



From our Hillel Seder to Yours

The events of October 7th, war in Gaza, and rising antisemitism will undoubtedly impact our Seder experiences, reflections, and the ways many of us approach the themes of Passover this year.

Rabbi Jordan Gerson, WashU Hillel's Silk Foundation Campus Rabbi & Chief Experience Officer, has adapted WashU Hillel's Haggadah for our new reality post-October 7th.

Below are three excerpts that students will be reading together at WashU Hillel's First Night Seder on campus, which you might wish to incorporate into your own Seder gatherings.

Breaking the Middle Matzah - *Yachatz*

In Hebrew, the word “*yachatz*” means “to divide,” and so in this moment we take the middle matzah and break it in two, hiding the larger piece as the *afikomen*. The act of breaking the matzah is rife with symbolism. This year there is special significance as we think of the hostages still being held in Gaza, taken from their families, friends, and communities - separated from those they love.

We also think about how October 7th, the ensuing war in Gaza, and current climate have fractured our campus community and campuses across the country. We think about how misinformation and rising antisemitism have caused divisions within friend groups, organizations, and even in the classroom. **Tonight, we find joy in togetherness, but we also hold onto hope that in the year to come, all hostages will be able to celebrate this feast of freedom with their families, that there will be peace, and that our campus communities can begin to heal.**

The act of breaking the matzah in two during *Yachatz* begs the question, "How can we work to repair that which is broken?" Are there some things that can be repaired and other things which will always remain broken? What can we learn from this act of breaking and from the notion of brokenness?

The Passover Story - *Maggid*

As we lift this broken matzah, we are reminded that this is the bread of affliction, a symbol of poverty and need. Matzah reminds us of how "in haste did we go out of Egypt."

We think back to the suffering of our ancestors and how swiftly they fled from Pharaoh's rule that their bread didn't have time to rise. Today, we also turn our attention to those who are in need and we say, "Let all those who are hungry, come and share in our Passover meal. This year we are here, next year may we be in the land of Israel. This year we are slaves. Next year we will all be free."

At tonight's Seder, let us also offer the following prayer, this year Israel's hostages are captives in Gaza, next year may they once again be free in the Land of Israel.

In Every Generation...

The injunction, *Bekhol dor vador chayav adam lir'ot et atzmo keilu hu yatzah mimitzrayim*, “In every generation, each person is obligated to see themselves as if they had participated in the Exodus from Egypt,” is one of the most evocative lines in the Haggadah. It is a call to empathy, to feel the suffering and redemption of our ancient ancestors as our own.

It is also a command to use the story to bring meaning into our own contexts, as we imagine ourselves being lifted out of despair and into freedom. Every year, we see ourselves in this story in a different way—this is part of what makes the Seder such a lasting and powerful ritual. This year, the reverberating trauma of October 7th, ongoing war in Gaza, thousands of Israelis displaced from their homes, rising antisemitism, and weakening bonds of allyship around the world, give us new lenses for understanding the Exodus story. In some cases, the words of the Haggadah feel more relevant; in others, the Haggadah’s proclamations clash with reality. How can we celebrate a holiday of freedom when over 100 people are still held captive in Gaza? How do we call for all who are hungry to come eat at our tables when so many Israelis are not at their own Seder tables and millions of Palestinians are on the brink of famine? While there are no definitive answers to these questions, Passover is a time for us to reenter a generation-spanning conversation and envision ourselves anew in the Exodus story’s themes of persecution, resilience, and redemption.