

# An Unprecedented Annual Ritual

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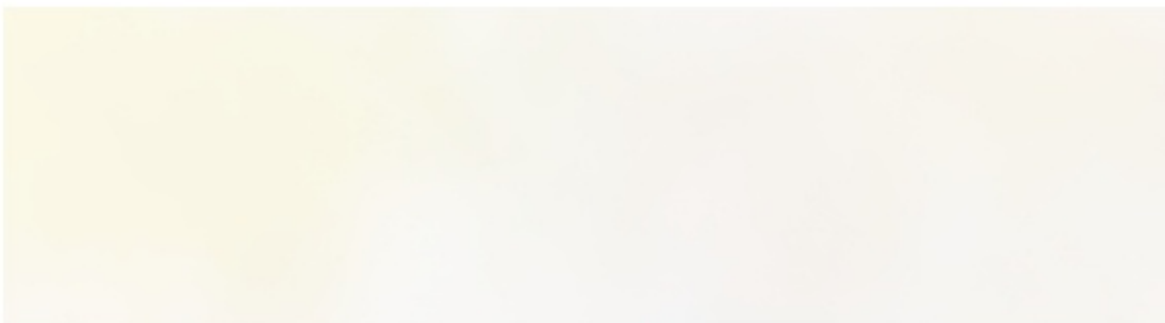


Ritual is important to  
us as human beings. It  
ties us to our traditions  
and our histories.

Miller Williams

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Tonight, we hold a kind of Seder we've never had before. For most of us, it's a familiar ritual. We have performed it every year, no matter the year. Our ancestors performed the ritual in good times and bad. This year we're not where we usually are for Seder, nor are we with the beloveds we're usually with for this ritual. And yet, we perform the ritual. Individually and together. We take the steps, and we explore the items, stories, and ideas that we explore in this Biblical ritual, this rite of spring.

Agnes Varda said: "If we opened people up, we'd find landscapes."

Tonight, in quarantine, the Seder table - and our own interiorities - are our landscapes. The landscapes are full, lush, strange, and worthy of exploration and questioning.

The Quran (5:32) mirrors Mishna Sanhedrin (4:5) when it says: We decreed upon the children of Israel that whoever kills a soul... it is as if he had slain the whole world, and whoever saves one - it's as if he saved all mankind. Each of us is a world, is a society, is a landscape. And tonight, we gather around us what we can - each item or its approximation for ritual purposes is the thing, and also any number of metaphors. Each item we gather to ourselves is a part of our landscape, of our whole world - full of all the beautiful and terrible things we find in life.

We will explore the Pesach, Matzah, and Maror - and our other additions to the Seder plate - later in the Seder, as is tradition, this early moment of gathering and creating our ritual landscapes brings us to the recitation of the Order of the Seder.