

From the Rabbi April 2020

*“B’Seder”*

The Hebrew idiomatic expression for “just fine” is *b’seder*. “How’s it goin’? Oh, just fine. *B’seder*.” It literally means “in order.” Everything is in order. Nothing is particularly out of order. Everything is in its place. The routine has not been disturbed. *B’seder*.

A Passover meal is known as a *seder*. This is because there is a prescribed “order” Rabbito the meal, including when the meal itself is eaten, and what is eaten, and what is prohibited from being eaten. “When do we eat?” is a silly question. We eat when “eating” comes up in the *seder* of the *seder*. Not before, and just as importantly, not after.

How ironically fitting it is that the Jewish festival of “order” is upon us just at the moment when our world is more *out* of order than anyone alive can remember. It is practically impossible for any of us to imagine ourselves creating a Passover *seder* this year that is even close to normal, close to *b’seder*.

First of all, we will not allow ourselves to gather in the configurations of family and friends that epitomize Passover. Yes, we know all about the Rabbinic dictum of *pikuakh nefesh*, whereby the saving of life supersedes the performance of almost any mitzvah, even the fast of Yom Kippur.

But we have come to rely on Passover to lay the foundation of our family structures as Jews. The dynamics, the dialogue, the recipes, the traditions, even the fights...all of it is vital to the way we create Jewish memories. To be denied that joy is like trying to sustain a blow to the heart, if not to the body, of our Jewish selves.

To the extent that we will be able to convene a *seder* in our home, or online, or on the phone, or by any of the cyber platforms that have come to dominate our days since the Coronavirus shut down normal life, we will do so not quite *b’seder*, meaning that we will inevitably skip some steps in the time-honored order of the service. We will abridge our beloved discussions (and arguments!), we will leave out some of our favorite songs and readings, and we will most likely not stay online through the eating of our feast, even though that’s the time when the

most important annual extended family bonding takes place. Meaning that so much of what we rely on the *seder* to do will not quite work. *B'seder*? Not in the least!

In that way, this year's *seder* will accurately mirror our experience of the world. Our vast network of relationships, which we plug into through real-time-and-space physical gatherings, cannot now give us the satisfaction of human contact we desperately crave and need. *Lo b'seder*.

May I suggest that, as an exercise within an exercise, we turn to a favorite of the Passover ritual, *Dayenu*, to give us some much-needed perspective. The *Dayenu* poem ("it would have been enough for us") consists of fourteen items in the Exodus saga, each of which "would have been sufficient" even if it were the only thing that worked out for us. If we had only left slavery, or only crossed the Sea, or only stood at Sinai and received the Torah, or only eaten manna, or only survived forty years in the wilderness, etc., we would be eternally grateful.

How so? Because we realize that we were blessed with an abundance of miraculous gifts. A lot went wrong in the passage from Exodus to Sinai to the Land of Israel, but so much actually went right. *Dayenu* is an exercise in *perspective*. It's a glass-half-full meditation on the facts of our predicament.

I propose that whatever we cut from our *seder* this year, we not only retain the singing of *Dayenu*, but precede the song with a go-around of what is *b'seder* right now. Are we relatively healthy? Do we have what to eat (*pesadik* or otherwise)? Do we have access to emergency health care (so far)? To garbage pickup? To clean running water and functioning sewage? To electric power, without which Zoom and email and cyber-*seders* would be unimaginable? Are there people in our congregation and community who have banded together to check on one another and reach out to the vulnerable among us? Are we among those who have found new ways to reach beyond ourselves in service to others?

*Dayenu!*

We are literally wandering in a map-less wilderness, and the duration of that journey is unknown, just as it was for the ancient Israelites. They found a way to

enumerate not only what was *lo b'seder*, but what was miraculously *b'seder* as well, and they coined the term *dayenu* to express their wonder.

And may I offer one more *seder* exercise: Imagine we are confined to our home day and night. Every time we open the door, we feel a sense of risk. No need to imagine it: it is our reality. Now take a look at the end of the Haggadah. Before the *seder* concludes, we are all directed to go to the door and open it wide. We invite the harbinger of redemption to come in and join us, and to bring us news of a better time to come. Is there a more fitting closing ritual to our Corona *Seder* than that? To open the door as a symbol of our intention not to give up hope that a time of healing will come, that we will have a role to play in bringing that healing, and that eventually we will all be able to go outside and congregate once again.

That will truly be a great conclusion to a *seder* that is *lo b'seder* – a *seder* that cannot be completed during the night of the festival itself – but that must be suspended until we have done the difficult work of self-sacrifice and communitarian commitment, which is what the Passover *seder* was always really about in the first place.

Rabbi Lester Bronstein