

# Celebrating Passover:

What You Need to Know About the Passover Seder



## PASSOVER FAQ'S

What is the story of Passover? What does the word Pesach mean? What is a seder? Find answers to these and many other questions about this holiday.

### **What is the story of Passover?**

The story of Passover originates in the Bible as the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The Torah recounts how the Children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt by a Pharaoh who feared them. After many generations of oppression, God speaks to an Israelite man named Moses and instructs him

to go to Pharaoh and let God's people go free. Pharaoh refuses, and Moses, acting as God's messenger brings down a series of 10 plagues on Egypt.

1. Water turned to blood (Exodus 7:14-25).
2. Frogs cover the land (Exodus 8:1-15).
3. The dust turns into gnats or lice (Exodus 8:16-19).
4. Swarms of flies cover the land (Exodus 8:20-32).
5. Death of all Egyptian livestock (Exodus 9:1-7).
6. Boils break out on the people of Egypt (Exodus 9:8-12).
7. Hailstorms kill unsheltered humans, animals, and vegetation (Exodus 9:13-35).
8. Locusts cover the land and consume all remaining vegetation (Exodus 10:1-20).
9. Darkness covers Egypt for three days (Exodus 10:21-29).
10. The firstborn children of all Egyptian people and cattle die (Exodus 11:1-10, 12:29-32).

The last plague was the Slaying of the Firstborn; God went through Egypt and killed each firstborn, but passed over the houses of the Israelites leaving their children unharmed. This plague was so terrible that Pharaoh relented and let the Israelites leave.

Pharaoh then regretted his decision and chased the Children of Israel until they were trapped at the Sea of Reeds. But God instructed Moses to stretch his staff over the Sea of Reeds and the waters parted, allowing the Children of Israel to walk through on dry land. The waters then closed,

drowning Pharaoh and his soldiers as they pursued the Israelites.

### **What does the name of the holiday mean?**

The name Pesach is derived from the Hebrew word *pasach*, which means "passed over." It recalls the miraculous 10th plague when all the Egyptian firstborn were killed, but the Israelites were spared.

### **What is a seder?**

A seder is an elaborate festive meal that takes place on the first night(s) of the holiday of Passover. The word seder literally means "order," and the Passover Seder has 15 separate steps in its traditional order. These steps are laid out in the *Haggadah*.

### **What are the four questions?**

The Four Questions are traditionally asked by the youngest person at the seder who is capable of asking them. The version that appears in the *Haggadah* is in Aramaic.

#### **Transliteration**

Ma nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol haleilot?

Sheb'khol haleilot anu okhlin hametz umatzah; halailah hazeh, kuloh matzah.

Sheb'khol haleilot anu okhlin sh'ar y'rakot; halailah hazeh, maror.

Sheb'khol haleilot ein anu matbilin afilu pa'am ehat; halailah hazeh, shtei f'amim.

Sheb'khol haleilot anu okhlin bein yoshvin uvein m'subin; halailah hazeh, kulanu m'subin.

### **Why is this night different from all other nights?**

On all other nights we eat both leavened and unleavened bread, but on this night we eat only unleavened bread.

On all other nights we eat all kinds of vegetables, but on this night only bitter herbs.

On all other nights we do not dip our food even once, but tonight we dip twice.

On all other nights we eat either sitting up or reclining, but tonight we all recline.

### **What is the *afikoman*?**

The *afikoman* is half of the middle matzah that is broken in the 4th step of the seder, *Yachatz*. It is traditional to hide the *afikoman*, and the person who finds it gets a prize! The *afikoman* is eaten last of all at the seder, during step 12 of the seder, *Tzafun*.

### **PROHIBITED FOODS: on PASSOVER**

Prohibited foods (חמץ (*hametz*)) include the following: leavened bread, cakes, biscuits, crackers, or coffees containing cereal derivatives (i.e. anything made with wheat, barley, oats, spelt, or rye). Any food containing these grains or derivatives of these grains (the five prohibited species for Pesah) is forbidden. Flavorings in foodstuffs are often derived from alcohol produced from one of these grains, rendering that food חמץ (*hametz*). Such products require Pesah supervision.

Ashkenazic rabbinical authorities added the following foods קטניות (*kitniyot*) to the above list of prohibited foods: rice, corn, soy, millet, beans, and peas. However, last year the Conservative Movement of Judaism ruled that kitniyot can be eaten.

### **PERMITTED FOODS on PASSOVER**

a. The following foods require no “כשר לפסח” (“*kosher l’Pesah*”) label when purchased before or during Pesah: fresh fruits and vegetables; eggs; fresh fish (whole or gutted); fresh or frozen kosher meat other than chopped meat; whole (unground) spices and nuts, including whole or half pecans (not pieces); pure black, green, or white tea

leaves or teabags; Nestea regular and decaffeinated unflavored tea; coffee (unflavored regular); baking soda and bicarbonate of soda. Quinoa/