

Shabbat Shalom everyone. It's nice to be here with you virtually, but I admit to missing seeing you in person tremendously.

I want to talk a little bit about our seders next week, that I know we're all thinking about. In fact, I want to start by talking a little bit about the END of our seders next week.

L'shana haba'ah b'Yerushalyim - each year, we end our seders with the same hopeful phrase, "Next year in Jerusalem!". And while some of us mean it more literally than others, the sense that next year can be better than this year is ingrained in us as Jews. We are an eternally optimistic people - and, even in the midst of the Coronavirus and social distancing, we haven't lost that hope.

It's almost stunningly self-indulgent that we announce longingly, at the end of each seder, that we want a better experience next year. Even in a year when we are able to look around the table, eating delicious food with all the people that we love, we wish for a better and different seder next year.

Well, for sure we should've been careful what we wished for last year, because we're certainly getting a different kind of seder this year!

But in all seriousness, it's important to remember that this strange Passover isn't all that unique. Throughout history, our people have celebrated Passover under the oddest, sometimes even dire, conditions. We can all imagine what Passover was like during the Holocaust or the Spanish Inquisition, but we've conditioned ourselves to think that those are the anomalies. I'd like to flip that thinking on its head. Our perfect seder, the one we imagine when we're fretting about how different this year is going to be, is actually the anomaly.

Snowstorms, stomach bugs, being away at college (or studying abroad or in the army), financial insecurity or job requirements have all kept us away from our family seders for years. The difference this year is that we're all

experiencing the same longing to be together at the same time, rather than noticing the few people not able to make it home this year.

I've been thinking a lot lately about the very first seder - the one when the Israelites were still in Egypt, "Pesach Mitzrayim" as it's known in rabbinic literature - and how that differs from "pesach dorot", the Passover of the generations after the Exodus. And in truth, how the Pesach Dorot that many of our sages talk about (ie. during Temple times) differs dramatically from the Passover that we know and love, in our family homes.

It has been a long time since most of us felt the sense of narrowness and fear that is described in Exodus 12. On the night of that very first seder in Egypt, Israelites were eating the "pascal lamb" with their households (or neighbors, if their household was too small) while they literally feared for their lives, watching their Egyptian neighbors die. They were staying inside, protected only by the blood on their doorposts and faith in a leader and a system that they had no reason to trust.

When morning came, there may have been a momentary sense of relief that they had survived the night, but that was surely short-lived, as the uncertainty of the day was no more reassuring than the uncertainty of the night.

And yet.

Here we are. The Israelites fled in the face of death, crossed a sea of terror with water threatening to close in on them, faced starvation in the desert, and somehow came out the other side having coalesced into a People. And not just any "people" but a People that has survived and thrived throughout the generations to the point where we expect not the seder that they celebrated, but one of abundance, where we have to pretend as

if we know what it was like to be slaves in Mitzrayim, when we, in fact, have no context that would help us imagine that fate.

Our people have gotten through a lot worse than what we are dealing with now. Which is not to say that there isn't real sadness at the situation that we find ourselves in. This is.

But we're going to be ok. We're going to hold onto that eternal hope that next year will be better than this year. And even as we know that the next few weeks are going to bring terrible news to our country, we hold onto the knowledge that all is not lost and that we're going to come through this momentary crisis.

One small textual nuance that I noticed and am holding onto.

Exodus 12:4 commands us to eat the roasted lamb - but if our household is too small, to pair up and share with a neighbor. If you're finding yourself too alone this Passover, I hope you'll look towards your neighbors for virtual comfort. And if you find yourself with an abundance of love to share, look around the community to see who needs a reach out, an invitation to join you on Zoom, or a shout out the window.

I recently shared an article¹ on Facebook about how we, as a people, are not wired for this virtual world. As you're listening to this dvar torah, you are using, at most, two of our five senses - sight and hearing. But if we were in person, or if we experienced the eating of the pascal lamb with our households or our neighbors, we would be engaging all five senses. We'd see, smell and taste the food; we'd hear our neighbors; we'd hug and touch them; we'd touch our plates and food and chairs. We would be fully engaged in the meal and in the present moment.

¹ https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/01/opinion/coronavirus-lockdown-loneliness.html?referringSource=articleShare&fbclid=IwAR0sbv_32KMqmc5w6ts1-GohBHMI4XmTFSVDA9XBAf-utCStdID-xBkh8SY

I urge you to pay attention to all five senses this Shabbat and holiday season. How can we enliven our experience by engaging not just online but in person, in whatever ways are safe for us to do.

A friend and colleague recently told me about a funny mishap she had on the phone. She ended the call by wishing the person a "zissen Pesach", the Yiddish phrase for "a joyous Passover". But the person on the other end of the call didn't hear the word "zissen" - she heard "decent". May you have a decent Pesach, she thought her rabbi was wishing her.

And so my blessing for you is this - I hope that within all the ways that this seder is going to feel different and awkward, you find an abundance of joy to celebrate. And if that joy is also accompanied by some (very appropriate, very typical) sadness at what is missing, I hope it all weighs out to be, at minimum, very decent.

Shabbat Shalom - and an early Chag Sameach!