

10 TIPS AND MEDITATIONS FOR A **POST-HARVEY** PASSOVER

By RABBI CHAIM LAZAROFF

“Many waters cannot quench the love, nor can rivers flood it,” writes King Solomon (Song of Songs, 7:7). On Passover we remember how G-d visited 10 plagues on the Egyptians and saved our ancestors from slavery, including a miraculous trip through raging waters.

Our community has seen its fair share of plagues, courtesy of Harvey, and many are still waiting for G-d to help them through the waters that engulfed their homes this past fall.

During the Seder, we read from Talmud Pesachim, how in every generation, every Jew is to envision oneself leaving Egypt. Having experienced tragedy on so many levels, the notion of suffering and redemption is all that much more real for all of us.

The Passover rituals are not mere actions, to be mechanically performed by rote. Rather, they are keys to the soul, helping us touch the untouchable and imagine the unimaginable. As we prepare for Passover, and commemorate the 10 plagues, I've collected 10 tips and meditations for a more meaningful Seder in a post-Harvey Houston.

1) "WHEAT

Since Talmudic times, and perhaps earlier, Jews have been collecting money before Passover, to ensure that everyone has what they need to celebrate the Holiday of Freedom in princely style.

In ancient times, these funds would help families procure flour with which to bake their own matzah. That's why they are generally known by the two Hebrew/Aramaic names of *maot chitim* (wheat money) or *kimcha DePischa* (Passover flour).

This year, the need in our community is more acute than ever before. Please give your *maot chitim* contribution through your local shul, where your rabbi is sure to know who can use help making ends meet.

Contributions also may be made to Chabad's Maos Chitim Fund, chabadhouston.com/donate, and Jewish Family Service's Passover Assistance Fund, jfshouston.org/giveonline.php?dc=13.

For more on this custom, see Jerusalem Talmud, Bava Batra, 1:4 and Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Orach Chaim 429:5.



2) SELL OFF

Every year before Passover, we appoint the rabbi to sell our chametz to a non-Jew, so that we experience a chametz-free Passover. This year, as we lock up our chametz and make arrangements for its sale, we are thankful for

the possessions we have, either salvaged from Harvey's waters or recently purchased. Useful tip: When listing locations where you may own chametz, be sure to include storage lockers if your stuff is still not all back at home where it belongs. You may sell chametz with Rabbi Shimon Lazaroff at chabadhouston.com/chametz.

3) INVITE LOTS OF GUESTS

Right at the beginning of the Seder, we read the *hay lachma anya*, in which we invite anyone in need to join us at the Seder table. Problem is that by the time the passage is read, it's a bit late in the game. Now is the time to send out those invites, making sure that every Jew has a spot at a Seder table. The Haggadah has Four Sons, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe taught us (in a letter dated 11th of Nissan, 5717 – April 12, 1957) not to forget about the fifth son, who is absent from the table – because every single Jew deserves to have a spot at the Seder.

4) CHECK ALL OVER

On the night before Passover, we check our homes for chametz, joining together all strata of existence, as taught in Kabbalah and Chassidut: mineral, organic, animal and human. You are a human, using the feather (from a bird), wooden spoon (from a tree), candle (from the inanimate). This year, as so many of our lives, homes and places of business have been plunged into chaos, make sure to search everywhere that you may have brought chametz food, as we work together to perfect the world.

For more on the Kabbalistic elements, see Tanya Likkutei Amarim 38, elaborated in Iggeret Hakodesh Epistle 20.

5) HANDMADE IS BEST

As Houston struggled to get back on its feet after Harvey, we all experienced the power of a helping hand, of the presence of friends, neighbors and even strangers joining together to muck out, tear out and dry out. Beyond the actual help received, the fact that we banded together in a time of need was so very powerful, sending a strong message that we all are human, equally valuable before G-d and worthy of each other's time, effort and muscle.

This year, as you purchase matzah for the Seder, go for the "old-shul" handmade variety (chabadhouston.com/ordermatzah), the stuff that was made by actual human beings, who kneaded, rolled and baked it with the intention that it be used at the Seder. Sure the machine-made stuff can work in a pinch, but as Harvey taught us, there is nothing like the human touch.

For further study, see responsa of Avnei Neizer 536-537.

6) DON'T FLOOD YOURSELF

Water is a good thing. Rain is a blessing. But, we have learned that too much, too fast can be detrimental. Same goes for Seder wine

(or grape juice). Preferably, wine should be used. Halachic authorities have permitted the use of grape juice for those that wine is difficult for them to drink, especially children. If grape juice is necessary, it is best to mix in a little bit of wine. For more on this, see Ketzos Hashulchan 80:1.

Get cups that are too big, and you'll find yourself struggling with the last two cups. As you prepare to drink four cups of wine, don't down giant goblets of wine so that you are too full to drink all four. Instead, get yourself glasses that can hold 3 ounces, fill them to the brim and drink down the entire shot at each right time of the Haggadah.

Four cups should not be drunk consecutively, but dispersed throughout the Haggadah (Shulchan Aruch, 472:8).

7) IT'S OK TO CRY

Ever since I have been a young boy, I have had the dubious privilege of grating the horseradish for the Seder. You can wear goggles, put a carrot in your mouth or try any other published or unpublished bubbly-trick. The fact is, if the horseradish is fresh, you are going to cry. And, that's just fine.

As we look back at how much so many lost this year, it's OK to shed tears. The marmor teaches us to confront our pain, look it in the eye, shed tears, and learn to look past it, dust off and keep on running into the future.

Tip: If you want your horseradish to stay sharp, make sure to keep it in a sealed Ziploc bag or Tupperware container after you grate it.

8) VERBALIZE GRATITUDE

At the Seder, we retell the story of our nation's survival. We all know the story, but we still tell it again every year as we recite in the Haggadah, "Even if we are all wise and learned, it is still a mitzvah upon us to retell the Exodus from Egypt."

Look back at this past year and see how many blessings have visited you. It may be that your house survived unscathed, or it may be the wonderful people who came forward to help you in your time of need. Whatever you have to be grateful for – and, I am sure there is something – discuss it at the Seder and express your gratitude to G-d and His human angels.

9) APPRECIATE (AND FEED) YOUR LOVED ONES

In our family, my father, Rabbi Shimon Lazaroff, makes it a point to make Texas-sized Pesach latkes (called "Zaydie Latkes") for the many children and grandchildren visiting for Passover, giving them each a piece of ingestible love. As you sit around the Seder table or as you

Lazaroff family recipe for Texas-sized Pesach latkes

1 giant potato (peeled and grated)
1 egg
1 Tbsp. fine-chopped or grated onion
1 fine-chopped or grated jalapeño pepper
Salt to taste
Kosher for Passover oil or chicken schmaltz for frying

Combine all ingredients, shredding in as much jalapeño as your loved ones can handle. Heat oil or schmaltz in pan until sizzling, and fill entire pan with batter, frying covered on a low flame until browned. Flip, cover and finish frying. Leave on for longer for a crispier taste.

Note: There is a custom on Pesach to eat only fruits and vegetables that can be peeled (Chayei Adam 127:2).

feast together throughout Passover, make sure to extend extra attention to those nearest and dearest to you.

10) FEAST FORWARD

As we work hard to get back on our feet, it's crucial to keep our eyes on the goal, remaining cognizant of the normalcy that will return to our lives. It may take a month, a year or even two years, but it will happen!

On the last day of Passover, we read about the redemption yet to come, with the arrival of Moshiach. There is a Hasidic tradition dating back to the Baal Shem Tov to commemorate this with a special meal, held in the waning hours of this holiday. In Chabad tradition, we take it a step further, eating matzah and drinking four cups of wine. Only this time, we are not looking back to something that has happened, but looking forward to something we hope and pray will happen very soon.

This year, celebrate the Moshach's meal and place your hope in a brighter, better tomorrow.

For more about this meal, see Nitei Gavriel, Passover III, page 127, and Hayom Yom, Nissan 22.

Next year (or even this year) in Jerusalem!

Rabbi Chaim Lazaroff, a Torah Day School of Houston alumnus, is the director of Chabad of Uptown and program director for Chabad Lubavitch of Texas.

Find more readings, how-to guides, recipes and more, including a listing of thousands of public Seders in Houston and around the world at chabadhouston.com/pesach. A list of open-to-the-public Houston-area Seders also are published in the Jewish Herald-Voice. ✦