

# **The Sharsheret Un-Seder: Inspiring Messages and Insights for those impacted by cancer**

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Presented by:



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Melissa Rosen:

Welcome to Sharsheret's first ever Un-Seder. It's really meant to be an inspiring experience to help us prepare, to help center us all in relation to the upcoming Passover holiday. I'm going to be your moderator today. My name is Melissa Rosen, and I serve as the Director of Community Education at Sharsheret. Many, many of my colleagues worked to create this innovative program and are joining us now to ensure the program is seamless.

Melissa Rosen:

Although our collective quarantine jump started this program as in person support programs became unavailable, the focus today is really about celebrating Passover while living alongside cancer, whether currently or years ago. I think it's important to share that each presenter joining us today, myself included, shares the perspective of being a breast cancer survivor, and that has informed all of our presentations.

Melissa Rosen:

I want to take less than a minute to discuss what's going to happen at the program, and some Zoom etiquette. Today's program will include several short presentations, including Cancer, Corona, and Contentment: Celebrating Passover This Year, Making Healthy Choices During Passover, Finding Hope on the Seder Plate, Dayeinu: A Musical Interlude, and Next Year in Jerusalem, Next Year for Me, which is actually a presentation in collaboration with all of you.

Melissa Rosen:

As Jenna mentioned, as you enter the Un-Seder, you'll automatically be muted. We will be manually muting anyone who doesn't stay muted, but if you need to unmute for any reason, there is a button on the bottom to mute you and to unmute yourself, on the left-hand of your screen.

Melissa Rosen:

This program is being recorded. If you do not want your image on the recording, you can choose to turn off your video. The option to do that is also on the bottom left-hand of your screen. You also have the

option of calling in, and just listening via telephone, and that information was in your confirmation email.

Melissa Rosen:

We strongly recommend that you choose the speaker view for today's presentation. The speaker view is an option on the top right part of your screen. That will really let you see the speaker's face, and any stuff they have to put on to the screen. So, that's really the best option.

Melissa Rosen:

That being said, even when you choose the speaker view, there are little thumbnails or small pictures either on the top or the side of your screen to see other people who are in. Okay.

Melissa Rosen:

I'm actually the first presentation, entitled Cancer, Corona, and Contentment: Celebrating Passover This Year. The title is actually ordered incorrectly. We'll start off with the contentment part and the ways to deal with the challenges in our lives, then we'll finish with Passover. I want to end with that because I'll share some very practical pieces, but let's start with some more overarching concepts.

Melissa Rosen:

Passover is coming. It's basically here. As our ancestors prepared to leave slavery in Egypt, they witnessed the most frightening series of plagues. The experience must have been not just scary, but the fear must have been truly terrifying. Not only the fear of what the future held for them, but the fear of the immediate impact of the plagues on them. That is what we're facing today quite literally.

Melissa Rosen:

We already had enough on our plates between our usual obligations, work, family, community, and preparing for the holiday of Passover. Then, of course, dealing with a cancer diagnosis or cancer survivorship, treatment, managing side effect, concern about the future remission and cure. Now, we face an 11th plague, impacting the world around us without the past assurances we had that the plague will Pass-Over our homes. In fact, we may be at greater risk because of our medical status.

Melissa Rosen:

So, how can we possibly enjoy the upcoming holiday, celebrate our freedom, when between corona and cancer we feel anything but free? I want to share something with you. Those thoughts that recur in our minds as we deal with our current situations, whatever they are, cancer, COVID-19, Passover prep, they can actually be more difficult, sometimes more agonizing than the realities.

Melissa Rosen:

Listen, we're often overachievers when it comes to imagining worst case scenarios. So, how do we change that? The real question today is no matter our current relationship to cancer, how do we go from cancer patient to a survivor or more appropriately to a thriver? How can each one of us live as someone who thrives no matter what life is hands us?

Melissa Rosen:

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This is how. We're going to take the liberty to write parts of our own story and reframe our entire story, which, by the way, isn't necessarily an easy thing to do. We tend to tell our stories over and over again the same way. We're afraid of losing something. We hold on to our stories because the future is unknown and can feel scary, but we need to connect with the women we were on the day we received our diagnosis. Remind that woman of all you have learned from your cancer experience, strength and courage, a change in priorities.

Melissa Rosen:

Then we need to connect, we need to speak to ourselves six months down the road, two years down the road, 10 years from now and remind our future selves of all the unknowns we faced and how we blossomed. We were brave. We faced challenges. We made a difference and continue to make differences to those who are close to us and even to the world as a whole. We faced each ordinary moment whether they're difficult or not, with grace and made wonderful memories.

Melissa Rosen:

In fact, our experience with cancer may have actually prepared us more than most for this pandemic. We're better equipped to deal with isolation as cancer may have made us immunocompromised for a period of time. We're used to uncertainty as each step in our cancer experience is, or was, determined by past tests and reactions to treatment. We have knowledge and experience to share today that can help others.

Melissa Rosen:

As we consider transformative events, we typically think of big occasions, marrying, having a child, an illness or now I'll add to the list, a pandemic. Here's the thing. We shouldn't only count on these events to transform ourselves. Every day, we're faced with thousands of junctures that depending on how we react, behave, or think can transform our lives.

Melissa Rosen:

In a single moment, we can change our lives and the lives of the people we love. I want us to think about more of those instances. We can be aware of those instances, and transform the ordinary routine aspects of our lives into beautiful life-altering moments.

Melissa Rosen:

Just as we work to reframe the more unfortunate aspects of our lives into something more palatable, we can work to transform the more mundane aspect of our lives into something more beautiful.

Melissa Rosen:

Beginning the second night of Passover, we begin to count the Omer, the period of time between now and when we received the 10 commandments. It reminds me of how frequently we hear the woman of Sharsheret counting.

Melissa Rosen:

"Three more days until my surgery."

Melissa Rosen:

"I'm one week postsurgery."

Melissa Rosen:

"I have to wait another week for my pathology report."

Melissa Rosen:

"Third treatment in, five more to go."

Melissa Rosen:

"Today is two years post-treatment."

Melissa Rosen:

"Six months until my next scan."

Melissa Rosen:

There's another dimension to this counting. Women living with cancer are not merely watching the calendar. We're making our lives count. Every day, we hear from women who are strengthening their relationships, not sweating the small stuff, and finding meaning in their lives. Women are sharing what they have learned and supporting one another.

Melissa Rosen:

Throughout this journey, women are experiencing 'a-ha' moments. One caller shared that she was home recovering from surgery. She was spending a lot of time sitting with her kids, chatting, laughing, watching television. She said that these were moments that even a few weeks prior, she would have described as doing nothing because she wasn't running around doing something for the kids or with the kids. But she realized that being still and being focused in the simple moment of spending time, she felt more connected to them. This woman shared that she felt a shift within herself and her relationship with her family.

Melissa Rosen:

Whether we're sitting with our families now because we're recovering from a procedure or because we're being told it's safer to shelter in place, that's an interesting way to look at it. It gives us time to do things we might not have felt we had the time to do before. We might not have realized what is important before.

Melissa Rosen:

I'm grateful to the women and families of Sharsheret for reminding me that it's not just about counting time, but making time count. When we focus our thoughts and our energies on the past and the future, we miss those current moments, the todays, and all the opportunities they present.

Melissa Rosen:

That should be the goal for us, right? No matter the pandemic, no matter our cancer experience, it's a worthy way to live. How can we take this advice and make it practical for the upcoming holiday and even the days beyond Passover? No matter how we live our lives to the fullest, in reality cancer is

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exhausting, and it can be a challenge to deal with the day-to-day, with work obligations, family commitments, and complications that come with an unprecedented pandemic.

Melissa Rosen:

So, with Passover coming, let's redefine what's necessary. Let's get practical for a second. Do you need your grandmother's sponge cake recipe this year? Or will your family will be happy with ring gels and lollicones as a dessert this year? Maybe to you it's not Passover without your extended family, but clearly, that's not in the cards for this year. Can we reframe that temporary loss just like we work to reframe our cancer experience?

Melissa Rosen:

Maybe the quarantine can release some of us from the intense preparations and cooking that we probably shouldn't have been doing anyway. Hopefully, within a month or so, we can all gather with our friends and family, and it can potluck or better yet, catered. That will not only be a lovely experience, but we'll take some pressure off of us.

Melissa Rosen:

For some, a Zoom Seder may be an option. Again, it can be simple. It can be creative. It can be different than everything you've done in the past. Maybe children can lead it this year.

Melissa Rosen:

Personally, I'm writing Dayeinu emails to my friends and family, for them to read during their Seders, sharing my gratitude for all they have done by being in my life and how I appreciate how they always go above and beyond. So many creative options exist and can ensure meaning for you and your family as we work our way through Passover and the annual calendar filled with special days no matter our challenges.

Melissa Rosen:

So, let's take a second to sum up. You can define the moment. Instead of seeing things as good or bad, embrace the challenges that come our way and reframe. Each of us can recite our life stories, but can you rewrite some of those chapters? Tweak the direction of today's story. Remember, that doesn't necessarily mean changing events, but only how we perceive and react to them.

Melissa Rosen:

We all have the opportunity to do this every day. There's a line from Hallel, which consists of psalms, and it's traditionally read on Passover. In Hebrew, it begins "Zeh hayom". In English, "This is the day that God has made. Let us rejoice and be glad." What a great reminder for all of us.

Melissa Rosen:

This Passover will be different from all other Passovers, whether because we're dealing with cancer or dealing with the restrictions that the coronavirus has imposed, but we know that we can reframe and even edit or write the story of this Passover. The way we think about this year's celebration and about each day in quarantine, the way each of us reacts to our cancer experience is up to us, but there is no doubt this is not the holiday that any of us had hoped for, but one that will be remembered.

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Melissa Rosen:

The way we deal with it, the way we frame it will be the way those around us, either physically or virtually, will see the current situation. So, let's make those memories good ones.

Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much for listening. I want to move us on to our next presenter, Tamar Rothenberg. She is a registered dietitian, and the owner of Nutrition Nom Nom. She's also an adjunct professor at Touro College, and she will be speaking about making healthy choices this Passover. Tamar.

Tamar Rothenberg:

Thank you, Melissa. That was so beautiful. Hi, everyone in Sharsheret land. I'm in La-La land, though it's not so la-la lately, but I hope we can get our groove back. I'm Tamar Rothenberg, registered dietitian, owner of Nutrition Nom Nom, a private practice where I work a lot with breast cancer thrivers. I am so happy to join you from my virtual office in LA.

Tamar Rothenberg:

I want to share with you first my own Pesach story from about a dozen years ago. That Passover was in particular a time of freedom for me personally because a few days before Passover was my final chemo infusion for stage 3C breast cancer.

Tamar Rothenberg:

Now, you may think I timed it that way to get out of Passover cleaning, but I'm not that clever. So, as Passover literally passed, I started to feel better and better. The fog began lifting, and the fatigue eased a bit. If you've been through that, you know that every day gets a little better. It was especially joyous for me, knowing I did not have another chemo coming up, and my surgeries were still months away.

Tamar Rothenberg:

My family came and took over my kitchen as families do. So, I have warm memories of family support and the sounds of children playing, but many of you will not have that circle of warmth and support from family this year. So, let's shift gears and focus on reducing stress where we can, and my specialty that I want to talk about today about reducing food anxiety.

Tamar Rothenberg:

I'll share some nutrition tips to support and foods to support immunity with what's available now and for Passover. I'll keep it simple, and I want to reassure you that to keep your nutritional goals and your immunity strong, there are all the foods you need available in the markets and for Passover as well.

Tamar Rothenberg:

Nutrition is important, but it's also flexible. So, from your past treatment, you know that your body can bounce back. It can handle fluctuations in nutrition, and your GI system will recover, sometimes in as little as four days, but there are certain things that we can do to help that process along. There are foods that impact your body's resilience. Those are foods that also promote gut health. These foods are readily available on Passover.

Tamar Rothenberg:

So, for those in active treatment now, your priority is nourishment, simply nourishment, lots of calories, hydration, and protein. Focus on those three things: calories, hydration, protein. If your appetite is off, you can try smaller meals every few hours. Foods like soups and smoothies, that's where you can really pack in both nutrition and hydration. All foods fit right now. Don't worry about calories or things like that.

Tamar Rothenberg:

For survivors and thrivers, I know a lot of things have been canceled, but fruits and veggies have not been canceled. Nuts and seeds are also a filling and nutritious option on Passover. You can practice eating mindfully, but allow yourself those fun foods, so you don't feel deprived. Also know that frozen and canned foods are just as nutritious as fresh. There's very little difference.

Tamar Rothenberg:

For caretakers, I just want to add a note. It's very hard to see someone who doesn't want to eat. Don't push it. Just sit and eat with them, and then maybe you can find a texture or a temperature that they can tolerate. Usually, cold foods will work better, and they don't have smell. Also try to keep them out of the kitchen, so that smells don't bother them.

Tamar Rothenberg:

Now, back to general nutrition, of course, protein, carbs, and fats are very important. They are the trifecta of nutrition, but what about specific foods to support immunity now? I'm not talking about boosting immunity. That's not what you want. You want a support.

Tamar Rothenberg:

There are some nutrients that you probably have on-hand now, and most of those foods will also support your gut health, which is where most of your immunity actually lives. Like I said, in treatment, you will bounce back and calories are the most important thing right now.

Tamar Rothenberg:

For those in survivorship, let's talk about vitamin D. If you need it, if your lab work shows this and you've spoken to a healthcare provider, you can take vitamin D supplements. You can walk in the sun. Salmon will provide a little vitamin D. There's eggs that are called pastured eggs. They are pasteurized, but they're called pastured. These have three to four times the amount of vitamin D than regular eggs. Now, if you can't find them on Passover, that's okay. You can take the supplement if you need it.

Tamar Rothenberg:

For the rest, I really suggest food first, not supplements. Some of the foods that will support your immunity include probiotics, vitamin C. So, vitamin C is a powerful antioxidant. It heals and it supports the immune response, especially under stressful conditions. We are all under stressful conditions now. For example, marathon runners who take vitamin C, it actually works better because of the stress that their body is under. So, that works particularly well right now. The mineral zinc actually activates certain immune cells. Finally, black or green tea, these are plant nutrients that actually fight for you.

Tamar Rothenberg:



Let's look at what are some of those foods we can start incorporating. Jenna, if you could put up the handout please, and I'll just go over it. We're going to highlight in this handout what you can find now for Passover.

Tamar Rothenberg:

Let's go over some of these immune-supporting foods. Under probiotics, right now, you can find yogurt for Passover. Pro is pro-health. You're supporting your gut health. Prebiotics are the foods that feed the probiotics, and those are readily available now, too. Those are garlic, onions, bananas, apple, and things like flax seeds, though you want to check your particular Passover custom for that. All whole plant foods have prebiotics.

Tamar Rothenberg:

Let's turn to vitamin C, and some of the food sources that you can find now. So, of course, there are citrus fruits, but there are foods that have even more vitamin C than citrus foods. You're going to choose your lemon, lime, grapefruits, but your tropical fruits, which can be found kiwi now in the markets, two kiwis are your full-day supply of vitamin C. So, you're good with that.

Tamar Rothenberg:

Then bell peppers, some bell peppers have seven times the amount of vitamin C than citrus fruits. So, go for the whole rainbow of bell peppers. Then surprisingly, cauliflower is a great source of vitamin C and tomatoes as well.

Tamar Rothenberg:

If we move on to zinc here, For Sephardim you can have beans, but for Ashkenazim, I want to focus on, of course, dark chocolate which is a very necessary ingredient right now. That has zinc, but also, you really want to incorporate a lot of nuts and seeds. So, nuts, all the nuts, cashews, almonds, the nut butters, those are really good sources of zinc and protein, and your seeds, chia seeds, quinoa. I know a lot of times after Passover you don't want to look at quinoa anymore, but it's a great source of zinc and protein and fiber, all necessary nutrients for thrivers.

Tamar Rothenberg:

Then finally, vitamin D3. So, again, if you need that supplement, you're going to take it, you can get some from cod or any kind of salmon. Then I want to add to this list chia seeds. They are kosher for Passover. You want to check your custom. There's a custom to buy it before Passover, but that is a wonderful source of omega-3s. You can make smoothies with it. You can add it to salads. So, it's a great resource for that.

Tamar Rothenberg:

So, how would you take these foods and put them together in some easy meals? I'm going to just give you some, go over some quick recipe ideas for you that you can start to do. For example, salmon, you can use canned salmon to make salmon burgers, and then what you would do, instead of flour, maybe during the year you used flour, you would use almond flour, which I do see in the stores right now.

Tamar Rothenberg:

There you're getting your zinc from your almond. You still have the same texture as flour, and you would add in a sweet potato to help bind those ingredients along with whatever regular ingredients you use. It's a simple recipe for those patties and bake them. So, that's one idea.

Tamar Rothenberg:

Another idea, if you have fresh salmon, you could make a topping with avocado and lime. Lime, you're getting your vitamin C. Use that parsley if you have leftover from the Seder. Get your nutrients also. Red onion, a little olive oil, and mix up that topping, put it on fresh salmon, and you're good to go.

Tamar Rothenberg:

For those in treatment, if you want to try a green smoothie, it's packed with hydration, nutrients and vitamin C. You could take the romaine lettuce and the parsley. Yes. You can put romaine lettuce in a smoothie. Put that in a blender, and then add your two kiwis. That's your whole day supply of vitamin C, some gut-soothing ginger, a quarter avocado, and a cup of cucumber, and some pineapple if you want as well. Blend that up and that's a wonderful breakfast or a snack. Very hydrating.

Tamar Rothenberg:

Then finally, because I'm a dietitian, I have to talk about broccoli. So, broccoli is a great food source right now for fiber and just a great whole plant food. Just do some batch cooking. Steam up a really big batch of broccoli, and all you do during the week is switch up the dressing. So, for example, one dressing, you would grate ginger, you're getting that gut-soothing ingredient. For another dressing, you could make a citrus dressing to get your vitamin C, a blood orange dressing or any citrus, lemon juice, things like that.

Tamar Rothenberg:

So, I hope some of those ideas are helpful for your immune-supporting Passover. I wish you a peaceful and nutritious Passover with new food memories that you can cherish. Thank you.

Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much, Tamar. That was really helpful, and I took away some ideas that I'll be using.

Tamar Rothenberg:

Okay. Good.

Melissa Rosen:

Our next presentation is about Finding Hope on the Seder Plate. Before we move to that one, I wanted to just remind you of one thing. I had mentioned that the last piece for today is a collaborative piece with you called Next Year in Jerusalem, Next Year for Me. At the end of Seders across the world, we conclude with Next Year in Jerusalem. That's the metaphorical hope. Yet, each year, we have additional practical, meaningful hopes that we personally desire.

Melissa Rosen:

Throughout the rest of the program, I want to encourage you to give some thought to those desires and if you're comfortable, please type them into the chat box, so that we can share them as an uplifting conclusion to the program today, and a thoughtful way to enter the holidays. For those of you who don't

know, you can access the chat box simply by hovering your mouse over the bottom of the screen and clicking the word chat.

Melissa Rosen:

I now want to welcome Dr. Esther Altmann. She is on faculty and the Director of Pastoral Education at Yeshivat Maharat, which is located in New York, and she is going to speak about Finding Hope on the Seder Plate. Esther?

Dr. Esther Altmann:

Thank you so much. Welcome, everybody. I want to start by sharing that the hardest Passover, the hardest Seders I ever had was when I was 49, and I was in the midst of chemo treatment for breast cancer, and I was advised not to travel anywhere. Typically, my Seders were spent very, very fortunately and with great gratitude with my parents and extended family, but that Pesach I had had several surgeries, and I was weak, and I was worried, and I wasn't feeling well three chemos in.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

So, that was the hardest Pesach of my life, but yet, it was still a very meaningful one. I found the support of friends who hosted me, and from my immediate family, but it was different and it was challenging.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

This year, whether we are able to be with our families or not, and so many of us are not, the Seder will be a uniquely challenging experience. Yet, I hope we can all find moments of celebration and a sense of liberation even learning from all that oppresses us at this time.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

The symbols from the Seder plate are so rich and varied. I can think we can find both traditional meaning and some creative meanings as well, that I hope to share with you. So, here's my Seder plate. Each item has a particular designated place on the Seder plate, but I'm going to mix it up a little bit, and typically karpas is usually the first symbol on the Seder plate that we use and acknowledge. I'm not going to start with karpas, and I'm encouraging each of you to find your own order, your own meaning in the different symbols that are on the Seder plate this year.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

I'm actually going to start with maror, even though we tend to start with karpas. The reason I want to begin with maror, bitter herb, the memory of our slavery in Egypt, the memory of our oppression is that it feels appropriate for so many reasons to begin on a sober note.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

Why do I want to start here? Because I think before we can move to hope, to gratitude and liberation, we need to just acknowledge how much pain and suffering we might truly be experiencing. Illness can be an enslavement. I think we all need a good cry. This is real and you can cry. There is a profound sadness in ourselves, in our homes, and in the world at this time. Don't be afraid of it.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

When you eat maror, you can really eat a full olive-sized portion. It should bring tears to your eyes. It is sharp, it is bitter, and it is very intense. Eating maror is a therapeutic gustatory experience in this moment. Paradoxically, it might just be the thing that might help you feel better.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

This is where the story of Bene Israel begins, in slavery, in oppression, and in tears. You can cry about your illness, about your pain, about the limitations you may be struggling with, the impact on your loved ones, your worries, and your fears, the coronavirus, the precarious state of the world, and all that you might hold dear. So, let it out and have a good cry. It's a prescription that I'm giving everyone as a therapist.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

However, we don't want to stop there. Redemption is at hand, so let's not get too stuck, but shift to matzah, the bread of our liberation. Now, matzah is not actually on the Seder plate, but it seemed certainly so central and appropriate that I thought I would talk about it as well. Bene Israel ate matzah instead of bread because they were in a big hurry to leave Mitzraim lest Pharaoh changed his mind once again.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

The rabbis of the Talmud were deeply preoccupied with ensuring that matzah was made before the flour could rise, and they spent a great deal of time thinking about just how precisely matzah needed to be made. They established that 18 minutes was the very maximum time for making matzah to prevent any fermentation of the dough.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

This is in stark contrast to how we make bread or challah. If you make challah, you know that it is a very luxuriant and forgiving and time-consuming process. The bread rises over a couple of hours. You may give it a punch or two. You let it rise again, you knead it, and then you might shape it into bread. It's a slow, creative, and relaxing endeavor, not so matzah.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

If you have ever been to a matzah factory or watched a video of people making matzah, you can see the tension in their bodies as they rush to make every minute count. Every second is orchestrated and choreographed.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

Illness represents the difference between challah and matzah. In our regular lives, we move through our days and years with a sense that time can expand. It can rise like bread. In contrast when one is ill, every minute feels like it counts. Every minute can feel weighted with an important task that needs to be done.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

This has many advantages. You may have great insights about what you care about most deeply, and how you can use this time to frame and highlight what is most essential for you.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

I am certainly not saying this to create any sense of pressure, but rather, I'm suggesting that it might be helpful to be mindful of each minute, and to reevaluate our core values and priorities.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

I thought that this was a gift from my illness that I would bring into my recovery. However, I must confess that this mindset is truly challenging to sustain. It is hard to live each day with the press of just 18 minutes, and that is also okay.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

We will go back to baking challah after Pesach, and I hope that we will all be able to integrate both the crispness of the matzah and the much softer, gentler, doughiness of the challah into our lives moving forward.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

Now, let's talk about the zeroah, the shank bone, which represents the paschal offering. The very first Pesach was one in which each family was commanded to do their own Korban Pesach. They each slaughtered their own lamb, and they were commanded to eat it in their own homes with their own families. Perhaps this year more than any other year, we are recreating that very first Pesach more than we ever have before.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

This year, instead of traveling to be with relatives or friends, or to far off places, we are like Bene Israel in that dark night before living Mitzraim. We are in our own homes. Rabbi Isaac Luria, the 16th century kabbalist who lived in Safed connected the zeroah with the mystical aspect of Pesach. This is because he would say that zeroah is also the outstretched arm, the zeroah of God, the outstretched arm of God, and that the zeroah or the outstretched arm is what took us out of Mitzraim and it also reflects our ability to reach out our own arms to care for others.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

You might feel that this year your ability to reach out and extend your arm might be limited, but that is okay. It is the (spirit) that emanates from your home that is most fundamental and important.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

The next symbol is the beitzah, the egg. The egg is a symbol of the sacrifice that was brought to the temple. We also think of an egg as a symbol of the life cycle. It is round. It has no edges or corners. This Pesach, I invite you to think about the life cycle moment. I invite you to think about a life cycle moment in your past that brought you great joy. Take a moment. Close your eyes. Imagine the setting, the smells, the people who were with you there to celebrate. It could be a graduation, a wedding, a bar/bat mitzvah, the completion of a project, a book party, a birthday, a promotion at work, any moment in your life that felt like an arrival and achievement, a moment to pause and celebrate. Reflect back on that event and hold it close in your memory. Let it bring you delight. Remember the feeling of accomplishment once again.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

You might also want to think about a current or a future life cycle moment that you're looking forward to or anticipating. It does not have to be something major. It can be a small but meaningful milestone. You can imagine putting yourself in that setting at some future point in time. Hear the music. Smell the fragrances, the cacophony of voices, the laughter. Take a moment and just imagine a past life cycle event or one that you're anticipating that might bring you delight and joy.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

Let's move on to the haroset. The haroset is perhaps everyone's favorite symbol on the Seder plate because it's quite delicious, and we're usually very hungry by the time we get to the haroset. It's made of sugar, nuts, wine, maybe apples or dates. It is meant to symbolize the extra work, the additional oppression suffered by Bene Israel in Mitzraim. They had to make their own mortar to build the pyramids. Thus, it is a further symbol of the embitterment to Bene Israel.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

So, the sweetness of the haroset reflects a certain kind of irony, a paradox. It's a perfect example of the blending of despair and hope. The haroset is often a food that we experiment with on Pesach. There are so many creative and new and unique traditions and different ways to make haroset. It enables us to mix it up a little bit to be our full selves, our full creative selves and really enjoy the complex flavors that we can bring to it.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

I have another interpretation of haroset. When I think about it, I think about it as a material, originally, when Bene Israel was making the mortar for the bricks. It was a material made out of myrrh, straw, and mud that together created the binding of the bricks that built the pyramids.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

So, these materials on their own, straw and mud, were actually very fragile. They did not have any power, any inherent strength in themselves, yet when they were combined, they produced something very powerful, a substance that could hold together huge, heavy stones.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

I invite you to make and eat your haroset this year with the idea that fragile elements can combine together to produce something strong and binding, a material to support great weight. Haroset can remind us that alone we are fragile, but when we combine our unique characteristics, when we mix it all up with other elements, we become a bonding substance, a cement that binds us and strengthens us, and enables us to build strong foundations.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

Finally, I'm going to come to the karpas. The karpas, which represents renewal, spring, hope, rejuvenation. We dip our karpas into the salted water, the salted water which represents the tears of Bene Israel and also the salty water of the Yam Suf. When Bene Israel crossed the Yam Suf, they sang a song, a song of jubilation and thankfulness.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

## The Sharsheret Un-Seder: Inspiring messages and insight for those impacted by cancer

The Pasuk says 'Az yashir Moshe u'vene Yisrael.' Many commentators are very puzzled by the term 'Az.' It seems to be an odd tense. It doesn't really reflect the present moment. It may mean when or then. They can't quite place why this grammatical oddity is at the beginning of this Pasuk.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

The rabbi of the Warsaw Ghetto had a very beautiful insight about the meaning of (this). He said that the song was actually written when Bene Israel were still slaves, that Bene Israel during their enslavement were able to anticipate their release, their freedom, and they wrote songs in anticipation of their liberation.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

So, when we dip the karpas into the salted water, we can be reminded of Bene Israel's hard work of hope that only came to be realized at future date. So, we, too, need to prepare our songs. We need to try and best prepare our songs even in our moment of deepest struggle and challenges in the hope that we, too, will have a (Yetziat Mitzraim) moment, when we can sing our songs of freedom and release.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

This Pesach of all Pesachs, we are uniquely challenged to find that moment. I encourage each of you like Bene Israel, who jumped into the Yam Suf seeking redemption to compose your songs of jubilation, your poetry of hope, and thanksgiving in whatever way you may be able to now imagine it.

Dr. Esther Altmann:

For your future, for the futures of your loved ones, and for the generations to follow, my wish for you and everyone is that this Pesach brings us a time of healing, a time when you can access your inner strength and resilience in whatever small ways are feasible for you, and that the symbols of redemption on your Seder plate will be imbued with meaning and with hope.

Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much. That was beautiful. I really know that we all appreciated those sentiments. I want to remind people before we move to our next presentation to take a moment while you're enjoying the music in the next few moments to type in what your hope for next year is, and we'll conclude with that.

Melissa Rosen:

Now, I want to introduce to you Cantor Toby Schwartz, who is the B'nai Mitzvah Coordinator at Valley Beth Shalom in Encino. She is going to share some thoughts on Dayeinu, as well as sing a few verses for us. So, Toby, please.

Cantor Toby Schwartz:

Hi, everybody. I'm Cantor Toby Schwartz. I am delighted to be here with you all. I have been wrestling with, should we sing first or should we talk first? I think we should sing first, just so we have a little change and we can absorb everyone's beautiful words because I've learned a lot so far. So, even though you're all on mute and all around the country, please sing, at least the Dayeinu part. (singing)

Cantor Toby Schwartz:

Everybody. (singing)

Cantor Toby Schwartz:

Everybody sing. (singing)

Cantor Toby Schwartz:

So, now, the harder part. I get to talk. I am a recent survivor, very recent survivor. Two years ago yesterday on April 4th during Pesach, I was given my diagnosis of breast cancer stage 2B. That was probably the worst Pesach of my life. Last year during Pesach when I was finished with my chemo, but still doing herceptin infusions monthly, just before Pesach, my mother died. So, for Pesach, we were in Shiva. That was the second worst Pesach of my life.

Cantor Toby Schwartz:

This year, it seems like we're all having an interesting Pesach together. I need to let you know first that I, despite being a cantor, I don't like Pesach very much because I have viewed Pesach for all the years while I've done everything for my family and my children to make a sense memory of Pesach a beautiful celebration that they would remember, personally, I always felt like a slave. I still felt like I was in Yitziat Mtizraim from the cooking, the cleaning, the shopping, the preparation, and then I had to sit down and lead my Seder because that's what you do when you're the cantor. I definitely felt like a slave.

Cantor Toby Schwartz:

Now, I'm looking at Pesach differently. This year, we're all looking at Pesach differently. Now, I'm looking at Pesach and I thought about the word Dayeinu and I decided that Dayeinu is gratitude. So, what are you grateful for? That's the question I have for each of you. What are you grateful for this Pesach?

Cantor Toby Schwartz:

I am grateful, like many around the world, I am grateful to the doctors, to the hospitals, to the nurses, to the first responders, to those who are taking care of all of us in this terribly challenging time for us as cancer survivors.

Cantor Toby Schwartz:

I'm still grappling with that word, personally. I'm not sure I have gotten to the point where I call myself a survivor yet. I'm grateful for those doctors who have put forth so much time and energy in research, in testing, in finding us new medications. I would not personally be here if the good doctors at UCLA had not discovered herceptin. I don't think I'd be sitting here today if that were not the case. I am profoundly grateful to them.

Cantor Toby Schwartz:

I heard the story of one of them who said he became a researcher in the field of cancer because his own mother went through the trauma of cancer and did survive for a very long time, and it inspired him as his life's work. I'm so grateful for him and all of his colleagues, and all the choices that they make to do their best to help all of us.

Cantor Toby Schwartz:

I'm still scared. Can't tell you I'm not, but I'm looking to find this Pesach not to be as a slave, definitely not to be as a slave, and not to be as a person who is suffering from cancer. I'm blessed with so much gratitude that I am feeling better, that I am strong, and trying hard to be grateful for everyday, and



trying every night not to give in to the, oh, my gosh, panic of cancer. Now, we have our worldwide panic of coronavirus.

Cantor Toby Schwartz:

So, I urge you not to panic, to hold on to that strength that each and every one of you has as a cancer survivor and say, "Dayeinu." It could have been enough, right? You had your surgery. You had your treatment. It could have been enough, but there are new avenues everyday that are being found for us.

Cantor Toby Schwartz:

My wishes for next year are next year that we are healthy, Dayeinu, next year that we will meet here again as survivors and as thrivers, and that each one of us should be grateful as much as we can.

Cantor Toby Schwartz:

For those of you who are still in treatment, my heart is with you. You're in my prayers. If you want to send me, type in your Hebrew name. I will add you to my Mi Sheberach list, and I'll pray for everybody. That's the only thing I think I can do, but I'm grateful, and I say, "Dayeinu. Amen." We should all be here to talk next year. Maybe to see each other in person and meet with joy. Dayeinu. Thank you so much.

Melissa Rosen:

Toby, that was absolutely beautiful. Thank you so much for the music that uplifted us and for your thoughts, which you gave so personally and reminded us we all have so much to be grateful for. Thank you. Okay.

Melissa Rosen:

Some of you have been typing in your hopes for next year or a year from now. We're all saying next year in Jerusalem, but we all have our personal 'next years'. Two of my wonderful colleagues, Jessica and Rachel, the Valley Outreach Program Coordinator in California, and Rachel is the Support Program Coordinator, will be sharing some of those, and then we'll wrap up quickly.

Melissa Rosen:

Jessica, do you want to start off?

Jessica Jablon:

Sure. Susan says she wishes for the new year no more COVID-19. We will be talking around the table telling stories of Passover with 2020 being the year of away from everyone.

Melissa Rosen:

That's true. Rachel?

Rachel Teicher:

Yes. I saw one where someone shared that they would love to be with their family, particularly being with their grandson and to continue years of healing from her diagnosis and any complications.

Melissa Rosen:

Thank you. Let's go back and forth.

Jessica Jablon:

Sure. Rabbi Claire said, "My hope is that the six symbols on the Seder plate take on new positive Passover plague meanings."

Melissa Rosen:

I like that. Rachel?

Rachel Teicher:

I'm just scrolling through here to find all these great comments. Thank you for sharing. Rabbi Claire shared another wonderful thought saying specifically something about a strong arm that Hashem took our ancestors out of Egypt, and that you feel that we will be taken out of Egypt pandemic sooner than later, and you have your tambourine ready, which I love. That sounds great. You are discussing how you feel like you're going to be a changed human and you're prepared to let old explanations of your life and story fall away. Beautiful. Thank you.

Jessica Jablon:

Cindy said, "Next year, I hope for all of us to be stronger, able to connect better with our families, and to be able to be a great and positive contribution to our local and global communities."

Melissa Rosen:

That's beautiful. Rachel?

Rachel Teicher:

I see another one here just that somebody wrote in that they're just grateful for Zoom and hoping that we can all be in person together next year.

Melissa Rosen:

That is good.

Jessica Jablon:

From Ayesha, "I hope to be able to provide Sharsheret as a resource to all those who may benefit from the great service they provide."

Rachel Teicher:

Our last one I think says, "For next year," this is from Leslie, "I'm looking forward to a virus-free and family-full Pesach. As I am a chronic ovarian cancer patient, I hope that there are cures for all types of cancer."

Melissa Rosen:

That's a beautiful sentiment. So, as we finish up, a couple of things. I want to thank everyone who participated on this webinar experience. Rachel and Jessica who read your wishes, Jenna who started the presentation, and our presenters who came from all over the country to share such unique and

different perspectives and experiences. I want to thank you. We had 85 women join us and we all came from different places medically, geographically, Jewishly, and we joined together and it was really beautiful.

Melissa Rosen:

I want to thank three organizations we work with. This Un-Seder was presented with the support of Komen Los Angeles, in partnership with breastcancer.org, and in cooperation with the Centers for Disease Control, agreement number DP 14-1408. I also want to let you know that we will go through the chat. If there were questions that weren't answered, we will reach out to you individually. If there were concerns we couldn't address, we will reach out to you individually.

Melissa Rosen:

As we finish, my final wish is that I hope that the stressors that we face today no matter where they come from Pass-Over us and we're able to feel peace, contentment, and joy for the holiday and beyond. Please remember that Sharsheret is here to help you no matter your concern. We do this via email, via phone always. For us, things haven't changed.

Melissa Rosen:

So, if you have some concerns or need some support or the opportunity to vent, please do not hesitate to reach out to Sharsheret, and we are here for you.

Rachel Teicher:

Yes. I just wanted to personally introduce myself. My name is Rachel for those of you who, I don't know, I was one of the people just reading from the chats that you guys shared. I am one of the social workers on the clinical team for Sharsheret, and I just wanted to say a big thank you for everybody who did feel comfortable sharing your thoughts with all of us here in this community type Seder or Un-Seder, whatever that might look like now for everybody. We did get one really sweet last chat about having animals keeping us company, and I think that's definitely a great point.

Rachel Teicher:

I know a lot of us are feeling alone for different reasons, even if we're not physically alone. I just wanted to remind everyone that Sharsheret really is here for you, and we are, myself and my amazing team of colleagues who are all trained social workers to be there for you through all of this. It will be our pleasure. Don't hesitate to reach out. We are still Sharsheret strong, and we are here to be your Sharsheret family. You are never alone in this.

Rachel Teicher:

So, please, anything at all, my email was on the invite that you guys joined the webinar with, but you can always go on our website. Reach out to clinical staff or give us a call at any point to speak with any of us.

Melissa Rosen:

Perfect. Have an easy prep, and although different, a wonderful Passover, and we will see you as spring progresses. Thank you very much!

## About Sharsheret

Sharsheret, Hebrew for “chain”, is a national non-profit organization, improves the lives of Jewish women and families living with or at increased genetic risk for breast or ovarian cancer through personalized support and saves lives through educational outreach.

With four offices (California, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey), Sharsheret serves 150,000 women, families, health care professionals, community leaders, and students, in all 50 states. Sharsheret creates a safe community for women facing breast cancer and ovarian cancer and their families at every stage of life and at every stage of cancer - from before diagnosis, during treatment and into the survivorship years. While our expertise is focused on young women and Jewish families, more than 15% of those we serve are not Jewish. All Sharsheret programs serve all women and men.

As a premier organization for psychosocial support, Sharsheret’s Executive Director chairs the Federal Advisory Committee on Breast Cancer in Young Women, Sharsheret works closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and participates in psychosocial research studies and evaluations with major cancer centers, including Georgetown University Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center. Sharsheret is accredited by the Better Business Bureau and has earned a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator for four consecutive years.

Sharsheret offers the following national programs:

### The Link Program

- Peer Support Network, connecting women newly diagnosed or at high risk of developing breast cancer one-on-one with others who share similar diagnoses and experiences
- Embrace™, supporting women living with advanced breast cancer • Genetics for Life®, addressing hereditary breast and ovarian cancer
- Thriving Again®, providing individualized support, education, and survivorship plans for young breast cancer survivors • Busy Box®, for young parents facing breast cancer
- Best Face Forward®, addressing the cosmetic side effects of treatment
- Family Focus®, providing resources and support for caregivers and family members
- Ovarian Cancer Program, tailored resources and support for young Jewish women and families facing ovarian cancer • Sharsheret Supports™, developing local support groups and programs

### Education and Outreach Programs

- Health Care Symposia, on issues unique to younger women facing breast cancer
- Sharsheret on Campus, outreach and education to students on campus
- Sharsheret Educational Resource Booklet Series, culturally-relevant publications for Jewish women and their families and healthcare Professionals

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