

Leanne Rubinstein

Personal essay

Passover has always been my favorite holiday. Celebrating it in the middle of a global pandemic, however, helped me understand my own culture and its importance in a whole new light.

Every year my family comes together at my grandparents' house, each baring a predetermined dish for the dinner following the Seder: we provide the kugel, my grandma makes the brisket, my aunt's family brings a vegetable of some sort and my uncle makes a dessert. We sing songs, eat lots of matzah and drink wine while we teach each other the history of Passover from the Haggadah, a Jewish text. Then we begin the meal. Nowadays, I know the songs and stories so well that the holiday holds a special place of nostalgia in my heart. It also didn't hurt that my parents let me drink wine with the adults when I was in high school!

This year, there was no large gathering at my grandparents' home. There was no brisket or kugel, as the grocery stores did not have the ingredients needed.

Even so, the holiday was as festive as ever. Home from school with my immediate family, I joined them in setting up a video conference call with the other households, sending photocopies of our version of the Haggadah so everyone could follow along.

My grandparents didn't know how to set up their video camera. My five-year-old cousin struggled to sit still in front of a computer, distracting her parents. My aunt's in-laws couldn't find the Haggadah in their email. There was a significant audio lag when we'd try to sing the songs.

None of it mattered.

The Seder was a huge success. We took turns reading passages aloud and, with a little patience, the quality time was still very much the highlight of the evening.

If anything, this Passover felt even more important than usual because it brought us together when we felt furthest apart.

The story of Pesach resonates more during this difficult time because its message is one of resilience. It highlights the Israelites' freedom from their oppressors, as well as all the suffering they endured in their quest to safety. Throughout their struggles, my ancestors maintained their hope and their faith that all would be okay.

Whether one is celebrating a religious occasion this weekend or not, this reminder is as important as ever with all of the suffering our world is currently enduring.

On Passover, we sing a song called "Dayenu." Translated from Hebrew, this means "It is enough for us." Passover reminds us to be grateful in times of hardship. It reminds us that, even with very little, we may still be wealthy.

Being stuck at home is not easy. It is frustrating to be unable to be at school or work. It is draining to be constantly worried about the health of family and friends. It is hard to be away from friends, and it is a struggle to find motivation for productivity in a time when every day feels the same as the last.

But I am grateful.

I'm grateful that I have my family to support me. I'm grateful that myself and the people I care about are in good health. I'm grateful that my father is able to work from home. I'm grateful that we live in an age of technology that allows me to continue learning and stay relatively connected to my friends. Gratitude is the key to making it to the end of this long tunnel.

For now, dayenu. It is enough.



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