

From: [David Kraemer](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: An existential crisis, one person's response to communal fear— 3/23/20
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From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
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To: mojo210al@gmail.com
Cc: docgorin@aol.com
Subject: An existential crisis, one person's response to communal fear— 3/23/20

Spring is pregnant with images of redemption and resurrection. For us as Jews, Spring demands we recall the redemptive moment in Egypt when our ancestors were redeemed from slavery and the Jewish people were born. For our Christian friends, Spring demands that they embrace a construct of resurrection by which their savior became eternal. This spring, the world is very different, and the rituals associated with those celebrations will therefore be different as well. I can't speak to how Easter Egg rolls will change or the impact of missing out on a big Easter dinner. But I can speak to the difference in Passover this year and, in the process, perhaps remind us that this is an opportunity to embrace not a moment to mourn. Passover for us as Jews is a celebration of family that serves as a model of the celebration of our sense of being a people. Indeed, the earliest description of Passover, (read this past Shabbat in Shul as an additional Torah reading) reminds us that everyone in their OWN house offered the Paschal sacrifice and only if there was too much were we to invite others in. But the initial ritual was house by house reflecting on the almost impossible concept that a people enslaved for hundreds of years was about to claim their freedom. Of course, over the ensuing 3200 years, as it were, the celebrations have become more involved. To paraphrase Bialik—a Seder for two is like kissing your sibling through a veil. But for many people this year Seder will be on their own, in households of 1 or 2 or 5 but without the extended family and guests that define for many the ritual itself. I still remember the first Seder I remember. I was barely five, had not yet started kindergarten because I had a February birthday, but my mom had already taught me to read. At the start of the Seder, I thought I was very smart, and I said to my dad, “tonight I get wine.” And he said, no you don't. I said I do. It says so. He said where. I said on the bottle. He said show me and when I did, he burst out laughing in a vision I still see to this day. My mom may have taught me to read but one does not pronounce “Chilled” as “child”. I am reminded of that image every year, and indeed on the last Pesach that I was privileged to be with my parents in Jerusalem,(2013), my dad told that story. The seder is a celebration of questions and answers. Framed as “how is this night

different from all others”, this year the world is asking the most difficult question and one in which there is no clear-cut answer. We don’t know what the outcome of this COVID-19 will be. We don’t know how it will upend the society we have come to understand. We don’t know who will emerge unscathed and who will become a victim of plague. But we do know some things that have carried us as a people for generations upon generations. This year, when we gather for Seder, we will be disappointed, but it is not a tragedy. Tragedy is a death as a result of contact, disappointment is having to protect ourselves from gathering. Tragedy is the health professional who contracts covid-19 because of having to treat its victims, disappointment is having to protect ourselves from gathering. I feel bad for our grandson who will miss out being surrounded by grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins in Columbus. But I know that his parents will earnestly begin the process of “teach your child” by instructing him that he is now fully in the chain of tradition that understands the importance of being part of a people who does not give into despair. This year, while our ritual needs to be different and we will have to address how to connect, the one answer I do know is that introducing people outside the household unit on Seder night defeats the purpose of household isolation. (And for my Christian friends reading this—the same goes for Easter dinners). For Phyllis, who for almost all of our 41 Pesach’s together has made two wonderful Sedarim each year for 25plus people each night, the disappointment might be a little less, but no less profound. As we say at the end of the Seder—
“next year.....in Jerusalem”

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