so that playback is better. After Pesach, you can erase them.



## The Meal

- To the extent possible, and if you feel comfortable, send **recipes for some of your family signature dishes** for Pesach, with your invite or shortly thereafter, so if participants are willing to cook, they have time to get the ingredients and cook.

- **Encourage participation.** Particularly, if some of the family are young, you'll want to involve them in what, hopefully, will be a once in a lifetime experience.
  - Passover Songs, whether actually part of the traditional Seder experience or some of the song parodies which others have created.
  - Telling the plagues (add the 11<sup>th</sup> of today, Covid19 aka Coronavirus)
  - Favorite Passover memory
  - Favorite Passover food
  - Most memorable Passover Seder
  - The importance of making memories
  - Favorite part of the Passover Seder
  - Etc
  - Etc.

## Part of the Problem with Bandwidth & Other Issues

- Although a virtual Seder is a wonderful opportunity during these difficult days, there is the problem of 'bandwidth' - how much information, both audio and video - can be squeezed through your internet connection.
  - The problems bandwidth causes, delays / hesitations / drop off of audio or video is similar to the problems that our Ancestors had while leaving from their departure from Egypt until we got to the Promised land. You might want to make reference to same if you experience such issue during your Seder.
- If people are going to use a cell phone, suggest that they turn it so it is landscape mode, so more visual can be seen.
- If people use a laptop, turn it so that it displays not toward yourself, but to more of the people who will be participating (unless everyone has a laptop/tablet to use during the VS (Virtual Seder)).

## Finding the Afikoman

- Whether that takes the form of an internet word search or a Where's Waldo?-style picture or a Wikipedia hunt, it will be a snap to Venmo the prize to the finder.
- I'm working on a WordSearch puzzle which I'm more than willing to share, which contains many Pesach related terms, including 'Afikoman.' Another Passover WordSearch is also enclosed, provided by a generous participant of the first presentation.
- One suggestion during the first presentation of this topic was creating a folder in Google Drive, and add dozens, if not hundreds of images, only ONE of which is a piece of matzah, and have the younger members of the participants, try to find the 'Afikoman.' There are literally dozens/hundreds of both Passover related and Jewish interest photos. Copyright protection only is relevant if you're using a photo in a public setting

## ***Ron Wolfson's suggestions for a Virtual Seder:***

- 1. Prepare***
- 2. Give Homework***
- 3. Tell the Story***
- 4. Ask Questions***
- 5. Innovate***
- 6. Have Fun***
- 7. Afikoman Gifts***
- 8. Be Inclusive***
- 9. Make Changes: It's Your Story***
- 10. Wash Your Hands***

*Ron Wolfson has been a friend and contributor to the FJMC for many years. You'll receive a full copy of his suggestions in the email I send to you.*

Send me an email (subject: Virtual Seder), and I'll send you everything I have, including a copy of this presentation (so if you forget something you wanted to remember, you'll have it).

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