

## **Zeder Secrets (“Zeder” = Zoom Seder) and Ideas for Solo/Small Seders**

By Elizabeth Schnur

*"Our rituals and celebrations can't be stopped by unfortunate circumstances. We will always find a way to come together and to keep our traditions alive, even if not in exactly the way to which we are accustomed."* - Rabbi Rachel Grant Meyer, Rabbi-in-Residence at HIAS, 2020

It may be that the Jewish Community was hoping that we wouldn't be Zooming for Pesach this year, or maybe believed that everything that could be said about Zeders had been said last year, but most of the online Zeder advice comes from 2020. However, since PSJC knows that most of us will still this year have Zoom as some element of our Passover Seders and/or will be having small or solo Seders, we wanted to share some great ideas that are out there in the Googaverse (and note that many of them work for non-Zoom Seders as well) as well as ideas from members of our community. Much of what follows is borrowed from the sources noted and very abbreviated— for longer versions please see the references below and check out the originals online (URLs are included in the references).

### **Going it Alone or Very Small**

For those of us who are not Zooming and are having a Seder alone or in a very small group, Rishe Groner has a lovely article about this in Alma. Also check out **A Different Pesach: Ideas for the Solo Seder** (Fein et al), which is full of great ideas like having friends/loved ones contribute one idea for each part of the service, and how to do a solo Afikomen search. Some of the resources in what follows for Zeders may also be useful for solo or small group Seders.

### **Zeder-ing**

One great thing about Zeders is that you can **invite as many people as you like** – no worries about space! You also can be as elaborate in your Zeder as you like – going through the Haggadah with multiple commentaries and enhancements, or you can take a minimalist approach. The bare minimum for a Seder includes (1) Drinking the four cups of wine; (2) Eating matzo; (3) Eating the maror (bitter herbs, typically horseradish); (4) singing the Four Questions; (5) Asking at least one question of your own; (6) and Reviewing the Exodus story (after all, “Haggadah” means “telling”!). But adding readings, commentary songs and media can greatly enhance the experience – and Zoom provides the opportunity to include recorded songs and videos as well if you are comfortable with this. Remember that the Haggadah is itself a compendium of generations of Jewish enhancements and additions.

For longer, more traditional Zeders, you will need to purchase the paid Zoom alternative for around \$15/month or use another participant's paid Zoom account. The free version with which most of us are familiar only allows one to host a Zoom for up to 45 minutes.

**The most important thing about Zeders is to make them as participatory as possible.** If you think it was boring to watch your grandpa speed through the Haggadah when you were a kid,

imagine watching a single person drone on through Zoom! Whenever possible ask participants to read and contribute ideas and questions to the Zeder.

Optimally, every participant should have a copy of the Haggadah that you are using (many free – and customizable – Haggadot are available – Sarah Bunin Benor, professor of contemporary Jewish studies at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles, created a downloadable Haggadah PowerPoint that can be accessed at <https://www.jewishlanguages.org/passover>, complete with videos, images and songs). The leader can also “screen share” the Haggadah and any additional readings as you go.

Having a series of quotations from a variety of sources (Jewish and not) on a Passover theme (e.g., freedom) that guests take turns reading can be amazingly effective and participatory– this is essentially what we do in *Lev Tahor*. Sharing experiential parts of the Seder – like eating *maror* at the same time as one another – is also essential, so make sure that all your guests know what they need to have for the rituals in advance. The Nadler/Serber family also sets places at the table for the guests who are on Zoom, so that they can feel more included.

One thing the Schnur/Holmes family has done in the past that works for both Seders and Zeders, is to ask guests to bring something that has to do with the broad themes of the Seder: Exodus, freedom, spring/renewal, and giving thanks. Guests can “bring” a reading, a song, a painting or whatever. Past contributions have included puppet shows, piano solos and an a cappella Mozart Hallelujah during Hallel. This works best if the leader knows what folks are bringing in advance so that they can include it in the most appropriate place. Guests can share their own screens with their contributions when the leader calls on them. Again, the **less passive and more participatory** the guests are on the Zoom, the more they will enjoy it.

Most people know by now that singing together is a disaster on Zoom, given the different speeds at which sound travels depending both on location and internet strength. For most of the Zeder it will work best to have **one person leading the singing at a time**, and others singing along at home on mute, though the song leaders can change from section to section. There can be exceptions to this though – Yehudit Moch and Judith Ulman brought us the tradition of singing Had Gadya with each person choosing a sound for each of the items in the song (e.g., dog, cat, water, etc.) and making that sound as their item comes up in the song – it is challenging but possible to do this taking turns on Zoom! Likewise, it is probably worth the cacophony to sing a verse or two of Dayenu all together, unmuted.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of Zeders is **what to do about the meal**, since a lot of the Seder ritual comes after we eat. A strong recommendation is to move the fun songs that are usually sung at the end of the Seder (Had Gadya, Echad Mi Yodeya, etc.) to an earlier point in the Zeder, for example, before or after the first course is eaten. Here are some options for the meal:

1. Continue to Zoom while you eat dinner. If you have a large crowd of Zoomers, invite people to go into breakout rooms of 6-8 people so that everyone can socialize as they eat. Zoom now allows users to change rooms at will, so your guests can visit one another in the various chat rooms. After dessert and Afikomen proceed with the Zeder as you normally would do!
2. Sign off when the meal starts and ask people to return in 45-60 minutes to finish the Zeder. The problem with this is that it feels discontinuous, and many people will likely not come back for the end. (Of course, some folks would leave after dinner anyway, even if you were celebrating in person...)
3. Just have the first course together on Zoom as a symbolic meal, followed by Birkat Hamazon (blessings after eating) and then finish the Zeder together (you can have more to eat individually after the Zeder ends). This is a little problematic traditionally, as the last thing you are supposed to eat is the Afikomen; you can save the Afikomen till later, for after you eat the larger part of the meal, but it is not ideal.

Nearly all experts recommend doing a **pre-Zeder test run** with your participants, particularly if they are not regular Zoom users. Make sure everyone knows how to mute and unmute themselves – and the host/leader should also know how to mute all participants. Decide in advance if there should be a co-host who can also mute everybody (when you are the leader it is hard to keep track of things like this).

Rachel Kraus in Mashable has a great list of suggestions of information to communicate to your guests in an email before the Zeder (which I have added to below), including:

1. **Details:** Date, time, and how to Zoom log-in. To ensure privacy, you may want to set a password and distribute it ahead of time.
2. **Etiquette:** Set expectations and a process for how to participate, whether that means using Zoom's hand raising function, whether people are going to be muted and then unmuted when called upon, etc. Decide about how the “chat” function should be used.
3. **The Haggadah:** Include a PDF or link to the Haggadah that you will be using.
4. **Shopping list:** Let people know what they should have on hand so they can fully participate (e.g., *charoset*, *maror*, matzo). Also give them a head's up about how you will be handling the meal.
5. **Contributions:** Solicit material for Zeder inclusion if you have not already done so.

In USA Today Carly Mallenbaum reminds Zoomers to, “do an audio test and have decent lighting before you start your Passover call...If you don't like your regular background... consider uploading a photo or maybe a themed graphic that you can use as a Zoom background.” [In 2020 USA TODAY built special Passover Zoom backgrounds just for the occasion: Matzo (<https://www.gannett-cdn.com/experiments/usatoday/gifs/tool/928-matzo-zoom.png>), Matzo balls (<https://www.gannett-cdn.com/experiments/usatoday/gifs/tool/930-matzo%20balls-zoom.png>), Frogs ( <https://www.gannett-cdn.com/experiments/usatoday/gifs/tool/931-frog-zoom.png>) and Wine (<https://www.gannett-cdn.com/experiments/usatoday/gifs/tool/932-wine-zoom.png>graphics).]

Another good resource for Zeders is an article by Irene Katz Connelly from The Forward. One of her recommendations is to assign several roles prior to the Zoom, noting that "...This is a time for one person to step up and be really bossy!" The roles that she suggests include:

**Seder leader:** "Just as usual, this person will lead the other participants through the Haggadah. The seder leader can assign parts beforehand, create an order to follow before the seder, and/or call on participants one by one.

**Tech whisperer:** This person should lead a practice run if you decide to have one. The tech whisperer should use the screen-sharing function to make the Haggadah visible during the video call, so that everyone can see clearly what page they should be reading. This is a good role for a teenager who isn't jazzed about the seder but loves to show off mastery of the mute button.

**The D.J.:** The D.J. is in charge of deciding what songs are on the program. Archie Gottesman, chief executive of JewBelong, suggested using the screen-sharing feature to play singalong videos (<https://www.bimbam.com/dayenu/>) that show the text of each song.

**Discussion leader:** In this uncertain time, it's important not just to retell the Passover story but to think about how it relates to our current predicament. The discussion leader's job is to carve out time for those conversations. He or she can coordinate with participants before the seder, asking them to bring readings to share.

**Kid Wrangler:** It can be a challenge to make seders accessible to kids without rendering them boring for adults. That's where a virtual seder might have advantages: kids can easily duck in and out of the seder if they get bored or restless. The kid wrangler can find some activities to keep them occupied, like Passover coloring pages, and some kid-friendly resources everyone can enjoy, like a video retellings of the Passover story."

Other ideas from Katz Connelly (quoted liberally below) include reimagining standard Seder rituals, including:

**Elijah's cup:** "... families can recreate the "solidarity and community care" embodied in the ritual. Choose a charitable organization to support as family, either by donating money or volunteering time in the unimaginable future when human contact is no longer life-threatening.

**The afikomen:** "... You can capture the spirit of the ritual through an online game or puzzle. If you have a family member who loves to make scavenger hunts, draft them into creating customized brain teasers or word searches." [See Angela Weisl's Virtual Afikomen Quiz at the end of this document.] "Or turn to this computer game version of the search, created by software engineer Seth Alter ([https://subalterngames.com/colossal\\_afikomen\\_adventure.html](https://subalterngames.com/colossal_afikomen_adventure.html))"

Mallenbaum adds some similar ideas: "Pick a hiding place in your mind and play '20 Questions' to have people guess where the afikomen is, whether it be a place in the house that everyone knows or somewhere in the world, "Carmen Sandiego"-style."

Dina Nadler adds: "I read online about a fun way to find the afikomen when you are not in the same place. I found Where's Waldo style pages online that had a matzah picture hidden.

Everyone can print them out. No one is allowed to look at them until a designated time during the seder. A prize is given to whomever can find the hidden matzoh on the picture first.”

**Breakout rooms:** “You can use Zoom’s “breakout room” feature to split up participants into small groups for more manageable, less scripted conversations. The Discussion Leader can pose a question for each group to consider. Breakout rooms can also keep kids occupied: let them share activities in their own “room” if they get tired of the rituals.”

**[And finally!]:** “Pick a signature cocktail: If a worldwide pandemic isn’t reason enough to augment the traditional four cups of wine, what is? Read up on liquors that are kosher for Passover (hint: tequila), then choose a cocktail for everyone to share — or let each participant create and display their own. If you really need to let it all go, try a Passover-themed drinking game.” For example: take a shot each time you hear the name “Moses” – note that this won’t work with traditional Haggadot that don’t mention Moses!

Whatever you end up doing in your Zeder, remember to have fun. This is an opportunity to build new Passover memories that you can share when we are once again able to celebrate in-person together. You might even want to carry Zeder ideas into your next Seder!

### **Resources**

- Some Fun/wacky ideas can be found at: <https://www.jewbelong.com/holidays/passover/>
- See Angela Weisl’s Afikomen Quiz, below
- And for no good reason except that it is so easy and delicious, there is a recipe for “Matzo Crack” at the end of this document!

### **References**

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## Angela Weisl's VIRTUAL SEDER 2021 AFIKOMEN QUIZ

NAME:

EMAIL:

(So I can send you your prize!)

Answer the questions to the best of your ability. Googling is fine. Whomever gets the most questions right gets the big prize. Everyone gets A prize. Kids only (Parents can help).

1. What does the word "Afikomen" come from?
2. When do we actually eat the Afikomen?
3. Usually we hide the Afikomen and the Kids are supposed to look for it. What happens when they find it?
4. Another part of the Seder is usually done by kids (not always at ours). What is it?
5. Why do we eat Matzah on Passover anyway?
6. What does the Charoset symbolize?
7. Why do we dip the vegetable in salt water?
8. Name some of the Ten Plagues.
9. What does the word "Seder" mean?
10. What goes into the Korech or "Hillel Sandwich"? (Ex. Cr. Who was Hillel anyway?)

4/17/2020

Chocolate Toffee Matzo Crack - Once Upon a Chef

once upon a chef  
WITH JENN SEGAL

### Chocolate Toffee Matzo Crack

Adapted from Marcy Goldman of [Better Baking](#)

*With layers of matzo, crunchy toffee, chocolate, and sea salt, matzo crack is an absolute must for Passover!*

Servings: 35 2-inch squares

Total Time: 1 Hour

#### INGREDIENTS

4-5 lightly salted matzos (preferably the Streit's brand - see note below)  
2 sticks (1 cup) unsalted butter  
1 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar  
1 (12-ounce) bag semi-sweet chocolate chips (I use Ghirardelli)  
1 heaping cup chopped pecans (toasted if desired, for maximum flavor - see note below)  
1/2 teaspoon sea salt flakes or kosher salt

#### INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with heavy duty aluminum foil, making sure the foil goes up and over the edges, and top with a sheet of parchment paper.

Cover the baking sheet with the matzos, cutting and piecing them together as necessary to fill the entire pan.

Make the toffee: Combine butter and brown sugar in a medium saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly with a whisk, until the mixture comes to a boil. (If it looks like it's separating, just keep stirring; it will come together.) Once the mixture comes to a boil, continue cooking and stirring for another 3 minutes until foamy and thickened. (Be extra careful - the toffee will be very hot!) Immediately pour the toffee over the matzos and, using a spatula, spread into an even layer.

Put the pan into the oven and bake for 8 to 10 minutes, or until the toffee topping is crackled and bubbling all over. Remove the pan from the oven and place on wire cooling rack on the counter. Immediately scatter the chocolate chips evenly over top. Wait 3 to 5 minutes for the chips to soften, then use an offset spatula to spread the chocolate into an even layer. Sprinkle with the pecans and sea salt. Refrigerate until the chocolate is firm, about 45 minutes. Don't leave it in the fridge too much longer, otherwise it will be hard to cut.

Lift the foil overhang to transfer the matzo crack onto a large cutting board. Using a large sharp knife, cut into 2-inch squares. Store in an airtight container in the fridge and serve cold.

Note: I love Streit's lightly salted matzos for this recipe but any brand will work. If you can only find regular salted matzos, cut back or omit the sea salt at the end. If you can't find matzos, substitute Saltine crackers and omit the salt. You'll need enough to cover the entire sheet pan.

Note: It's a good idea to toast the nuts for maximum flavor but, truth be told, I never bother.

**Freezer-Friendly Instructions:** The toffee can be frozen for up to 3 months: Place the toffee in an airtight container. It can be eaten directly from the freezer or, if you'd like, remove the toffee from the container and let it come to room temperature.

