

Mindfulness Practices for Every Step of the Seder

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For so many of us, the Seder is a ritual to 'get through.' There is someone rushing through the words, another person checking the clock, another drooling over the smells from the kitchen. What if as the seder unfolds, we knew we could look forward to an opportunity for pause and reflection? Using the prompts below, transform your seder table into a circle of balance.

Note: These exercises can either make up a complete 'mindfulness seder', or you can choose one or more to incorporate into a seder you are leading or attending.

Kadeish קדיש – recital of Kiddush blessing and drinking of the first cup of wine

As you begin the seder, there is often a great deal of anticipation. Looking forward to that first sip of wine, taste of matza, warm soup...instead of counting how many pages to the next section, focus in on each step of this ritual. One method is to narrate (either out loud or in your mind) each step as objectively as possible: "I am holding the glass. I am opening the wine. I am pouring the wine. I am holding up the glass. [say blessing] I am sipping the wine. I am swallowing the wine." Notice what arises in this practice - is it calm and presence, or more agitation or anticipation? Bonus: try it for each of the 4 cups and see how it changes.

Urchatz ורחץ – the washing of the hands

Water is life and our hands are purified by the waters. Instead of washing and then rushing to dry them off, hold your wet hands open on your lap or on the edge of the table. Sit in silence or quiet whispers as you watch and feel the water evaporating. Take bets on when they will be fully dry or have a contest who can go the longest without drying them on the closest napkin.

Karpas כרפס – dipping of the karpas in salt water

Reciting blessings over our food is a chance to slow down and connect to the source of our nourishment. Assemble platters of three or more vegetables for each guest, or invite each guest to assemble mini platters at their seat after passing around a tray of vegetables. Choosing one item at a time, hold it in the air with your focus on the vegetable. What's did it look like while in the ground? (You may wish to provide photos - I'm especially fond of photos of potato plants!) Close your eyes and imagine the trip from the ground to the store to your plate. Then say the blessing.

Yachatz יתץ – breaking the middle matza

The breaking of the matza should be done in silence. As you prepare for the break, count three long breaths with eyes open and focus on the matza, held high for all to see. Listen closely to the sound of the matza breaking. At this moment, we hold the paradox of wholeness and brokenness; the matza is both the bread of our affliction and the bread of freedom. Take three more deep breaths. Optional: Share with someone next to you or the whole table - what paradoxes in your life are you sitting with today?

Maggid מגיד – retelling the Passover story, including the recital of "the four questions" and drinking of the second cup of wine

Dayeinu: What in our lives do we take for granted, but may actually be enough for us? Share with someone next to you or the entire table. After each person shares, respond: Dayeinu!

Rachtzah רחצה – second washing of the hands

So much of the seder is talking and listening. Finally, here's a part that has almost no talking. After you say the hand washing blessing, choose a niggun (simple wordless melody) that you and your guests can carry until everyone has finished washing. Use eye contact and the raising of the matza for motzi to signal the end of the blessing.

Motzi Matza מוציא מצה – blessing before eating matzo

The first bit of matza is always the driest. One is truly meant to savor that bite and not mix with any other dips or spreads. As you begin to munch on the first bit, notice what thoughts, feelings, and sensations arise. Joy, dryness, satiation...what else? Allow these to come and go without judgement until your serving of matza is consumed.

Maror מרור – eating of the maror

The embodied practice of purposely consuming maror has deep symbolism. Dipping ¾ ounces of maror into charoset, which is sweet, brings healing and alignment as we approach the formal meal.

Koreich כורכר – eating of a sandwich made of matzah and maror

Koreich is a memory sandwich. Since we no longer slaughter a lamb for the paschal sacrifice, there is only maror on our matzo sandwich. Though the pesach sacrifice is primarily represented with the zroa, shankbone, on the seder plate, our memory sandwich is the key moment of the seder to recall this sacrifice. Though we do not recite an additional blessing for this sandwich, as we chew, we recline and recall the communal rite of the shared roasted lamb.

The moment we consume this sandwich, we are simultaneous recalling the *Pesach offering*, both from Temple times and from our last night in Egypt. What makes this symbol so powerful is that we have the capacity to recall two moments in history simultaneously:

The word "Pesach" is literally the name of this sacrifice, which was done in memory of the one performed in Egypt on the night of the 10th plague when they put animal blood on the doorposts. The Torah commandment to consume the offering on the Passover holiday comes from Exodus 12:8: "They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs." and then in verse 14: "This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival..." (See Exodus 12:3-14 for the full section).

In Temple times, there were many key rituals regarding a sacrificed lamb or goat shared amongst family. In Exodus 12:3 we read "שֶֹׁהֶֶה לְבַיִת" - a lamb per household." One could not observe this ritual on their own - usually, families would combine with neighbors to afford a high quality lamb to share on the holiday.

Shulchan oreich שולחן עורכר – lit. "set table"–the serving of the holiday meal

Many seder meals begin with a spherical object, such as an egg, gefilte fish, or matza ball. Take a moment to examine this round food item, with no beginning and no ending. You have made it to the midpoint of the seder; and yet, this round item reminds us there is no beginning and no end. We are fully redeemed and we are still waiting to be redeemed. Turn over the item again, then bring it to your mouth for the first bite.

Tzafun צפון – eating of the afikoman

Walking meditation: An opportunity to get out our seats and wander. Perform the search in silence. Take your steps slowly and carefully. Extra credit if you have time: as you walk, say to yourself "lifting, stepping, placing" for each movement of each foot.

Bareich ברכר – blessing after the meal and drinking of the third cup of wine

Gratitude opportunity: Before or after saying the blessing after the meal, share one aspect of tonight's seder that you are grateful for in this moment.

Hallel הלל – recital of the Hallel & drinking of the fourth cup of wine

Praise and song with nature: As we sing hallel and enjoy our 4th cup, imagine one sign of spring such as a tree bud or flower. Close your eyes and picture it celebrating the unfolding of warmth and light that comes with the new season.

Nirtzah נירצח – say "Next Year in Jerusalem!"

Turn to someone next to you or share with the entire group farewell blessings for their journey home or a sweet night's rest.