

PASSOVER IN A PANDEMIC

Zooming in on Pesach

Religious organisations are reminding the community that they must not allow visitors into their homes for seders this Pesach, noting “these measures are about saving lives”.

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Photo: Toby Tabachnick

KEY religious communal organisations have issued guidelines for a Pesach like no other, in light of ever-developing government regulations issued during the coronavirus pandemic.

Working in conjunction with the Melbourne Beth Din, the Rabbinical Council of Victoria (RCV) has emphasised that “as a matter of halachah, it is absolutely mandated for everyone to follow as a minimum, all the government guidelines”.

“We need to stay at home unless it is essential to leave as per the government’s guidelines. These measures must not be compromised, and every individual has a role in their efficacy,” the RCV stated.

While acknowledging the closeness of the Jewish community, the body reiterated the government’s calls that prohibit guests in a family home, noting “these measures, while extremely difficult, are about saving lives”.

The council goes on to encourage social connection through the use of modern technology, where possible. As such, the RCV “highly recommends” hosting a Zoom conference call late in the afternoon on the eve of Pesach – for “those who find themselves alone, and for all who will miss being with family and friends”. The council suggests using the platform in order to sing songs from the Haggadah, tell stories and share the special and traditional moments with family and friends, but stresses live streaming is forbidden at the commencement of the yom tov at 5.45pm (Melbourne time) on Wednesday, April 8.

The RCV guidelines also recognise the difficulties in commemorating a yahrzeit and therefore encourage community members to reach out to their rabbi; recommend checking in with friends or neighbours who may be alone with a

brief, one-on-one (albeit, two metres apart) daily scheduled outdoor meeting; and implore the importance of giving tzedakah at this time.

The Sydney Beth Din (SBD) has also encouraged electronic devices to be used immediately prior to Pesach, but not during yom tov itself.

The SBD statement suggests utilising electronic devices to connect “our families wherever they may be, all ready and sitting at the set yom tov table ... We can talk to each other and exchange good wishes and blessings. We can symbolically go through meaningful parts of the Haggadah which we usually say or sing together like *Ma Nishtanah*, and *Avadim Hayinu* as well as singing the songs at the end of the seder”.

The statement reiterated, “It is prohibited to do this during yom tov. This must be completed prior to candle lighting time, 5.23pm [Sydney time].”

Meanwhile, co-presidents of the Union for Progressive Judaism (UPJ) David Knoll and Brian Samuel have also delivered a Pesach message to constituents.

“Our Jewish tradition is communal by nature, and isolation has made observance difficult. Synagogues across the globe have closed their doors to help preserve life, but spiritual connections need to be maintained,” read the statement.

Knoll and Samuel also acknowledged that many families within the Progressive and Masorti movements will not be able to come together in person for a seder this year – and “the only way for families to connect at the seder table will be via a virtual seder”.

“The Union for Progressive Judaism’s webpage and Facebook page provides resources for virtual sedarim that families can tap into. Our congregations are also offering a range of online services and educational opportunities for all ages.

“At this difficult time, it is more important than ever for our Jewish community to be safe and unified.”