

**Missing at Seder, Missing in Life**  
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Almost two decades ago, the filmmaker Michael Rubiner drafted a plan for a two minute, short and sweet Seder. Listen carefully. Try to discover what is missing.

*Thanks, God, for creating wine. (Drink wine.)*

*Thanks for creating produce. (Eat parsley.)*

*Overview: Once we were slaves in Egypt. Now we're free. That's why we're doing this.*

*Four questions:*

- 1. What's up with the matzoh?*
- 2. What's the deal with horseradish?*
- 3. What's with the dipping of the herbs?*
- 4. What's this whole slouching at the table business?*

*Four Answers:*

- 1. When we left Egypt, we were in a hurry. There was no time for making decent bread.*
- 2. Life was bitter, like horseradish.*
- 3. It's called symbolism.*
- 4. Free people get to slouch.*

*A funny story: Once, these five rabbis talked all night, then it was morning. (Heat soup now.)*

*The four kinds of children and how to deal with them:*

*Wise child—explain Passover.*

*Simple child—explain Passover slowly.*

*Silent child—explain Passover loudly.*

*Wicked child—browbeat in front of the relatives.*

*Speaking of children: We hid some matzoh. Whoever finds it gets five bucks.*

*The story of Passover: It's a long time ago. We're slaves in Egypt. Pharaoh is a nightmare. We cry out for help. God brings plagues upon the Egyptians. We escape, bake some matzoh. God parts the Red Sea. We make it through; the Egyptians aren't so lucky. We wander 40 years in the desert, eat manna, get the Torah, wind up in Israel, get a new temple, enjoy several years without being persecuted again. (Let brisket cool now.)*

*The 10 Plagues: Blood, Frogs, Lice—you name it.*

*Singing of "Dayenu":*

*If God had gotten us out of Egypt and not punished our enemies, it would've been enough. If he'd punished our enemies and not parted the Red Sea, it would've been enough.*

*If he'd parted the Red Sea—(Remove gefilte fish from refrigerator now.)*

*Eat matzoh. Drink more wine. Slouch.*

*SERVE MEAL.*

*Thanks again, God, for everything.*

*I can count up to 13, but there was only 1 kid goat.*

*Say good night*

What was missing?

One of the most important parts of the Seder absent from this two-minute version, was also missing from my seder table. Although it is important enough that the entire hag of Pesah is related to it, this part has been missing from all Seder tables for 1900 years.

A hint: I took our granddaughter to the Agricultural Museum. We saw what was missing from Seder: a roasted lamb. While we associate the *yom tov* with *matzot* and even refer to the festival as Hag haMatzot, the sacrifice offered to commemorate this event was called the *Korban Pesah*. After the destruction of the *Mikdash*-Temple, the Seder meal, which once began with the consumption of the sacrificial lamb, no longer had this central food.

Because of the missing roasted lamb, our rabbis reconfigured the Seder, putting the meal AFTER all the commentary and discussion. They kept *matzah* and *maror* at the culmination of part one and added Hallel and lots of songs following the meal. While Sephardim do consume roasted lamb, most Ashkenazi Jews refrain even from dry roast for the Seder meal.

Even so, all *haggadot* include Rabban Gamaliel's elevator speech.

רבן גמליאל היה אומר, כל שלא אמר שלשה דברים אלו בפסח, לא יצא ידי חובתו,  
ואלו הן, פסח, מצה, ומרור.

Rabban Gamliel says that there are three essential foods: Pesah, Matzah and Maror. Which comes first? The historic sacrifice.

One of Rabban Gamilel's innovations was that we were not directed to simply eat the essential foods, we were told to discuss them. And when we read this section, we are supposed to point to or lift up the symbolic food. *Matzah zeh*- point. *Maror zeh*- point. But when we say *Pesah zeh* - we don't lift up the shankbone. Some people don't even point at it.

A key food, intended to be at the table, mentioned in the Torah, the *mishnah* and the *haggadah*, and we don't recognise it the way we do the other foods. It's strange, because we refer to the *yom tov* as *Pesah*, which by the way, doesn't mean passed over. It means saved or protected, in connection with the first lamb sacrifice in Egypt.

Without the possibility of the sacrifice, the other two foods - which - as Hillel taught - were suppose to be eaten with the Pesah offering - moved up in significance to replace the lamb. This was one of the great innovations of post-Temple rabbinic Judaism. Ritual life was to continue, despite destruction and disruption.

How do you continue when something or someone really important is missing?

Today is Shemini, the eighth day of Pesah. The last Shemini was Atzeret and the day of the Hamas attack. Almost 700 Israeli civilians were killed by the invaders, among them were 36 children and 364 mowed down at the Supernova music festival. There were also 71 foreign citizens and 373 soldiers and other security

personnel. Look around the Beit Knesset and see the faces of hostages. All of them are missing on this 207<sup>th</sup> day of captivity. Some of them are dead. Take a moment to remember the individuals or person that you are remembering today. Hold that mental image. Can you feel a scratchy beard, smell the scent of perfume, feel the warmth of a sweater, see the smile?

Do any of you remember the children's book by Shel Silverstein, *the Missing Piece*? A wheel is missing a wedge-shaped piece of itself. Like a slice of pie or pizza missing.

It was missing a piece.  
And it was not happy.  
So it set off in search  
of its missing piece.

One way of compensating for a loss is to try to fill it by try to go back to "the way we were." Some of us do this when a person we love dies. We want to keep the room the same way as when our daughter was alive. We leave a seat empty at the table for our zaidie or bubbie. This year, many Seder seats were left empty in recognition of the carnage and hostages held by Hamas.

There are Jews who want to restore the Passover sacrifice. For them, the recapture of all of Jerusalem in 1967 raised the possibility of returning to the ritual of the Second Temple. Since the *korban* Pesah can be offered on an altar on the Temple Mount even without the Temple, they try, every year, to do so.

A halakhic question about this was asked of Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg, a great rabbinic sage, whose legal compendium is called *Tzitz Eliezer*. His reply was first, that there's no obligation to offer sacrifices in our times. He also wrote that if Jews started constructing an altar on the Temple Mount, millions of people would declare a holy war against us.

Indeed, Muslims focus on the small group of Jewish extremists as a reason to oppose the vast majority of peaceful visitors at the Western Wall and to prevent any Jewish or Christian prayer on the area that we consider the Temple Mount, Har Habayit, and Muslims call Haram al-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary. The last time I was up there with a group of Christians and Muslims, the Waqf guide referred to the Jews walking in the area as provocative.

Another way we deal with loss is to try to fill the gap with a search for something else. So people will travel or try to be busy to block out the awareness of their grief.

We often feel that finding our own Missing Piece — whatever it may be — will make us happy. A new companion or spouse. But then other complications arise. The Circle in Shel Silverstein's book finds a seemingly perfect Missing Piece, only to discover that it now rolls too quickly for a butterfly to land atop it, it cannot stop to talk to a beetle or smell a flower.

Over recent years, we have witnessed to what Fred Iklé and the late US Senator Daniel Moynahan called “semantic infiltration”, “the process whereby we come to adopt the language of our adversaries in describing political reality.” Moynihan noted especially how totalitarian regimes would advertise themselves as “liberation movements.” Anti-Zionism leads to antisemitism and occasionally leads people to refer to Israelis as Nazis. Some opponents of Israel call for Palestine from the river to the sea, another way of advocating for the end of a Jewish state.

There also are Jews who have adopted the language of anti-Zionism in the name of *tikkun olam*. They imagine that the world would be better if they could find the missing piece that would make Israel perfect. They have lost perspective on what is real and what is ideal. They object to the way Israel faces its military and internal challenges. They declare that the prophetic vision and voice of justice is neither heard nor seen in the Land.

But this is an imaginary desire. No one lives in a perfect nation-state. The Israelis I know are constantly striving to lessen the gap between the ideal and the real, the aspirational and the daily duties of life.

So what does one do with the missing paschal lamb? What does one do with the missing pieces in our personal life?

We include them in our memories and words. We acknowledge what would have been present. We mention the Pesah lamb. We don't forget it. But we don't try to make it real again. Missing, yet somehow still in our thoughts and memories.

At a shivah and funeral, we console mourners with these words: “May the One who is present be with you to offer comfort and consolation, along with others who have mourned in Zion and Jerusalem.” We always recall our loss, but want mourners to learn from the resilience and continued life of the Jewish people..

So too, we take note of the grandfather’s chair that is empty this year, of the loving partner whose bed is vacant, of the sibling who can no longer take our phone call, of the child whose laughter used to fill the house with joy. We mention them.

We miss them. Somehow, we continue to roll forward, bumping along, knowing that there will always be a missing piece.

[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/low\\_concept/2006/04/the\\_twominute\\_haggadah.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/low_concept/2006/04/the_twominute_haggadah.html)

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