



# A Seder Companion: Strength in Our Time

Pesach is the holiday of finding strength in narrow places. Jews around the world, in every generation, place themselves between the raging waters of the Sea of Reeds. Pharaoh's army approaches from behind, and the only place to proceed is into the uncertainty of the desert. Where does one find strength and hope as the walls literally close in?

The excerpts from the [Hebrew College Passover Companion](#) in this activity offer numerous access points to find the possibility of strength throughout the ancient ritual of our *Seder*. Through asking questions, eating symbolic foods, and telling our story, we find touchstones of fortitude for our own time.

*We are grateful to Hebrew College for contributing this activity, which features excerpts from the [Hebrew College Passover Companion](#).*



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**1. In her reflection on *Karpas* (the part of the Seder when a fresh vegetable is dipped in salt water; pages 11–13), Hebrew College President Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld writes:**

*When I was growing up, my mother would read these verses from Song of Songs each year at our Passover Seder. This will always be karpas for me, sprigs of fresh parsley dipped in the sound of my mother's voice saying, "Arise my darling"; saying, "For lo, the winter is past." Saying no matter what bitterness life might bring, there is always the possibility of love. And where there is love, there is hope . . . . Karpas promises that the renewal unfolding in the world around us will come just as insistently to our own lives, to the places that have frozen over in our own weary and wary hearts. Even in the darkest times and narrowest places, there is a song in our souls waiting to well up again . . . . The entire Seder is an invitation to taste the tears and hopes of our ancestors.*

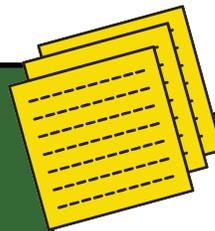


What makes up your personal “karpas”? Where do you turn to find strength during difficult times?

**2. In *Yachatz* (the part of the Seder when the matzah is broken in two; p. 14–15), Hebrew College faculty member Rabbi Jordan Schuster describes how the broken matzah inspires us to yearn for what is not yet whole and visible to the world:**

*Yaḥatz — the Passover ritual of breaking a sheet of matzah in two — takes its name from the Hebrew root ḥ.tz.h. meaning quite literally “to break in half.” We pull out the middle matzah from a stack of three, we crack it in two, and we hide the larger piece, leaving the smaller piece on the table to consider. For Rebbe Nachman, this smaller piece — this lesser fragment — represents us and our world. But the larger piece that we are called upon to conceal — this, he teaches, represents G-d. Cracked away from the larger hidden half, we are severed from Divinity, and a distance — undefined and wrenching — opens up between us.*

What places of brokenness in the world or in your community do you most wish to help fix? What places in yourself do you wish to find new wholeness for?



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**3. The Hebrew College Passover Companion is structured around the *simanim*, or signposts, of the Seder, bringing readers from the ritual's beginning, through the meal, and to its closing. In *Shulchan Orekh* (the part of the Seder when the festive meal is eaten; pages 43–45), Gail Twersky Reimer writes:**

*Some of my favorite childhood memories are of setting our Seder table. In addition to laying out the embroidered damask tablecloth with its matching napkins, and the handsome fine china, freshly polished silverware, and exquisite crystal wine glasses — all of which, after the two Seders, would be stored away till the following year — there was the classic Seder plate with its special ceremonial foods, the ornate Elijah's cup, the bowls of salt water, and an assortment of other silver and crystal items, each with its special place on our table. As soon as guests arrived, before any words had been spoken, they understood that this night was different from all other nights. The set table served as an overture to the forthcoming evening's symphony.*



We all have a favorite part of the Seder. Perhaps it is one of the *simanim* — the Four Questions, the *Maggid* (Passover story), or searching for the *afikomen*. Perhaps it connects to your childhood or the memory of a loved one who has since passed. What is your favorite part of the Pesach Seder? Where do you most find the symbol of hope in the Seder?

**4. In *Barech* (when the blessing after the Seder meal is said; pages 49–50), Rabbi Jordan Brauning begins:**

*Blessing beforehand is easy.  
Praises spill out when the table is set,  
bounty before us, still untouched.  
Gratitude pours freely from hungry lips.*

**He continues:**

*Our collective instinct,  
like some ancestral muscle memory,  
compels us to thank before we take.*

As we celebrate our second Passover of this pandemic, what are you grateful for? What has compelled you to say “thank you” during this time?



We hope the [Hebrew College Passover Companion](#) has helped you find new strength in the ancient Seder ritual during our global pandemic — and that next year we can sit down at the table with friends and family, and a newfound freedom to celebrate in ways that bring us joy and peace.



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