

יָחַץ: Embracing Brokenness

In the *Yakhatz* ritual of the Passover seder, we break the middle of three *matzot*, reserving the larger half to be eaten as the *afikoman* at the end of the meal. In the same way that someone spilling wine on a white tablecloth can break the ice at a formal meal, breaking the fragile matzah opens the door for honest and robust conversation about challenging subjects during the *Maggid* section that follows. The texts below offer two approaches to consider for *Yakhatz* this year. The first is a ritual of invitation, responding to the pain of absence and loss by encouraging seder participants to metaphorically invite missing loved ones and strangers to the seder table. The second is an excerpt from *A Night to Remember*, reminding us of the power of recalling brokenness.



Inviting the People We Miss to Our Table

Noam Zion

The seder gives us a chance to tell the stories not only of our ancestors, but of those we once knew and loved who are now missing from our tables. They may be beloved parents and grandparents whose chairs are now empty; friends and relatives disconnected from Judaism and our worldwide Jewish family; or family members, friends, and loved ones who could not join us this year for one reason or another. Ritual can help heal the pain caused by these poignant absences.

There are already many traditions around recognizing fellow Jews who are not present at our seders. During WWII, the *kibbutzim* of Mandate Palestine began pouring a cup of wine “for the missing.” Those present at the seder would dedicate their fourth cup to the many *kibbutz* members who had volunteered to serve in the British Army fighting the Nazis. In the 1970s and 1980s, many left an empty chair at the table or added a fourth matzah for Soviet Jews and/or Syrian Jews who were not free to celebrate Passover or to make *aliyah*. This year, consider setting an empty place to acknowledge those massacred and kidnapped on October 7, and the Israeli soldiers who have died in defense of their homes and families.

Questions for Conversation

- Is there someone whose name you would like to add to the list of those you miss at your seder this year? Would you like to tell part of their story during *Maggid*?
- Can you think of other rituals, songs, pieces of art, or monuments you have encountered that make space for people who are no longer or unable to be with us?

Entering the Broken World

Mishael Zion, from *A Night to Remember*

The Passover story begins in a broken world, amidst slavery and oppression. The sound of the breaking of the matzah sends us into that fractured existence, only to become whole again when we find the broken half, the *afikoman*, at the end of the seder.

This brokenness is neither just a physical nor a political situation: It reminds us of all those hard, damaged places within ourselves. All those narrow places from which we want to break free. In Hebrew, Egypt is called *Mitzrayim*, reminding us of the word *tzar*, narrow. Thus, in Hasidic thought, *Mitzrayim* symbolizes the inner straits that trap our souls. Yet even here, we can find a unique value, as the Hasidic saying teaches us: “There is nothing more whole than a broken heart.”

Questions for Conversation

- What does the sound of breaking matzah evoke for you?
- How does the ritual of *Yakhatz* frame the narrative of the Exodus and the rituals of the seder?
- What does the Hasidic saying “there is nothing more whole than a broken heart” mean to you? Has your understanding of the phrase changed over the past year? If so, how?