



# Agudas Achim Congregation

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## Special Pesach Guide 2020 / 5780

All listed services below (including the seder)  
will be hosted on Zoom [at this link](#).

|                        |                     |           |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| Pesach morning service | Thursday, April 9   | 9:30 a.m. |
| Pesach Second Seder    | Thursday, April 9   | 6:30 p.m. |
| Pesach morning service | Friday, April 10    | 9:30 a.m. |
| Shabbat services       | Friday, April 10    | 7:30 p.m. |
|                        | Saturday, April 11  | 9:30 a.m. |
| Pesach evening service | Tuesday, April 14   | 6:30 p.m. |
| Pesach morning service | Wednesday, April 15 | 9:30 a.m. |
| Pesach morning service | Thursday, April 16  | 9:30 a.m. |



## AGUDAS ACHIM PESACH GUIDE

Dear brothers and sisters,

*‘Mah nishatanah ha’Pesach hazeh mikol ha’Pesachim?’* – ‘How is this Passover different from all other Passovers?’

This Passover is more real and surreal than any other Passover in the living memory of most American Jews. This is the year when Biblical metaphor – experienced and reenacted around our family tables with the patina of quaint nostalgia – has become suddenly and shockingly real. The gritty experiences of our ancestors who observed Passover through the immediacy of their own historical travails drift into focus again. Now we are the generation of the plague; it is we who shelter-in-place, disinfecting our doorknobs where our Biblical forebears would have painted their lintels with the blood of a yearling ram. It is we who have to contend with home Sedarim diminished; missing our loved ones at the table. All of a sudden, our world has been turned up-side down. Here we are, in this poignantly precise historical moment, where we can at once feel our smallness while knowing we are called to greatness.

It is the urgency and peril of times like these that the Rabbis called *‘sha’at d’chak’*, ‘an hour of duress’. Our wise and compassionate tradition has always accommodated the needs of our People during times like these. This Passover will be different from other Passovers. There are things we will do without and that we will miss, like gathering in-person and celebrating our beloved communal Second Seder in-person. There are things that we will do in new and innovative ways, like sell our communal Passover supplies to raise money for worthy causes and run our Second Seder via Zoom.

There are leniencies and compromises that our tradition not only permits but *mandates* for the sake of our *health* and *life*. Sheltering-in-place and social distancing are *‘mitzvot g’dolot’*, (great commandments) and are the two appropriate and empowering responses we can take to fighting this pandemic. With every physical contact avoided and every day at home, *we are saving lives* and aiding the frontline medical workers in their holy work – the highest prerogative of our faith. Hence, in full alignment with epidemiologists and public health experts, it is my strong encouragement and *P’sak Halakhah* (rabbinic ruling) as your Rabbi, that people *do not expose themselves to extra and unnecessary risk* to obtain Passover supplies or to keep kosher for Passover. It has always been my mission as the Rabbi of a dual affiliate synagogue to make space for the breadth of Jewish observance. I feel this mission more keenly this year. We can only do our best under the circumstances presented us. Make the ritual decisions for your family that feel safe, intuitive, compassionate and feasible. In this pack, I will provide resources to aid you in that decision-making process.

*‘Etz chayyim hi’* – ‘The Torah is a Tree of Life’. Preserving life – *pikuach nefesh* – is our greatest injunction and no longer theoretical in this moment. We are called by a merciful God and through a *‘Torat Chesed’*, a Torah of Compassion, to choose life at every turn.

In that light, the synagogue has created an Emergency Fund for this pandemic (and future calamities) to support congregants in distress. Likewise, we are making the Tikkun Olam Fund available to support organizations serving the wider community. We encourage you to make donations to either Fund (or both) as a practical mission bearing our light and lovingkindness into the world.

Why is this Passover different from all other Passovers? Our choices balance on a narrow bridge and truly matter. Our decisions are spiritually transformative and morally foundational. In the words of Devarim

(Deuteronomy), *'uvacharta b'chayyim l'ma'an tech'yeh atah v'zarecha'* - 'choose life, so that you and your progeny may live' (Deut. 30:19).

Next year, in-person.

May the Ever-Living God grant us grace, strength and peace.

*Shalom uv'rachah*, peace and blessings,



Rabbi Esther Hugenholtz

## THINGS TO CONSIDER IN YOUR RITUAL OBSERVANCE OF PASSOVER

### **Mental and emotional wellbeing**

Make ritual and religious decisions that facilitate and protect your mental and emotional wellbeing and that safely reduce your isolation, including the use of technology on the Sabbath and Festivals. If you are new to the practice of Passover, be gentle with yourself – this may not be the year to grow one's level of observance or to experiment with new expressions of Jewish religiosity.

If you require additional emotional and spiritual support, please reach out to the synagogue, to the Rabbi directly or to the Caring Committee.

### **Passover kashrut and leniencies**

This addendum seeks to provide context and leniencies to the practice of Passover kashrut for those who observe.

If it is your practice to replace already-open products that may in themselves not be *chametz* (contain leaven) but may have a slight chance of having encountered leaven by being in proximity of leaven (for example, spice containers in the pantry sitting next to bags of flour), you may want to weigh the virtue of buying new products against the extra exposure (and expense, during economically uncertain times) to contagion if you would go to the supermarket. I would encourage you to consider using as much as you can of items you already have in the house. The same applies with the ritual food items needed for the Seder. If you lack certain items, consider replacing them with symbolically similar items. For example: parsley with other herbs or greens, horseradish with ordinary radishes, a shankbone with a beet or even a chicken bone, etc. If you are short on matzah, you can choose to make your own or please be in touch with the synagogue in order to procure matzah safely.

If you ordinarily follow Ashkenazi minhag and refrain from eating kitniyot (legumes), you may consider eating kitniyot this year if it feels spiritually comfortable to you and if it reduces anxiety and exposure to contagion in order to procure extra food items. (There is no Halakhic objection to eating kitniyot – see pack - according to Conservative Halakhah, but many continue to observe Ashkenazi minhag out of fondness of family and communal tradition).

## THINGS TO CONSIDER IN YOUR RITUAL OBSERVANCE OF PASSOVER (cont.)

In short, all ritual and religious decisions should be made with pikuach nefesh (preserving life) in mind. If amending religious practice directly impacts your exposure to contagion (by, for example, reducing trips to the supermarket), then please amend your religious practice. If the integrity of your religious practice is sound irrespective of the need to procure extra items, then you may be encouraged to continue your ritual practice as customary.

## PASSOVER RESOURCES

[My Jewish Learning: Six Tips for Hosting a Solo Seder](#)

### **Reform:**

[Family-friendly Haggadah by Rabbi Amy Scheinerman](#)

[Resources from the CCAR \(Central Conference of American Rabbis\)](#)

### **Resources from the Union of Reform Judaism:**

[Your Guide to Hosting a Great Virtual Seder](#)

[Video: How to Make Matzah at Home](#)

[How to Recite or Sing the Four Questions](#)

[Send Beautiful, Free Passover eCards](#)

[A Guide to Eating on Passover](#)

### **Conservative:**

[YouTube video on how to prepare your kitchen for Passover](#)

[Why is this Year Different?](#) Zoom meeting on Sunday, April 5 at 7:00 p.m. led by Dr. Ron Wolfson and Cantor Steve Stoehr. This year's Passover will be unique; learn how you can make it special.

[Preparing for Passover during a Pandemic: Rabbinical Assembly resources](#)

[More resources from the USCJ](#)

[FREE Feast of Freedom Haggadah](#)

**Sale of Hametz:** The Rabbinical Assembly is arranging for people to [sell their hametz virtually](#).

## SALE OF CHAMETZ, KITNIYOT AND PESACH PREPARATION

*Addendum for observing Passover during the Pandemic is included in the letter at the top of this document.*

The formula for what defines chametz is the five Biblical species of grain (wheat, spelt, rye, barley, oats) that have been brought in contact with water (and airborne yeast) for a minimum of 18 minutes. The Torah, supported by rabbinic interpretations in Rabbinic law, commands us to not consume, use or possess chametz during the seven days (eight days, rabbinically) of the holiday.

A second category of food items traditionally prohibited for Ashkenazi Jews (Jews of European descent) are *kitniyot* (known collectively as 'legumes' – rice, corn, legumes, peas and nuts). These have always been permitted to Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews (of Middle Eastern and Asian descent). The Committee of Jewish Laws and Standards of the Conservative Movement has ruled that kitniyot are permissible to Ashkenazi Jews also, expanding the range of foods available for Passover, especially relevant this year.

Changing one's home over to keep 'kosher l'Pesach' (kosher for Passover) is one of the traditional observances of Passover. Note: preparing the house for Passover does not need to be equal to spring cleaning and is not meant to be a stressful process (rather, it invites us to cleanse symbolically and contemplate our liberation). Rabbinically, anything that is no (longer) fit for human consumption is not consider chametz, including grime, stale breadcrumbs etc.

It is traditional to use special crockery, cooking utensils and dishes for Passover, or to kasher ('make kosher') utensils for the occasion. Hard, non-porous, heat resistant plastic, glass, Pyrex and metal can be kashered; earthenware, ceramics and wood (except if one sands it down) cannot. Fine bone china can be used if it has been left standing unused for a year. Kashering is usually done parallel to how the item was used: immersion in boiling water for silverware and cooking pots, heating until red hot on the stove for skillets and simple washing in case of glass. Heat-resistant kitchen surfaces and counter tops that can withstand purging with boiling water can be kashered that way. Covering food preparation surfaces with tinfoil is another option. Stoves and ovens are kashered by cleaning them and heating them (all burners on for about 10 minutes, or a self-cleaning oven cycle).

The Rabbis of the Talmud, aware that destroying chametz wholesale could cause economic hardship, created a method for storing away our chametz for the holiday and selling it to a non-Jew so that it is legally no longer in our possession. This practice is known as 'mechirat chametz'. This year, we encourage people to use the form provided by the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism included in the resource pack.

## BEDIKAT CHAMETZ

There is a custom to engage in a 'chametz hunt' on the night before Passover begins (in this case, Tuesday, April 7th) once Passover cleaning has been completed. Some wrap a number of pieces of bread (for example, 10, a mystical number) in tinfoil and hide them around the house. The members of the family go search for these pieces with a candle and feather, or in our contemporary context, a flashlight or the light on your cellphone. Then the retrieved chametz is burned or discarded (*biur chametz*) on Wednesday morning with a blessing (the blessings can be found in every Haggadah). This activity may provide extra family fun when sheltering-in-place.

## BITTUL SHISHIM

Bittul shishim, the nullification of 1/60th of an admixture is a halakhic principle that allows one to purchase non-kosher for Passover products before the start of the holiday but not during the weeklong holiday. The principle at work here is that one may intentionally nullify traces of chametz in food items that are in and of themselves not chametz (think fruit juice, tinned vegetables and fish, cheese, yogurt, milk, eggs etc.) as long as they are purchased beforehand. This allows the consumer some leniency in observing the holiday. During the holiday itself, one is limited to buying fresh produce (vegetables, fruit, fish, meat) without a hechsher, while other products will need a hechsher. See the addendum on taking on leniencies l'shem pikuach nefesh, for the sake of preserving life, at this time. A suggestion to reduce exposure and contagion would be to continue the leniency of bittul shishim throughout the holiday itself and not just for advance preparation.

## NOTE ON RITUAL OBSERVANCE

Our congregation, by virtue of its dual affiliation with both the Reform and Conservative Movements is unique. While the integrity of ritual observance of Passover is valuable and important, it is equally important to imbue the holiday with a spirit of meaning, joy and sanctity. Please see the addendum for extra guidance and support regarding observance during the Pandemic.