

A Joyous Passover

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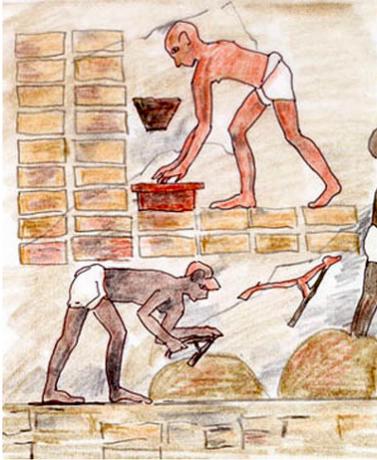


Please contact us if
you need an
invitation to the first
night Seder.
We will try to match
a host family.

Why is this night different from all other nights?

The celebration of Passover has evoked this question in various ways for thousands of years.

Passover is a time to celebrate and remember. It is a time replete with questions, stories, songs, customs, and traditions that are different from the everyday. On this night of Passover, the drama is told and retold of the ancient Israelites' escape from slavery to freedom.



The story unfolds in the Book of Exodus. It begins in ancient Egypt, sometime between 1550 and 1150 BCE. The story tells that the Israelites lived in ancient Egypt in relative peace until a new Pharaoh Ramses II arose. Fearing an accelerated birthrate among the Israelites, the Pharaoh took harsh, oppressive steps by declaring that all newborn Israelite males would be put to death and the remaining Israelites would become slaves.

A child, Moses, is born to an Israelite couple, named Yocheved and Amram. Fearing for the life of her child, Yocheved places the baby, Moses, in a waterproof basket and sets it adrift down the Nile River. (All the while Moses' sister, Miriam, guards the baby from a distance). The Pharaoh's daughter then finds the baby and raises him as her own. Yocheved, wanting to be near her child, secures a job as the baby's nursemaid. Years pass and

Moses grows up as a prince of Egypt.

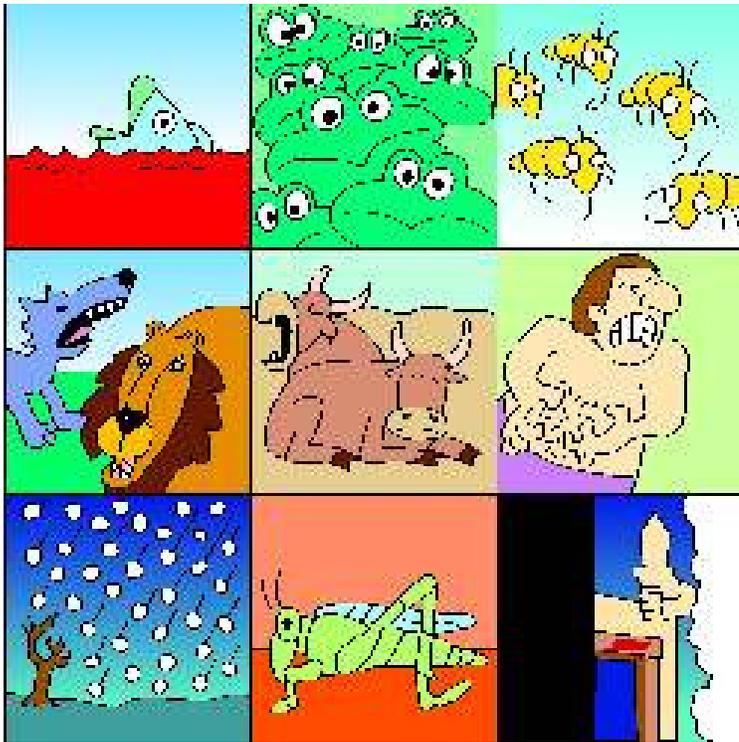
One day, while witnessing the suffering of the Israelites, Moses rises up against slavery and oppression by striking an Egyptian taskmaster, who was beating a Hebrew slave. Fleeing from his act of violence, Moses leaves Egypt for the Land of Midian, and becomes a shepherd.

The story then continues: while searching for a lost baby lamb, Moses comes upon a burning bush, which miraculously, had not been consumed by its own fire. A voice comes from the bush - thought to be a symbol of God - and tells Moses that he has been selected to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt.



According to the Bible, Moses returns to Egypt and requests that the Pharaoh grant him permission to take the Israelites to the land that God has promised to their ancestors - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Numerous times the Pharaoh refuses to permit the Israelite slaves to leave. It is only after ten dreadful plagues are unleashed upon the ancient Egyptians, that the Pharaoh finally relents and lets them go free. The tenth plague, the most horrific of all, was the plague of death on the Egyptian firstborn.

The name for the holiday is Pesach or Passover, which is taken from the Biblical exodus story as told in the Book of Exodus. The Israelites were able to avoid the tenth plague by marking their doorposts - thereby signifying that the "Angel of Death" was to "pass over" (in Hebrew, Pesach) their homes.



The holiday is also called Chag Ha-Matzot, the Holiday of Unleavened Bread, for, according to the Torah, the Israelites, in their rush to leave Egypt, did not have time for their bread to rise. Thus the symbol of matzah reminds the Jews of the time when they were slaves. It is also called the 'bread of affliction'.

Another name for the holiday is Chag Ha-Aviv - the Springtime Festival, as it falls on the 15th of Nisan - the first spring month. The Passover holiday rituals involve symbols of springtime and rejuvenation of the earth after a long winter. The use of vegetable greens and eggs are used to symbolize both birth and life.

The final name for Passover is Z'man Cheruteinu - the Time of Freedom, for Passover is a joyous holiday celebration of freedom from Egypt, the freedom from servitude, and a time for remembering and giving thanks.



Setting the Table- It is customary to reserve special linens, dishes, silverware, glassware, and cooking and serving utensils exclusively for Passover. Passover is a time to "bring out your best." Placing fresh cut spring flowers on the table is an appropriate touch. Each Seder participant should have a glass for wine or grape juice. Distributing several small Seder plates and salt-water dishes around the table is a useful - but not necessary - way of minimizing plate-passing time.

The dramatic action of a Passover Seder takes place on several levels simultaneously - the Jewish version of *Back to the Future*. While the ritual foods and the narrative from the Haggadah, recall the bitterness of slavery and the drama of the Exodus from Egypt, the format and sequence of the meal resemble a Roman banquet, complete with vegetables dipped in liquid as an appetizer, four cups of wine, and guests eating in repose and reclining on pillows! The Seder serves as a recapitulation of the Jewish historical and spiritual experience, centered around the dining room table.

A Seder plate...

The Seder plate bears the symbolic items referred to during the meal. Roasted egg (betzah)-represents the cyclical nature of life birth, growth, death, and rebirth. It is a symbol of one type of offering that was part of the Passover observance during the time of the Temple in Jerusalem. Roasted bone (z'ro-a): the roasted bone is another reminder of the pascal lamb, which was first offered during the Exodus from Egypt.



Green Vegetable (karpas): the green vegetable (often parsley or celery) is a symbol of spring. Fruit and Nut Mixture (Charoset): this tasty mixture of ground fruits and nuts, flavored with spices and wine, serves to remind us of the mortar the Jewish slaves made for the bricks in Egypt. Bitter Herbs (maror): horseradish is a symbol of the bitterness of slavery. Maror is dipped into charoset before it is eaten. Another Bitter Herb (chazeret): many Seder plates have a space for a second kind of bitter herb. Romaine lettuce is commonly used as second bitter herb.

- **A matzah plate** (with cover). This plate or container holds the three ritual pieces of matzah.
- **A wine cup** for every participant.
- **Elijah’s cup**. An additional wine cup, placed in the middle of the table, is filled but not drunk. This cup is set aside for the prophet Elijah, who is invited to pay us a visit during the seder meal.
- **Small dishes filled with salt water, for dipping.**
- **A copy of the Haggadah for each participant**
- **Kos Miryam - Miriam’s Cup represents the role of Moses’ sister as prophet and supplier of water in the parched wilderness.**



Every Seder is a combination of doing and telling. Through the active participation of each member of your family or Seder guest, your celebration can convey powerful messages and create lasting memories. Passover rituals are easy to perform - even for your youngest family member. Yet they are far from trivial: each has deep symbolic meaning and a connection to an important Jewish value or experience.

Drinking wine. When we drink from the first cup of wine, we celebrate a season of joy and make our meal not only festive, but also a holy occasion.

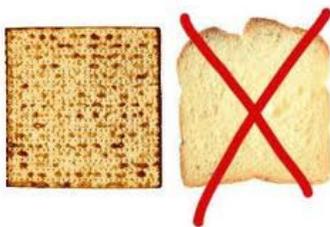


Washing hands. We wash our hands not to rid them of dirt, but to lift ourselves to a higher state of “cleanliness” - that is, to heighten our awareness of the sanctity and importance of the occasion.

Dipping a vegetable. When we dip parsley into salt water, we do two things: we refresh our eyes with the bright green symbol of new growth in spring, and we symbolically taste the salty tears of our ancestors who lived in slavery.



Prohibition of leaven - The prohibition of leaven, chameitz, is stated in the Torah: Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, on the very first day you shall remove leaven from



your houses (Ex. 12:15). Biblical injunctions specify that chameitz must not be seen nor found in one’s possession. In accordance with these laws, observant Jews make a thorough search for chameitz and remove it from their possession the day before Passover. This usually becomes the occasion for a thorough spring-cleaning.

The Torah states that the children of Israel baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay (Ex.12-39). Thus, the prohibition of eating chameitz became a memorial of the Exodus: “Remember this day, on which we went free from Egypt...no leavened bread shall be eaten.” (Ex.13:3)

During Passover, chameitz may not be eaten. This restriction refers to five species of grain: wheat, barley, spelt, rye and oats. In medieval Europe, the Ashkenasic rabbis added rice, millet, corn, and legumes. In Israel only the original prohibition found in the Talmud is observed following the Sephardic custom.

It is easy to avoid the few foods which are directly forbidden, such as breads, cakes, pasta, and cereals. However, it is increasingly difficult to avoid foods, which have been prepared through the addition of some leavened goods. Expert knowledge is needed to make that determination. This is certified through Heksher (certification) which is added to food and drink prepared for Passover use. Foods marked “Kosher for Passover use” give us the greatest certainty that they are suitable for holiday observance. Foods which are permitted and which require no Heksher if a new package is opened for Passover use include; sugar, coffee, tea, salt, frozen vegetable, dried fruits and honey. Since there are many foods which do not contain leaven which are forbidden due to local or regional customs whose origin is now lost, we should keep in mind that is inappropriate to say a food is forbidden when it is not. We avoid foods which are prepared in a vessel that is either used to prepare leaven or foods into which some leaven might have been accidentally added. Because modern industrial preparation is so closely supervised, and its machinery regularly sterilized, a Heksher is not required in all instances.

The Search for Leaven - To be certain that no leaven will be seen or found in the house during Passover and that no one will inadvertently eat chameitz, a search for leaven, Bedikat Chameitz, is made at the beginning of the evening of the 14th of Nisan—the night before the first Seder. The home has usually been thoroughly cleaned before this point, and all of the chameitz set aside or disposed of. With all members of the family in attendance, the symbolic ritual of Bedikat Chameitz begins. It is customary to place pieces of bread in several parts of the house, which then become the object of a family search. Before the search begins, the following blessing is recited:



Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us by Divine commandments, and has commanded us to remove the leaven.

Traditionally, a candle is used to ferret out the last remaining pieces of chameitz during this family hide and seek. The bread morsels and any other leaven found are swept with a feather into a wooden spoon and wrapped in a cloth. On the conclusion of the search, the following is said:

Any kind of leaven which remains in my possession that I have not seen nor removed or about which I do not know shall be regarded as non-existent and considered as the dust of the earth.

Since we live in an imperfect world, even our best effort may not remove all leaven or contact with leavened goods from our lives. At Pesach, as through the year, our efforts take priority over the completion of our actions. Judaism is not all or nothing!

Disposing of Chameitz - Chameitz is not eaten after 9 am on the day before Passover. The rabbis recognized, however, the difficulties and hardships imposed on those who possessed leaven in large quantities (i.e. wheat farmers) and would suffer substantial losses if they destroyed all of their chameitz. To obviate this situation, they instituted the transfer of leaven to a non-Jew by a legal bill of sale. Because of the intricacies of the legal formulation, a rabbi is designated by congregants as their agent to execute the transaction. While the physical transfer of the leaven is not made, the non-Jew has the legal right to take possession of it. After Passover, the rabbi buys back the leaven from the non-Jew and thus restores it to the possession of the original owners. All chameitz that is “sold” is placed in a separate locked closet so that it is out of sight. Chameitz contract enclosed.

Ma Nishtanah – The Four Questions

Ma nishtanah halailah hazeh mikawl haleilot ? (2x)

Sheb'chawl haleilot anu ochlin chametz umatzah, (2x)
Halailah hazeh, halailah hazeh, kulo matzah. (2x)

Sheb'chawl haleilot anu ochlin Sh'ar y'arakot, (2x)
Halailah hazeh, halailah hazeh, maror, maror. (2x)

Sheb'chawl haleilot ein anu matbilin Afilu pa'am echat, (2x)
Halailah hazeh, halailah hazeh, sh'tei f'amim. (2x)

Sheb'chawl haleilot anu ochlin bein yoshvin uvein m'subin, (2x)
Halailah hazeh, halailah hazeh, kulanu m'subin. (2x)

מה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל-
הַלַּיְלוֹת?

שֶׁבְכָל-הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין חֻמֵץ
וּמִצָּה; הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה, כָּלּוּ מִצָּה.

שֶׁבְכָל-הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין שָׂאֵר
יֵרָקוֹת; הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה, מָרוֹר.

שֶׁבְכָל-הַלַּיְלוֹת אֵין אָנוּ מִטְבִּילִין
אֲפִלּוּ פְּעַם אַחַת; הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה,
שְׁתֵּי פְּעָמִים.

שֶׁבְכָל-הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין בֵּין
יוֹשְׁבִין וּבֵין מְסֻבִּין; הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה,
כָּלָנוּ מְסֻבִּין.

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

On all other nights we eat leavened products and matzah, and on this night only matzah.

On all other nights we eat all vegetables, and on this night only bitter herbs.

On all other nights, we do not dip our food even once, and on this night, we dip twice.

On all other nights, we eat sitting or reclining, and on this night, we only recline.

Recipes

Ashkenasic Charoset

Mix together: 2 large apples, chopped fine or grated
½ cup walnuts, chopped fine
½ teaspoon cinnamon
2 tablespoons sweet red wine
Add ½ cup raisins or any other dried fruit for a more creative recipe.
If you do, add an extra tablespoon of wine and ½ tsp. cinnamon.



Sephardic Charoset

3 pounds pitted dates, soaked overnight
in water
8 tablespoons sweet red wine
Put dates in saucepan. Add water to cover dates, put on low flame and simmer, stirring.
Process in food processor or press through a colander until smooth. Add wine, cinnamon and nuts.

cinnamon to taste
chopped walnuts to taste

Israeli Charoset

1 apple, chopped
3 bananas, mashed
1 orange, with juice and grated rind
15 pitted dates, chopped
Combine the mixture, add matzah meal until smooth and thick.

1 cup almonds, chopped
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ cup sweet red wine
matzah meal, as needed sugar or honey

Family Favorite Fruit Kugel

1 cup crushed pineapple
2/3 cup sugar
1/2 cup oil
1/2 cup matzah meal
3 apples, peeled and shredded

1/2 pound pitted, chopped prunes
1/2 cup chopped, dried apricots
8 eggs

In a very large bowl, combine first 7 ingredients. Add eggs, stirring well each time. The mixture will be very loose. Pour the mixture into a well-greased 9 inch x 13 inch glass baking dish. Bake in a preheated 350 oven until set and lightly browned, approximately 45 minutes. Serves at least 12.