

# Acknowledging and Releasing the Burdens: An Old/ New Ritual for Breaking the Middle Matzah

Contributed by [Moving Traditions](#)

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For Passover this year, Moving Traditions is sharing a new take on a traditional Syrian and Moroccan Passover ritual in which seder participants place a piece of matzah on their shoulder to recall the experience of bondage.

After the middle of three sheets of matzah is broken, the larger piece—which later will be used for the afikomen—is passed around the room. Each guest places it on their shoulder (using the right hand and left shoulder) while reciting a line from the Book of Exodus: *And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading-troughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders.*

Each guest then feels for a moment as if they are an enslaved Hebrew, carrying the burdens of bondage as they flee Egypt.

Matzah is both the bread of affliction and the bread of freedom. This year, as we mark the second Passover of the pandemic, we are taking time to acknowledge the burdens that the pandemic has placed on people's shoulders.

Think about all the people who took on extra burdens this year, by choice or by necessity. People you know and people you do not know. Burdens that were economic, that were emotional, that were reflective of systemic injustices. People close by and people far away.

**Step 1:** Break the matzah. Everyone takes a turn placing the larger piece on your shoulder and sharing who you are thinking about and the burden that person or people carried this year. (Guests on camera can use their own piece of matzah!)

**Step 2:** Ask someone to read the following contemporary blessing:

May our eyes be open to each other's pain.

May our ears be open to each other's cries.

May we live with greater awareness.

May we practice greater forgiveness.

And may we go forward as free people able to respond to ourselves and each other with compassion, wonderment, appreciation, and love.

- Rabbi Yael Levy

**Step 3:** Ask everyone to imagine what liberation from the pandemic will look and feel like for them, their friends and family, and the world. Take a moment of quiet to acknowledge the losses of the past year. Then share a hope or vision of liberation.

**Step 4:** Ask everyone to think of the time when we will be liberated from the pandemic. Reach out your hands (either to the camera or to those around you) and say: May these burdens be lifted and may all who eat the bread of affliction taste the bread of freedom.

**Step 5:** Hide the afikomen!

Our 2021 seder resource offers you—and others around your table or online—the opportunity to consider the weight of the challenges you have been carrying over the past year, and the burdens shouldered by so many others who have helped us persevere and arrive at another Passover.

[Click here](#) to download a PDF of the resource. We hope our 2021 resource prompts a discussion about ways to promote justice and liberation in the year ahead. Have a sweet and liberating Passover!