

Home Alone for Passover? Not a Tough Decision

By Raphael Benaroya

As my wife and I get ready to spend Passover alone, self-quarantined in Florida, our adult children in New Jersey are agonizing over our decision to stay apart from them. They're forlorn that our extended family won't be celebrating Seder together for the first time in 40 years.

My son challenged me—could this be the wrong choice? One daughter also expressed concern—wouldn't this be very hard for us? My other daughter wondered—was this a tough decision for us to make?

Well, it's true that the Seder is one of our family's most important rituals—as well as the most widely practiced Jewish tradition around the world. And our separation is a little sad. But the answer to all these questions is a resounding NO.

After all, we have plenty to be thankful for. We have shelter, food, and all the comforts we need. We can talk with our family over the phone or see them face to face through electronic media. And we certainly don't want to expose anyone to risk.

Yes, we will miss the festive table surrounded by our children and grandchildren. And yes, we will miss fulfilling our obligation to tell our grandkids the story of Passover—how the Israelites' Exodus from bondage to freedom some 3,500 years ago gave birth to the Jewish nation.

That flight from bondage makes me think about my paternal grandfather, my namesake.

During World War II, my grandfather and his family survived the Nazis in Eastern Europe. His eldest son, my father, then just finishing high school, was forced into a labor camp, while the rest of the family were squeezed into cramped quarters in the ghetto.

Soon after the war, with my father back home, my grandfather sensed a new danger as the Communists took over and imposed their totalitarian ideology. He foresaw the erection of the Iron Curtain, and decided he had to make a better life for his family. So in 1946, he took a series of actions with tremendous risks to save them.

First, he paid a smuggler to take my father out of the country, knowing he would face a long, lonely and treacherous journey, away from his family. My father had to cross three borders to get to Israel, then under the British Mandate.

THAT was a tough decision.

Soon after my father left, my grandfather sent his middle son—my uncle—the same way. He was a teenager, 15 years of age at the time.

THAT was a tough decision.

Finally, my grandparents and their youngest son, then just 10, set off on their own dangerous escape. They couldn't be sure of making it, or connecting with their older sons. And even if they reached the land of Israel, it would not be safe. The country was surrounded by enemies and on the brink of war. My grandfather could expect his family to eat hand to mouth, uncertain of finding reliable shelter.

THAT was a tough decision.

Around the same time, my maternal grandparents were taking their own perilous actions. They obtained a fake passport for my mother and her brother, showing them as husband and wife, so that border guards would let them through the Iron Curtain just before it was drawn shut.

THAT was a tough decision.

But our decision to keep the family apart this Passover? That was easy.

Sure, our Seder will be a little lonely, unlike any other in this generation. But let's remember our many blessings. And let's keep the proper perspective.

Compared to what our forebears went through, celebrating Passover apart is only a "passing" inconvenience. Clearly, we should all just do what's best to stay healthy and safe. That's a good thought for everyone, not just for our family.

My grandfather would approve.

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