Such a Different Passover!
Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal

How different is this Passover from so many other Passovers!

On other Passover nights we have gathered with family and friends for seder; on this Passover, our gathering is smaller.

On other Passover nights we celebrated our freedom; on this Passover, we are restricted in our movements.

On other Passover nights, we drew the stranger close; on this Passover we are wary.

On other Passover nights, we celebrated past salvation and optimism about the future; on this Passover, we are fearful in the present and anxious about our future.

How different is this Passover from so many other Passovers!

But Passover is our holiday that celebrates hope and transformation.

Regarding the matzah, we say, “This is the bread of our affliction, which our ancestors ate in the land of Mitzrayim.” The word “Mitzrayim” means “confined places.”

We are in this moment, in the confined and narrow space of “Mitzrayim.”

But we also say, “Now we are here in Mitzrayim. Next year we will be in the land of Israel. Now we are enslaved. Next year we will be free.”

Recalling past liberation pushes us towards hope, an expectation of future redemption.

Our physical separation from friends, loved ones, and our community is our way of joining together spiritually with the rest of the world for pikuah nefesh, to preserve life.

How different is this Passover from so many other Passovers! May it lead to many happy celebrations in the years to come. “Next Year in Jerusalem!”
Finding Miracles in Hidden Places
Rabbi Mark Greenspan

A commentary on the Haggadah by Rabbi Naftali ben Shimon Hertz Ginzburg (Poland, end of the 17th Century)

Why was it necessary to tell us that one must make a blessing on the karpas boray peri ha’adamah, since we are obligated to make a blessing on any food which we consume? The reason is based on a principle of Halakha: for anything which would normally be improved through cooking, we say the sh’hakol blessing when it is uncooked and the appropriate blessing in this case ha’adamah when it is cooked. Based on this, the Maharil wonders why, if one uses parsley for the karpas, one would say boray peri ha’adamah? There is a great lesson to be learned from the fact that we say this blessing even though it is not necessary to recite this blessing under these circumstances.

This is an allusion to a Midrash (BT, Sotah 11b): when the Israelite women gave birth in the fields and the Egyptian soldiers would come to kill the children, the ground would swallow up the infants. The Egyptians would then bring oxen to plow up the ground in order to find them. After they left, they broke through the ground and sprouted up like weeds, as it says “I caused thee to multiply as the plants of the field.” (Ez. 16:7) In order to remember this great miracle, we eat greens and recite the blessing boray peri ha’adamah even though it is not necessary to recite this blessing under these circumstances.

1. How do we traditionally explain karpas at the Seder? How does Rabbi Ginzburg tie this symbol into the story of Passover?
2. The Midrash borrowed from the Talmud is fanciful at best. Why offer such a strange explanation for this common symbol? What does it add to the story of the Exodus?
3. In these trying times, how can we find signs of God’s presence in the face of illness and suffering?
4. In what way is karpas a symbol of hope? (Text and Translations from Sefaria.org)
Transforming Loneliness with Questions
Rabbi Mark Greenspan

It is hard to imagine Passover celebrated without family and friends around us. Yet many of us might find ourselves alone tonight or at a very small Seder. Questions and conversation are such an important part of this observance; how do we tell the story without others?

It’s been said that the four questions aren’t really four questions; in fact they aren’t really questions. They are template that are meant to inspire us to ask other questions that will inspire a serious discussion. The following sources might allow us to explore the role of the so called four questions and how we might use them differently as we celebrate Passover alone or few in numbers.

1. MISHNAH PESACHIM 10:4

They mixed him a second cup, and here the son questions his father. If the son lacks the intelligence to ask, his father instructs him: How different is this night from all other nights! On all other nights...

a. According to the Mishnah who is supposed to recite Mah Nishtanah at the Seder? What purpose does this statement serve? Why is it so important to “ask questions” at the Passover Seder?

b. What questions is it important for us to ask ourselves and others this year?

2. TALMUD PESACHIM 116A

The Sages taught: If one’s child is capable and knows how to inquire, the child may ask the parent. If the child is not capable, one’s spouse may ask. And if one’s spouse is not capable of asking or if one doesn’t have a spouse, one should ask oneself. Even if two scholars who know the laws of Passover are sitting together and there is no one else present to pose the questions, they may ask each other.

a. What does it mean to “ask questions” when one is celebrating the Seder alone or with a small gathering? What questions might we ask this year to start off the Seder?

b. How is a does a virtual Seder feel different from a personal Seder? Do you think that a virtual Seder will discourage or encourage conversation and questions? Why?
3. SHULCHAN ARUCH, ORECH CHAIM 473:7

We pour for him the second cup, so that the children will ask why we drink the second cup before the meal. If the son has no wisdom, the father teaches him. If he has no son, his wife should ask him. If he does not even have a wife, he should ask himself. Even scholars should ask each other “what is different,” etc. (And when the son or the wife asks, there is no need to say “what is different,” but they may begin from “We were slaves.” Maharil)

a. According to the Shulkhan Arukh, pouring the second cup of wine is a way of getting people to ask questions to start off the Seder. How might we inspire others or ourselves to ask questions on Passover night?

b. Note that the Maharil states that it is unnecessary to recite the Mah Nishtanah as long as someone has asked a question at the beginning of the Seder. Formulate some questions that you would like to ask on this night of remembrance and celebration?


Arkady Tsurkov had received a package of matzah from home. He divided it into two parts, and for a long time sought an opportunity to send it to me and another Jewish zek.1 “I don’t need it,” he said. “After all, I’m going to be released.” But instead of release he earned another two years of camp, and he greeted Passover, the holiday of freedom, somewhere far away, among criminals. And now, I too, at the last moment had lost the opportunity to use Arkasha’s matzah, which I received from a zek who was transferred to my cell. Well, so what? The salted sprats would be my maror, the bitter herb, and for the charoset, the sweet mixture of nuts, apples, and wine, I would use my cup of hot water. What could be sweeter in the punishment cell?

I tried to recall everything I could from the Passover Haggadah, starting with my favorite lines: “In every generation a person should feel as though he, personally, went out of Egypt” and “Today we are slaves, tomorrow we shall be free men. Today we are here; tomorrow in Jerusalem.” The thaw was over, the future was fraught with new tribulations, and I hurried to steel myself with the words of the Haggadah.

a. Natan Sharansky describes how he celebrated Passover in the loneliness of a Soviet prison. What questions would you like to ask him if he was at your Passover table?

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1The Shulkhan Arukh was authored by Joseph Karo and published in 1565. The gloss that was added to the text (in italics) is from Rabbi Yaakov ben Moshe Levi Moelin, 1365 -1427 a Talmudist and Halachic authority best known for his codification of the minhagim of the German Jews

2A term for a prisoner at a Russian prison, especially (historical) at a Soviet labor camp.
Reflections on the *Ha Lahma Anya* in a Year of Plague

Rabbi Martin S. Cohen

Sometimes the familiarity we bring to the best-known passages of our sacred texts masks their best lessons. A good example of that phenomenon has to do with one of the best-known passages in the Haggadah, the one that opens the long *Magid* section in which *seder*-meal participants fulfill the mitzvah of telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt.

The setting will be well-known to almost all. The leader uncovers the *matzot*, lifts the plate, and recites words we’ve all heard a thousand times. “This is the bread of affliction. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Next year in Jerusalem.” Most seder-regulars can easily recite the words from memory. At some tables, they are sung aloud, which only makes it easier to remember them from year to year.

But hiding behind the words are all sorts of riddles and puzzles, of which one is particularly relevant to this year of plague through which we are all living.

The invitation to the hungry to come and join in the feast is suggestive of the natural sense of hospitality that Jewish people bring easily to the celebration of Jewish holidays. But there is a problem here, and it has to do with the second part of that invitation, the part that reads *kol di-tz’rikh yeitei v’yifsah*. Often mistranslated as “Let all who are in need come and celebrate Passover with us,” the words go back to the ancient obligation to consume the meat of the *korban pesah*, the paschal offering, on Erev Pesach and mean more precisely “Let all enter who need to come and share our *korban*, our paschal offering.”

It’s a noble thought. The Torah, after all, says unequivocally at Exodus 12:8 that “you shall eat the meat [of this sacrifice] on that night; broiled in fire and with *matzah* and *maror* shall you eat it.” So what could be more natural than helping others perform the very mitzvah your own family has already gathered to undertake? But there’s a detail that needs to be considered: the Torah specifically requires that the Israelites consume the sacrifice in *havurot*, pre-formed groups constituted of the specific sponsors of the specific offering they will then consume together. And, indeed, this is the law. Maimonides, for example, writes unequivocally that “the paschal offering may only be slaughtered as a specific offering for its specific sponsors,” who become the people thus entitled to consume it (Hilkhot Korban Pesah 2:1). So how can the *seder* leader blithely invite any in need to eat the *korban* with his or her own family? Such people specifically cannot accept the invitation without breaking the law.

So that’s the riddle. What the “real” answer is, who knows? But what the riddle means to me, and particularly in this year of plague, is that sometimes you have to be in the moment and not solely in the pageant. Yes, the invitee should have signed up for his own sacrifice, should have sponsored a *korban pesah* in the specific way required by law. But that’s not what happened! And who can say why not? Is the invitee too poor, too shy, or too unfamiliar with the law properly to have dealt with its requirements? Is the invitee held back by physical disabilities or mental or emotional ones? Is the specific person being invited in a traveler, a stranger, or perhaps an alienated local who up until that very moment was certain...
that the very last thing he or she wanted was to do the whole Pesah thing with someone else’s family? Whatever! This person has appeared at the door. The time limit for slaughtering the pesah is long past and the kohanim, the Temple priests, mostly have the evening off anyway to attend to their own seder. And as the burden shifts from obligation to generosity, from harshness to kindness, from halakhah to aggadah… the host, accepting the situation not as it ought to be or could be but as it actually is, turns to the person standing at the door and, preferring the real over the ideal, invites that person in to join the family inside and to participate in celebrating Passover by consuming the flesh of the sacrificial offering with which the festival shares its name.

The folk genius of the Jewish people allows for things like this, for people knowingly to step occasionally around the details for the sake of a greater good. And that is where we are today in the age of COVID, all of us trying to negotiate a path forward between the obligatory and the necessary, between the ideal and the real, between the festival of the past (and surely also the future) and the one we are living through right now. No one wants to be alone on Pesach. And yet that’s exactly where we all are: alone at home without the family and friends with whom we would usually be. No one wants to ask the four questions to an empty, or almost empty, room. There are surely no people anywhere who have always wanted to sing Chad Gadya by themselves or, more weirdly, to themselves. And so…some of us are zooming our seders into our children’s homes or into our parents’ homes, even despite the myriad reasons for us not to engage in that kind of broadcast-magic on a hag. Some of us are attempting to worship in virtual synagogue settings on the holiday through internet hook-ups that would normally be impossible for observant Jewish people to countenance. Shopping itself feels dangerous; some of us who haven’t ever eaten kitniyot on Pesach are actually considering slightly relaxing that rule even if just for this single year if doing so can help us avoid another terrifying trip to the supermarket.

The bottom line is that you have to do what you have to do. And that, as the line in the Haggadah about the korban pesah and the unsigned-up stranger at the door suggests, the pursuit of the greater good will always be the wiser choice. That thought should be our watchword as we negotiate these stormy seas on which we are all afloat this year: the key is to do what we can with what we’ve got and with how things are. The past is memory. The future is fantasy. All we really have is the present!

*Mah Nishtanah Halaylah Hazeh? Why is this Passover Night Different From all Other Passovers?*

Rabbi Naomi Levy

1. On all other Passovers we eat leavened or unleavened bread and food to our hearts’ content – But tonight we are keenly grateful for every morsel of food we eat. With supermarket shelves running low and a fear of even going to shop in a market we recognize our frailty tonight and we give thanks for the blessing of this sumptuous meal on our table. We give thanks for those who grew our food, we give thanks for those who risked their lives to sell us our food. We give thanks to those who did the shopping. We give thanks for those who prepared our feast. And we give thanks to our Creator who sustains us each day and is beside us in this challenging time.

2. On all other Passovers we eat maror to cause ourselves to understand the bitter, we eat what’s bitter to
remind us of the torments our ancestors endured – But tonight, we don’t need to be reminded of the bitter. Every headline speaks to us of bitter maror stories. As we eat maror tonight we pray for the day when our lives will return to normal so that we once again have to be reminded of the bitter.

3. On all other nights we don’t dip things in water, but this Passover night we must remind ourselves to wash and to wash, to disinfect and to wash some more.

4. On all other Passovers we sit surrounded by family and dear friends – But tonight we FaceTime and we Zoom, and together we pray for the day when our homes will be filled once more with the sweet sound of voices rejoicing and feasting in love to sing Your praise, God.

May That Day Come Soon, Amen.

In Times of Senseless Tragedy, God Manifests through Us
Rabbi Shai Held, Originally Published in the Forward on March 31, 2020

The situation is devastating. An entire country, the most powerful one of its time, brought to its knees, its vast military and economic might no match for the plague that envelops it.

It must have been utterly crushing to be an Egyptian back then.

And yet, horrible as things got, the world at least made sense. God announced that God would bring the plagues, and why God would bring them. The plagues proceeded along their predicted course and were brought to an end by declarations, however fleeting, of repentance and submission. Egypt was overrun by tragedy but at least, according to the biblical narrative, it understood why.

There is comfort in knowing why — and barring that, in pretending to know why. Not for no reason have Jews traditionally responded to historical tragedies by taking the blame upon themselves — “Because of our sins were we exiled from our land,” as the liturgy has it. It is easier to indict oneself than to admit that the world is chaotic and the suffering that pervades it often senseless.

If the choice is between an insistent affirmation of meaning and a tormented acknowledgment of meaninglessness, many will choose the former, no matter how much cognitive dissonance it may generate.

To follow the spread of the coronavirus is to be reminded again and again of how little we know: who becomes symptomatic and who doesn’t; who is ill for just a few days and who ends up fighting for their life; who lives and who dies. Much of the time, no explanation is available to us, and thus our fear and anxiety only grow.

“The world proceeds along its course,” say the Talmudic Sages. Diseases make no distinction between the righteous and the wicked. At moments like this, the intertwining of the moral order and the natural order, so fundamental to biblical spirituality, seems like (at best) a messianic fantasy to us.
For those of us who are (or aspire to be) believers, there is that always nagging question: How to affirm God and to love God in a world with so much… randomness and useless suffering.

What does God do in a world like this?

In the story we will soon reenact and celebrate, God is revealed through God’s thunderous intervention in history. In the story we are now living through, God is revealed — if at all — through small and often subtle acts of human responsiveness to the sufferings of others.

Deuteronomy tells us that God loves the stranger, manifesting that love by providing the stranger with food and clothing (10:18) and then charges us to love the stranger, too (10:19). The message implicit in the juxtaposition of these two verses may be: How does God love the stranger? God’s love is manifest through our own.

We must become God’s hands. When 30,000 medical professionals come out of retirement and risk their lives to save the lives of others, they become God’s means of operating in this broken, terrifying world.

The present moment leaves us with no choice but to dwell in radical uncertainty. We may wish for certainty but we will not find it. A theology of love does not pretend to understand why the world is as it is; it focuses not on explanation but on response. It seeks not to justify God but to manifest God.

Our world is very far from the world of Moses and Pharaoh. That was a world in which God needed little assistance. To the extent that we can still talk about God now, it is a world in which God has chosen to need our assistance.

The moments of self-dedication and of human connection that ensue may be the closest we can come to seeing God in our world.

God Does Not Bring Plagues
Rabbi Naomi Levy

At every Seder, as we recite the ten plagues over Egypt we pour out a drop of wine to symbolize our sadness. We are heartbroken that any soul had to suffer, even those who hated us, tormented us and enslaved us. And still, we sing lighthearted songs with our children about “frogs here, frogs there.”

And as we enumerate the plagues we find ourselves muttering the final plague beneath our breath, not wanting to frighten our own children, not knowing what to make of a God who would murder innocent children.

Tonight, more than ever, it is time to liberate the God of the Universe from “Acts of God”. There was a time in history when we didn’t understand what caused earthquakes or floods or fires or contagious viruses. In order to feel less helpless in the face of nature’s fierce capricious power, religions found comfort in
blaming the victims of plagues for their own suffering. The Torah ascribes mass slaughter to God as divine punishment for sin: “They brought this upon themselves, they had it coming.”

But God is praying to be freed from this monstrous portrayal.
Tonight is the time to liberate God from this twisted, sadistic depiction.
Tonight is the time to proclaim God as the One who lifts us up, frees us, shelters and blesses us each day.
Passover will survive without a belief in a God who visits plagues upon any soul.

The key to Passover is a belief in rebirth, a belief that tomorrow can be better than today; a knowing that we each have a critical part to play in the unfolding of hope.
Freedom begins with open eyes and ears and hearts.
Seas will part, answers will come, cures will emerge,
New ways of believing will sprout up and take root,
A universal love that mirrors God’s love for every living creature
And for our world.

In the book of Exodus we are told that Pharaoh’s sorcerers were able to replicate the plague of frogs. The only difference between Moses and the sorcerers was: only Moses could remove the plague. When the sorcerers witnessed Moses reverse the plague they cried out: “This is the hand of God.”

The truth is, it doesn’t take any great supernatural powers to bring about a plague. We all have the power to destroy life and to destroy the earth and our atmosphere. But it does take great holy powers to reverse a plague, to heal the sick, to heal our planet, to heal hatred and war.

The Healing Hand of God acting through us is what will save us and lead us from constriction to wide open spaces, from fear to faith, from darkness to light, from worry to peace of mind, from economic hardship to abundance, from illness to health.

Let us raise a glass and drink a Cup of Praise to the Soul of Souls who fills us with the power to end all plagues. And let us say, Amen.

Moses’ Finest Hour: Before the Eighth Plague
Rabbi Lily Kaufman

Before the eighth plague of ארבה (arbeh), which will cover Egypt with locusts, a buzzing, living darkness, which anticipates on a massive scale the isolating חושך (darkness) of the ninth plague, Moses enters yet another negotiation with Pharaoh to let the Israelite people go. Pharaoh’s courtiers are now persuaded, and Pharaoh seems to relent before he once again changes his mind.

We can see his mind calculating when he asks, in Exodus 10:8, מיכלויה ים ממה (“Who exactly is going?”) Pharaoh seems to be trying to gauge the size of the Exodus, and to hold back some of the Israelite people.
Moses is having none of it. He declares (in Exodus 10:9) "(With our young and with our old we will go..." This is the beginning of a catalog of pairs: with our sons and with daughters, with our flocks and with our herds of cattle. ‘With our young and with our old’ is a merism, a literary device that indicates the outer limits of a category, like A to Z, which means everything in between. “With our young and with our old” means ‘With everyone’.

But it is more than a literary device. It is one of Moses’ greatest moments. He has identified the most vulnerable people first. Vulnerable but not cowards. And he has called them ‘our young’ and ‘our old’. They are not on the margins. They are us. And he says נלך, “we will go.”

In this time of terribly difficult triage decisions, when vital resources are scarce and health care workers are themselves in great danger and must make heartbreaking decisions under extreme duress, we need Moses’ message of unity, of protection of the most vulnerable people among us. We are all deserving. We are all worthy of redemption. We do not diminish anyone's humanity.

The test of any people and of its leaders is how it treats its most vulnerable population: whether these people are ‘them’ or ‘us’, in good times and in bad.

The Exodus story teaches us to stand up for our young and for our old, and for everyone in between.

**Dayenu – Enough, God!**

*Rabbi Naomi Levy*

Let those who are ill find healing – Dayenu
Let our worries be calmed – Dayenu
Let the weak and the vulnerable be protected - Dayenu
Let all healers find paths to bring healing - Dayenu
Let scientists grasp a higher knowing
That will lead to a cure – Dayenu
Let there be an end to this plague, God – Dayenu
Fill our hearts with hope
And our souls with faith,
Our bodies with health
And our homes with love.
Unite our world to bring on a day of freedom
Let the seeds of rebirth take root tonight
And grow in blessings
In Your light.
Dayenu – Enough, God.
Amen.

“...I will spare you, and no plague shall come upon you to destroy you.” (Exodus 12:13)
Let it Pass Over
Rabbi Naomi Levy

On this sacred night
Divided in space
United in voice
As we start our Seder
We cry out to You, God,
From our place of confinement and worry.
Hear our Passover Prayer:

Let it Pass Over, God
Let this plague Pass Over us.
Let it Pass Over every nation, every people,
The young and the old.
Let it Pass Over
Every city and every village
All across Your world.
Let it Pass Over,
Heal those stricken
In every hospital bed
And in every home.

Let this night of Liberation
Mark the birth of a great healing.
Give all souls the wisdom and the strength
To sacrifice their freedom of movement
For the sake of life.
Send healing to all who are ill.
Fill doctors and nurses and all those in the front lines of this battle
With the full force of their sacred healing powers.
Watch over them, God.
Enlighten scientists all across the world
With insight and discoveries
That will lead to effective treatments,
And some day soon,
A cure.

Free us, God,
From this plague.
Shelter us with your comforting presence.

On this Passover Night
We pray to you, God,
Let it Pass Over us.
Hear us God,
Heal us God
Amen.
B’khol Dor VaDor

Rabbi Jan Uhrbach

The thing is

to see yourself as
if

as if you weren’t sure
as if you didn’t already know
as if what seems so solid is only
not an illusion, exactly, but
contingent
  as if
    if only
    if not

as if anything could happen because
it could
as if what seems
so intractable inevitable impossible is only
an if

one of many
not an end but an
and or a
but or perhaps just
perhaps

as if you were in the narrow straits
(as if these weren’t?)
as if you were
but you emerged from there
or maybe not
as if you didn’t know
weren’t sure
which was which or maybe

you chose not to go

as if you are Moses Miriam the-child-who-whines Nachshon-jumping-in
just not Pharaoh

who knows
who “no”s
who knows no ifs
can’t bear ifs
can’t see himself, ever

can’t seem himself
as if
This year, given the circumstances of Covid-19, and the constant appeal to wash our hands, we are invited to approach ritual hand washing at Seder with more focused intention. The following texts are designed to give Seder participants a new way of thinking about the healing potential of water as it is posited throughout our tradition.

These texts can be read at one time during Rahatz, or throughout the Seder as a new hand washing ritual.

1. MIRIAM’S WELL
Just as You sustained the Israelites in the Wilderness with the water from Miriam’s well, we ask You, God, to sustain and nourish us through the grief of this epidemic. As it is written in Your Torah:

-indent:1.2em;"The Israelites arrived in a body at the wilderness of Zin on the first new moon, and the people stayed at Kadesh. Miriam died there and was buried there. The community was without water, and they joined against Moses and Aaron.” (Numbers 20:1-2)

What is the connection between Miriam’s death and the Israelite’s subsequent thirst?

Question to Consider: How has your soul been nourished during these days of quarantine?

2. SING TO THE WELL
Just as the Israelites sang in the Wilderness to celebrate of the miraculous healing Waters of the Well, we turn to the Spirit of the Universe, to hear our song and our plea, and transform these waters of Rachatz into a healing ritual. As it says in Your Torah:

"Healing Waters” at the Seder: Texts for a Rahatz Ritual
Rabbi Danielle Upbin

Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Yehuda, says: Three good sustainers rose up for the Jewish people. They are: Moses, Aaron and Miriam. And three good gifts were given to their hands, and they are: The well of water, the pillar of cloud, and the manna. The well in the merit of Miriam; the pillar of cloud in the merit of Aaron; and the manna in the merit of Moses. When Miriam died the well disappeared, as it is stated: “And Miriam died there.” (Numbers 20:1), and it says thereafter in the next verse: “And there was no water for the congregation.” (Numbers 20:2). But the well returned in the merit of both Moses and Aaron.

Question to Consider: How has your soul been nourished during these days of quarantine?
And from to Be’er, which is the well where the LORD said to Moses, “Assemble the people that I may give them water.”

Then Israel sang this song: Spring up, O well—sing to it— (Numbers 21:16-17)

Question to Consider: What music or poetry have you found to be satisfying during these days of quarantine?

3. LIVING WATERS
Just as You accompanied our ancestors when they were far from You, providing them with a path of return, we ask that we feel Your presence in our own spiritual exile. As You sprinkled Your living waters upon them, revive us with these healing waters. As it is written in the book of Your Prophet:

“Toward Him iniquity of My nation and all my sins. Cleanse me from my sin. Wash me throughly from my iniquity; Purify me from my sin…” (Psalm 51:3-5)

Question to Consider: What activities (or ceasing of your normal activities) have you found to be reviving during these days of quarantine?

4. FINDING A NEW WAY
Just as you heard the plea of King David when he recognized his sins and turned from his negative ways, hear our confession as we seek to change our lives for the better. Hear our cry. Cleanse us with Your waters of mercy. As it is written in the Psalms:

Have mercy upon me, O God, as befits Your faithfulness; in keeping with Your abundant compassion, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly of my iniquity, and purify me of my sin… (Psalm 51:3-5)

Question to Consider: In this time of pause from “normal” activities, what societal or personal behavior have you been able to reflect upon as needing to change? What current shifts do you hope will be maintained when we resume life “after” Covid-19?

5. PASSING THROUGH TOGETHER
Just as You were with the Prophet Isaiah, offering comfort to a dispersed and forlorn people, unite us and cleanse us of our exile from You. Be with us now as we cross these troubled waters to security and complete healing. As the Prophet proclaimed:
“But now thus said the LORD— Who created you, O Jacob, Who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I will redeem you; I have singled you out by name, You are Mine. When you pass through water, I will be with you; ...I am your Holy God and deliverer...” (43:1-3)

Question to Consider: In what ways do you feel God’s presence accompanying you or our society throughout this travail?

6. CLEAN HANDS AND PURE HEART
Creator and Sustainer, we are Your hands on earth. Medical providers, scientists and government officials reach out to aid the sick with your inspiration and vision. Be with them. Show them the way. Be with us through our affliction. Let our hands be clean and our our hearts pure with good intention so that we may enter your Holy sanctuary. As it is written in Your Holy Book:

Kvod Emunot Li-ha’aram mila’ah tob’l yishuv b’hu:
Cir’ah v’etifim yidkha ale’hem v’hapa’am:
Mereleh ha’cheret ha’etz hale’om b’mi’kum chas’dah:
Bekh nefesh be’er lebbib...

Of David. A psalm. The earth is the LORD’s and all that it holds, the world and its inhabitants. For He founded it upon the ocean, set it on the nether-streams. Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place?—He who has clean hands and a pure heart... (Psalms 24:1-5)

Question to Consider: What does the image of “clean hands and pure heart” evoke for you at this time of crisis?

7. CLEANSING WATERS FROM ABOVE AND BELOW
God and God of our ancestors, Your power is made manifest in Your Creation. You are our living, healing, flowing Source of all. Open your streams of healing power and flow through us. As it is written:

“[You are] a garden spring, A well of fresh water, A rill* of Lebanon.” (Song of Songs 4:15). *rill=small stream

As we wash our hands, we pray Next year in Jerusalem!” - looking toward a time when we can celebrate in the “city that is whole” with shouts joy, embrace, and dance.

God of healing, God of love, we offer you the words of Your Prophet:

“[You are] a garden spring, A well of fresh water, A rill* of Lebanon.” (Song of Songs 4:15). *rill=small stream

As we wash our hands, we pray Next year in Jerusalem!” - looking toward a time when we can celebrate in the “city that is whole” with shouts joy, embrace, and dance.

God of healing, God of love, we offer you the words of Your Prophet:

In all of My sacred mount Nothing evil or vile shall be done; For the land shall be filled with devotion to the LORD As water covers the sea. (Isaiah 11:9)

And let us say, Amen.

(Text and Translations from Sefaria.org)
The Bitter and the Sweet
Rabbi Naomi Levy

*Take a piece of matzah, place some Haroset and some Maror on it and recite this prayer as you eat.*

We are aware tonight that there is a sweetness lying inside our bitter conditions, just as there is a light forever shining for us in the darkness.
It is our mission to uncover the blessings hiding inside the curses tonight.
We are learning new lessons day by day.
We are filled with Gratitude:
For the food on our table.
For having a place to seek shelter in.
For doctors and nurses and all those risking their lives to save life.
For scientist seeking answers and treatments and cures.
For Zoom and FaceTime and all the technological advances that permit us to connect remotely tonight and each day.
For the love and support of family and friends.
For the kindness of souls volunteering to help.
For suddenly realizing how precious life is.
For the power to quiet fear.
For the courage to be optimistic and patient.
For nature’s beauty.
For inner strength and for inner peace.
For honest conversations that feel real and deep and true.
For time to slow down and take stock.
For quality time at home with those we love.
For the sacred space to go within and uncover wells of creativity that have been lying dormant…
Ask everyone participating in your Seder to share a blessing that they have uncovered while sheltering in place during this coronavirus.
This Passover we choose to embrace the blessings that are waiting for us even in the midst of this curse, Amen.
Finding and Eating the Afikoman
Rabbi Naomi Levy

*Tzafun* means *the hidden*.

This is the time in our Seder when we uncover, reveal and taste what’s been hiding in plain sight – the Afikoman.

Somewhere in this world right now there is a cure waiting to be found.
An answer is coming.
The day is near.
Open the eyes of researchers, God,
Fill them with the humility to learn from one another,
With the generosity to share promising insights,
With the curiosity to ask the right questions,
The vision to see with new eyes,
The audacity to think outside the box,
The perseverance to try again and again and again.

We eat the Afikoman now as a prayer:
May the cure that is hidden soon be revealed!
And let us say, Amen.
Eliyahu Hanavi: Opening the Door for Elijah
Rabbi Naomi Levy

The only guest we CAN safely invite into our homes tonight is Elijah. Elijah the Prophet is the one who will herald in the Messiah. Our tradition offers us many visions of what Messianic Days will look like. Some say it will be a time of supernatural events and miracles. But the Haftorah we recite just before Passover describes the great gift Elijah will bring this way: “And he will restore the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents.” Restoring Love is the greatest miracle of all, it is a Messianic dream. Elijah comes to every bris and baby naming to teach us this same lesson – that every single soul has a sacred role to play in the healing of hearts across this world. Let that healing begin tonight in my home:

Come Elijah, bless us our hearts with love and forgiveness. Come Elijah, now more than ever we are aware of how precious life is and how fragile. Come Elijah, enter this home, enter every home and drink from your honored cup. Redeem us Elijah, free us from resentments, heal us from anger, Bring an end to all war and bloodshed. Let a new time of healing begin tonight.

Welcome Elijah, pull up a chair. We need you tonight more than ever Come Now, Elijah, Heal our world. Amen.
Had Gadya
Rabbi Lily Kaufman

A child who lives on a farm or in a village notices that his father has bought a baby goat. This inspires the child to describe the likely life trajectory of this little animal, a creature with whom the child undoubtedly identifies. There will be natural violence, caused by a cat, a dog, a stick, fire, water, an ox, and a butcher. The fearful acts are prompted by nothing more than the simple existence of the little animal. The violence ascends up a hierarchy of Creation, determined by power and instinct. Each creature only does what comes naturally, as in a fable by Aesop. It's mildly comical, since so much trouble is generated so quickly by ... nothing; by the little goat’s existence in the world.

Then, in seamless continuity, following the small tragedies of the natural world, come the acts of powerful heavenly beings, the Angel of Death and God. There is no need for Jacob’s ladder stretching from earth to heaven here: this child imagines all these actions as a unified whole. One might have thought that all this violence would end with the Angel of Death, but God slays that most terrifying creature. It is a satisfying redemptive moment, yet unconvincing, since we all know that death remains in our world. It is undoubtedly intended as a vision of the future, when God will slay death.

This apocalyptic natural drama which resolves in heaven is composed in the poetic form of a nursery rhyme. Of course it is. The child’s fantasy ends the Seder with an utterly convincing jumble of unsettling connections: between childhood and death, terror and humor, acts of nature, acts of humanity, and acts of God, the ordinary and the miraculous. And, of course, one can draw a straight line of mysterious power and inexplicable behavior between the dad who bought the goat in the first place and God. Is dad a hapless figure, initiating a disastrous chain of events; a throwaway character; or is he the blameless and oblivious first mover?

And you thought buying a goat was a simple act of farm life! Every act we do has its moral consequences and its moral imperatives. Sometimes it takes a child to see that.

The moral of this tale? Buy the goat and take care of it, for heaven’s sake! Tend it and help it live to a ripe old age. Milk the goat and sell the cheese. Serve some of it at your vegetarian Seder.
Next Year! LeShanah HaBa-ah!
Rabbi Naomi Levy

We conclude our Seder with words of prayer, hope and uplift:
Next Year in Jerusalem!
Next Year in Health!
Next Year Free from Worry!
Next Year with Family and Friends!
Next Year Feasting!
Next Year Rejoicing!
Next Year in Laughter!
Next Year in Love!
Next Year filled with Song and Celebration!
Next Year with a Vaccine!
Next Year in Abundance!
Next Year in Peace!
Next Year in Blessings!

A Mi Sh’berakh for the end of the Seder
Ansche Chesed Congregation

When we are together for public worship, we often recite a prayer for healing, or “mi she’berakh” for the ill and their caregivers. During this time, when we cannot meet publicly, some of us may want to include similar texts. You are also always encouraged to use your own spontaneous prayers, which can be particularly precious.

May the One who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah

Mi she’berakh avoteinu Avraham, Itzhak, v’Yaakov, Sarah, Rivka Rachel v’Leah

Bless and heal the ill of our community (please insert individual names)

Hu yiverakh v’yirapeh et [haholeh/holah/holim] ba’Kehillah Hakedosha hazot

Among all the ill of the Jewish people and all the world’s nations

B’tokh sh’ar holei Israel v’umot ha’olam

במה שאר הולות ישראל ואמות העולן
A Prayer of Hope During this Pandemic

Rabbi Naomi Levy

We are frightened, God,
Worried for our loved ones,
Worried for our world.
Helpless and confused,
We turn to You
Seeking comfort, faith and hope.

Teach us God, to turn our panic into patience,
And our fear into acts of kindness and support.
Our strong must watch out for our weak,
Our young must take care of our old.
Open the eyes of those who are ignoring warnings that can and will save lives.
Help each one of us to do our part to halt the spread of this virus

Send strength and courage to the doctors and nurses
In the frontlines of this battle,
Fortify them with the full force of their healing powers.
Send wisdom and insight to the scientists
Working day and night across the world to discover healing treatments.
Bless their efforts, God.
Fill our leaders with the wisdom and the courage
To choose wisely and act quickly.
Help us, God, to see that we are one world,
One people
Who will rise above this pandemic together.

Send us health God,
Watch over us,
Grace us with Your love,
Bless us with Your healing light.
Hear us God,
Heal us God, Amen.

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