

Beyond the 1st Night: The Need for “Seder”/ Order

These days many of us are feeling overwhelmed, scattered, free floating, trapped, lonely, afraid, and so much more. Fortunately for us, this time period of physical distancing is punctuated by the holyday of *Pesah*, or *peh-sach* the opportunity for authentic speech, as Rabbi Josh recently wrote about in [The Shalom](#). We are encouraged at this season to tap into authentic speech, and at this unprecedented time the holyday of Pesah lean into *seder*/order, even beyond the ritual meals/*seders*.

How are we structuring our lives, and especially in life-affirming ways? At this time when so many of the things that ordered our days and our weeks no longer exist in the same way, we can feel disoriented at some level.

Perhaps, though, the unease that many feel goes deeper than this. The fact that the whole world is living with the reality of increasingly likely impending sickness and death for ourselves, our families, and our community contributes greatly to underlying anxiety and angst. As we get to know more and more people who have become sick, or died- at home or in the hospital- of COVID-19, our very differently structured days become harder for many of us. And we get caught up at some level by this fear.

At this point, we might want to get “on the balcony.” “Yes- I am afraid to die!” we might acknowledge to ourselves if we can be brave. After all, as humans we are wired to want to live, and the Torah reminds us time and again, “choose life!” How do we choose life when death is lurking a little too close for comfort?

Fortunately for us, we can turn to Judaism. As a spiritual practice, Judaism doesn’t leave us to just engage with this question now, but has raised it before for us. This past Yom Kippur I opened with the following story: “Reb Simcha Bunam, one of the early and great Hasidic masters, was close to the last moments of life. As he lay in bed, his grief-stricken wife burst into tears. With calm equanimity, the dying man looked at her lovingly, and said: “Why are you crying? My whole life was only that I might learn how to die.” And with these words rolling off his lips, he died peacefully...”

And then I asked, “How do we anticipate facing our own death? Will we feel peace? What might we experiment with in *our lives* to help us each learn to die peacefully?”

(You can re-read the rest of my sermon [here](#), and find my Rosh HaShannah sermon there as well.)

Choosing Life When Death Feels Inevitable

As the High Holiday liturgy reminds us, we will each die. Some quietly and at peace. Some by drowning, or by burning... Some will be rich. Some will be poor. Death is always inevitable, and some will die this year one way or another.

On Yom Kippur we even wear white, the color of death shrouds, and abstain from life-affirming actions such as eating, drinking, and intimate relations.

Rabbis - and even Isaiah in the haftarah we chant on Yom Kippur- often wonder, how can we make this all a bit more *real*? How can we truly shake ourselves awake so that we can make choices that are deeply rooted in the preciousness of life? How can we celebrate the fact that our soul/neshama is planted within each of our particular bodies at this time, and that - as the morning liturgy states- as long as my breath is within me, I will acknowledge that there is something more than “me” - I am not ultimately “pharaoh” - and from this place I can offer gratitude?

Perhaps if we could do this we'd fight and argue less, have an outlook based in more equanimity and joy, and share and sing and celebrate and love much more.

Will we let our fears- like Pharaoh- drive us? Will we ignore the fact of our impending death, staying in a place of relative constriction, and - yes - slavery?

This Passover, during the weeklong, homebound, retreat with powerful symbolic foods that continue to remind us of the work that we can be doing and the freedom that we can be reaching for, even at this time of physical distancing, we have a rare opportunity.

Today the world is gifting us the rare chance to keenly know the feelings of fear and possible death for us and our community, and to choose life despite what some might feel is a macabre reality.

When we are given a gift, we are reminded to consider what gifts we are sharing with others.

This Pesah, I encourage you to attend to the gift that loved ones always appreciate: creating order and speaking authentically about “end of life” issues with loved ones, and those who will be responsible for that stage of supporting you. (Find Rabbi Josh's Shalom article about the opportunity within Pesah for authentic speech [here](#).) In particular:

1. Talk about what's important. Now. Because all we ever have known is that the only sure moment we have to live is now. Do you have an ethical will? There are many resources online. In addition, here's a book I heard about recently that might be helpful: [A Family Legacy for your Children: Reflections from Your Mother's Heart](#)
2. Plan for your death. Do you have the following items? Are they updated? Do loved ones have copies?
 - a. healthcare proxy/ power of attorney information
 - b. living will
 - c. copies of an actual will
 - d. information about burial plots

Whenever the time comes that our soul and our body will separate, we surely don't want our loved ones to be struggling & wondering about our plans and hopes.

So this Pesah, in addition to the eating meditation opportunity we have with matza and the other symbolic foods, take time with your own thoughts and files, and let's get our "dying" as much in order as we can while we're alive to that we can be *free* now, and choose life with every breath that is still with us .

Amen!