



What is Passover

God took the Jewish people out of Egypt in the springtime. The Talmud notes that God was very thoughtful. Not only was He interested in redeeming the nation, He wanted to do so at a time when the weather was just right. Not too hot, not too cold.

Everything about the Passover season is beautiful. The whole idea of re-doing your house -- your environment -- for the holiday should be a beautiful experience. For some reason, though, the burden of all that cleaning often hangs heavy over us, and as a result we lose much of the joy of Passover. Cleaning for Passover can actually be easy, there's lots of room for creativity, and it's fun.

Creating a Chametz-free home

When to search

The good-deed of the final searching for chametz (Bedikat chametz) is to be done on the night of the 14th of Nissan, the evening prior to the Seder. Why at night? Because in your home there are crevices, little corners that have to be illuminated by artificial light -- and artificial light works best at night. If your unavlibel that evening.

The search can be started earlier according to the laws of bedikat chametz. However, the blessing is only said on the night of the 14th. By the next morning 1030 am One should have nomore chomtez in huis/her postions,infact one should speakout "All chametz, leaven and leavened bread, that is in my possession which I have not seen, removed or is unknown to me, should be annulled and considered ownerless like the dust of the earth."

Any place chametz might have been put during the year must be searched. Therefore, one must also check one's pockets.

What are we searching for?

What kind of chametz do we have to get rid of? And what is "chametz" anyway?

The Torah says: Lo yera'eh lecha chametz, velo yeraeh lecha se'or bechol gevulecha -- neither chametz nor se'or shall be visible to you in all your boundaries. Chametz is defined as the result of grain that ferments. Se'or is sourdough -- highly fermented dough that is used to make another dough ferment. Instead of using yeast, what they did in the olden days (and many people do today as well) is to take a little piece of old dough, mix that with the fresh dough, and it causes the fresh dough to rise. These are the two things the Torah requires us to get rid of.

There's a more intuitive difference between the two. Chametz is food. If there is anything a human being doesn't eat, then it is not chametz, because by definition chametz must be food. On the other hand, nobody eats se'or -- old sourdough. Se'or is non-edible fermented grain which has the function of fermenting other dough.

There's a third category: Non-edible chametz that is not capable of fermenting other dough. That is neither chametz nor se'or according to Jewish law we call this "garbage" -- and it does not have to be gotten rid of for Passover. Similarly, the Talmud says that se'or which is so bad that even a dog wouldn't eat it -- i.e. it's poisonous -- is according to Jewish law not regarded as se'or and is therefore not a problem on Passover.

To review the three categories:

- 1) Chametz is edible stuff made of fermented grain. It's edible by human standards.
- 2) Se'or is non-edible, but has the power to ferment other dough.
- 3) Garbage is something that is either incapable of fermenting other dough, or so totally non-edible that a dog wouldn't eat it. In such a case, you do not have to get rid of it.

The Passover Seder

AT THE SEDER TABLE:

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| 1. Sliced celery/potato/carrots (Karpas) | 7. Matzah cover with 3 matzot |
| 2. Lettuce (Marror) | 8. Plate of extra matzot |
| 3. Horseradish (Chazeret) | 9. Bottles of grape juice |
| 4. Charoset | 10. Bottles of wine |
| 5. Roasted chicken wing (Zero'ah) | 11. Cup for Elijah |
| 6. Hard boiled egg (Beitzah) | 12. Small bowl of saltwater |

AT EACH PLACE:

- Kiddush cup
- Pillow for reclining
- Haggadah
- Kipa



THE SEDER PLATE:

- Chazeret (lettuce),
- Karpas (vegetable),
- Beitzah (roasted egg),
- Zero'ah (roasted bone),
- Charoset (nuts and dates).
- Marror in center (bitter herbs)



The items on the Seder plate are placed in a very specific order. Starting from the bottom, and going clockwise, the order is:

If this diagram is from the Code of Jewish Law. Other opinions vary slightly

The reason for this order? The Talmud states a concept of *Ain ma'avrin al hamitzvot* - we shouldn't "pass over" any good-deed that is in front of us. For this reason, the Seder plate is arranged to follow the order of the Haggadah, so that whatever you need next will be located closest to you, to avoid having to "skip over" any other item.

The Seder plate should be located to the right of the leader.

A bowl of salt water should be placed on the table, near the Seder plate. The salt water should be prepared prior to the start of the holiday.

Additionally, three matzot should be placed on the table - either under or in front of the Seder plate. They should be covered and separated from each other by a napkin or cloth.

There are seven good-deeds that we celebrate at the Seder.

- 1) Telling the Exodus story.
- 2) Eating matzah.

The other mitzvot are rabbinical:

- 3) Eating Marror (bitter herbs).
- 4) Eating the Afikomen (an extra piece of matzah for dessert as a reminder of the Passover offering).
- 5) Saying Hallel (Psalms of praise).
- 6) Drinking the Four Cups of wine.
- 7) Demonstrating acts of freedom and aristocracy -- e.g. sitting with a pillow cushion and leaning as we eat and drink.

The Wine/Grapejuice info.

- At the Seder, every Jew should drink four cups of wine or grape juice corresponding to the four expressions of freedom mentioned in the Torah (Exodus 6: 6-7).

- Since we are free people this evening, nobody should pour their own wine or grape juice, but rather each person should pour for another -- as if we are royalty who have servants.

- It is best to use red wine, since this alludes to the blood spilled by Pharaoh, the blood as part of the Ten Plagues, and the blood the Jews put on their doorposts.

- Everyone should have their own wine cup, which holds a minimum of 98cc (3.3 oz.) according to Rabbi Feinstein. When Passover falls on Shabbat, the minimum amount for the first cup is 4.42 oz..

- It is preferable to drink the entire cup or at least drink a majority of the cup.

- As an expression of freedom, the Sages enacted leaning to the side while drinking the Four Cups of wine. Everyone should lean to the left and back! (Only left for the right is dangerous)

Begin the Seder...

One should have a Haggadah (passover book) during the seder, simply to have all the blessings and other paragraphs available.

Kadesh - The blessings

To begin the Seder, we make Kiddush and sanctify the day. The word "*kiddush*" means special and unique. The first step to personal freedom is to recognize that you are special. You have a distinct combination of talents, skills and experiences that qualifies you to make a unique contribution to the world.

The "*kiddush*" should be recited while seated. You should have in mind to fulfill two good-deeds:

- The good-deeds of Kiddush that we say on every Shabbat and Yom Tov.
- The special mitzvah to drink Four Cups of wine at the Seder

When saying the Shehechianu blessing, you should have in mind that it applies to all the various good-deed of Seder night. When the Seder falls on Saturday night, you should also make the Havdallah blessings as listed in the text, using the Yom Tov candles as your Havdallah candle.

Urchatz - Washing the hands

Everyone at the Seder now washes their hands in the manner of washing for bread -- pouring water from a cup, covering each hand up to the wrist. This is done WITHOUT a blessing.

We do this because any detached food dipped into one of the seven fluids (water, wine, blood, dew, milk, olive oil, and date honey) makes the food susceptible to spiritual uncleanness, and requires washing one's hands if the food will be eaten with the hands. Therefore, if the food will be eaten with a fork, then no washing is necessary. In that case, the leader should wash his hands, and then dip all the pieces.

Karpas - Salt water dip

Take the Karpas vegetable and dip it in salt water.

This must be a vegetable whose blessing is Borei Pri Ha-Adamah when eaten raw, but that is not useable for Marror. Options include carets, celery, parsley, or potato.

During preparation, it is important to check the vegetable carefully, since leafy vegetables in particular can contain tiny insects, which are obviously not kosher to eat.

One should eat LESS than the size of a kezayit (15 grams), to avoid having to say an after-blessing.

You should have in mind that the blessing will also cover the blessing on the Marror -- thus linking the Karpas to the meal, and fulfilling your after-blessing obligation with Grace After Meals.

Yachatz - Brake the Middel Matzah

The leader of the Seder breaks the middle matzah in two. The smaller piece is put back in between the other two matzot, to be eaten later at Hamotzi. The larger piece is wrapped up and becomes the Afikomen.

The Talmud states that children should try to "steal" the Afikomen in order that they will be encouraged to remain awake during the Seder. Another reason why the children steal the broken matzah. Is because children are so real and pure, when they see something broken, they want to take it right away.

Notice that the two good-deeds of eating matzah at the Seder will be from the same piece.

Maggid - Read the book

The Sages tell us that the unique ability given to humanity is the power of speech. Speech is the tool of building and construction. God used it to create the world ("And God said: Let there be light."), and the Kabbalists used it to create the golem.

On Seder night, we use our gift of speech for the central part of the Haggadah: telling the Passover story. The very word "Pesach" is a contraction of the words Peh Sach, meaning "the mouth speaks." The Hebrew name for Pharaoh, on the other hand, is a combination of Peh Rah, meaning "the bad mouth." For just as speech has the power to build, it also has the power to destroy. Gossip and slander drive apart families and communities.

On Passover, we use speech to "build" humanity -- by communicating, connecting, and encouraging each other. We stay up long into the night, relating the story of our exodus, tasting and sharing the joy of freedom.

As we begin the main part of the Seder -- the telling of the Exodus -- it is important to have a good translation of the Haggadah so you can understand what you are saying. This first paragraph of the Haggadah is written not in Hebrew, but in Aramaic, which was the common language of the time. Many have the custom of saying aloud, "I hereby am about to fulfill the mitzvah of telling the Exodus story."

We uncover the matzot, then keep the broken matzah raised for all to see, until the start of the Four Questions.

The Four Questions

Remove the Seder plate from the table until it is time to eat. We do this in order to prompt questions, and also to show that we're not going to eat until we've told the story! It is customary for the children at the Seder to recite the Four Questions.

Why is this night different from all other nights?

- 1) Why is it that on all other nights during the year we eat either bread or matzoh, but on this night we eat only matzoh?**
- 2) Why is it that on all other nights we eat all kinds of herbs, but on this night we eat only bitter herbs?**
- 3) Why is it that on all other nights we do not dip our herbs even once, but on this night we dip them twice?**
- 4) Why is it that on all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining, but on this night we eat in a reclining position?**

At this time, we also pour the Second Cup of wine.

The Four Answers - Avadim Hayeenu -

The three matzot should be left uncovered for the duration of telling the Exodus story.

- 1) The Jews had to flee Egypt and had no time for their bread to rise.
- 2) The bitter herb, usually horseradish, reminds us of the bitterness of slavery.
- 3) We first dip parsley, which symbolizes spring in salt water, and reminds us of the tears of the slaves. We dip the bitter horseradish in a sweet mixture of ground fruit and wine symbolizing the mortar used in building Pharaoh's storehouses to help contrast the bitterness of slavery with the sweetness of being free. Each one is a contrast to the other.
- 4) In ancient cultures, royally people had the leisure to recline when they were eating, a privilege that was denied to slaves.

The commentator Mishnah Brura says that this declaration, "We were slaves in Egypt," is the essential answer to the Four Questions, and that after this point it is permitted for young children to go to sleep.

In an expression of joy, the matzot are covered and the wine glasses are raised while reciting this paragraph.

Ten Plagues

Every time one of the plagues is mentioned, we dip our finger in the wine and spill a drop. This reminds us that our cup of joy is not complete because people had to die for our salvation. Thus it is considered insensitive -- after completing the drops -- to lick one's finger!

Rather than your "pinky" finger, you should use your "pointer finger" (Etzba in Hebrew), which corresponds to the declaration in the Torah that the plagues were Etzba Elohim -- "the finger of God" (Exodus 8:15).

You should spill a total of 16 drops -- three for "blood, fire and pillars of smoke," 10 more for the plagues, and another three for Rabbi Yehudah's abbreviation.

After all the drops have been spilled, the cup should be refilled.

Lificach

Cover the matzot, raise the cup of wine, and recite the paragraph aloud and joyfully.

Second Cup

When you drink the wine, don't forget to lean. So important is this expression of freedom, that if one forgets to lean while drinking the Second Cup, the law states you have to drink it again! If we already made the blessing over wine on the First Cup, why do we make a new blessing here again? Because of the significant time-lapse between the two cups.

Rach'tzah - Washing for the matzah

How do we wash our hands? First, fill a large cup with water. Pour half the water over your right hand (up to the wrist), then half the water over your left hand (do it twice). Then say the blessing and dry your hands.

From this point onward, be careful not to talk until you've eaten the matzah. This is to avoid any "mental interruptions" between the washing and the eating.

Motzi Ma tzah - Eating the matzah

It is a Torah good-deed to eat matzah on Seder night.

Unlike when we make "Hamotzi" on Shabbat, on Passover we do not dip the matzah in salt. This is because it is a special good-deed to taste the matzah itself.

Don't forget to eat the matzah while leaning to the left, like a king. (only left for the right is dangerous)

One should try to eat at least a half of matzah, and at the same time refrain from talking.

Marror - The Bitter Lettuce

Though many have the custom of using horseradish, the Talmud nevertheless includes Chasa -- Romaine lettuce - as one vegetable which may be used as Marror.

If Romaine lettuce is used, the leaves should total eight-by-ten inches, or about 25-29 cc. Extreme care should be taken to check the lettuce since frequently there are small bugs in the leaves.

If horseradish is used, it should be compacted into 1.1 fluid ounce -- an amount equivalent to one half of a typical egg. Horseradish in jars bought from the stores should not be used, since sweeteners are added to make them less bitter. Particularly problematic is "red horseradish" which is actually a mixture of beets and horseradish. If you use pure horseradish, it should be ground up before Yom Tov begins.

Before making the blessing, the Marror should be dipped into the Charoset, and then shaken off. The Talmud says a bit of Charoset serves as an "antiseptic" to dilute the harsh effects of the Marror. When

reciting the blessing, have in mind that the Marror will be eaten in the "Korech sandwich" as well. You should not lean while eating the Marror.

It must be consumed within two to four minutes of the first swallow.

Korech - Matzah & Marror Sandwich

Take the bottom matzah (remaining from the original three) and make a sandwich with the Marror.

For this good-deed, it is okay to use smaller amounts. The amount of matzah should be approximately 23-25 cc -- roughly one-third of a square matzah, or one-fourth of a round matzah. The amount of Marror needed is 3.6 by 2.7 inches of Romaine lettuce, or 0.7 compacted fluid ounce of horseradish. Dip the sandwich into the Charoset.

Say the paragraph of "Remembrance of the Temple." There is no blessing.

Eat the sandwich while leaning to the left like a king..(Only left for the right is dangerous)

Shulchan Orech - Table is Set (For Dinner)

Eat a festive meal. The meal should preferably end before midnight, in order to eat the Afikomen by that time. It is important not to eat so much that you will be too full to eat the Afikomen.

The meal should not include any roasted meat, in order to distinguish our meal from that of Temple times, when the "Pascal lamb" was eaten roasted. (Dry-pan roasting is a problem; the juices produced are not sufficient to be considered "cooking.")

The meal is actually an extension of the "Hallel" praises, so one should continue to speak about the Exodus throughout the meal. As well, the entire meal should ideally be eaten while leaning to the left.

Tzafun - We eat the afikomen

The Afikomen should preferably be eaten before the middle of the night. (This exact time will vary depending on geographic location; check with your local rabbi.)

The Afikomen should be eaten while you are "full" -- yet with some room still left in your stomach. If you are full to the point of "stuffed," eating the Afikomen might not be according to Jewish law an act of "eating."

The amount of matzah that everyone should eat for the Afikomen is a kezayit. This equals approximately 45-50 cc, which is roughly two thirds of a square matzah, or one half of the hand-made round matzot. If an individual finds eating this amount difficult, then he may eat half that amount.

Be sure to give each person at least one small piece from the Afikomen, and then make up the remaining volume from other matzot.

After the Afikomen, nothing else should be eaten for the remainder of the night -- except for the drinking of water, tea, and the remaining two cups of wine. The Afikomen is eaten while leaning to the left.(only)

Barech - Grace after meals

Everyone should rinse their wine cup clean, and then fill it for the Third Cup, which will be drunk at the conclusion of "Grace After Meals." It is customary for the master of the house to lead the "Grace After Meals" on the night of Passover.

- Drink the third cup

It is preferable to drink the entire cup. Otherwise, you should at least drink a majority of the cup. Don't forget to lean to the left (only)

while drinking. Open Door for Elijah

Pour the Fourth Cup, and also the extra cup for Elijah.

Hallel - Sing Praises

As the feeling of freedom inebriates our souls (helped along by the four cups of wine!), we sing aloud in joy. When the Jews came out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea they broke out in song (Exodus chapter 15). When we see the upending of evil, the Egyptians drowning at the sea, we are instinctively grateful to the One who orchestrated the turnaround! God delivers us from slavery unto freedom -- and we are amazed at the beauty and swiftness of it all.

- Drink the fourth cup

It is preferable to drink the entire cup of wine. Otherwise, you should at least drink a majority of the cup. Don't forget to lean to the left while drinking. The after-blessing for wine should then be recited.

Nirtzah - Conclusion

"Chad Gadya" Although the Seder has officially ended, it is praiseworthy to continue speaking about the Exodus until sleep overtakes you.

We conclude our Seder with the prayer, "Next Year in Jerusalem." Every synagogue in the world faces Jerusalem. It is the focus of our hopes and aspirations -- not merely in a geographic sense, but in a conceptual sense as well. The Talmud says creation began in Jerusalem, and the world radiated outward from this spot. Medieval maps show Jerusalem at the epicenter of Asia, Europe, and Africa. The world flows into this place, and all of life's forces resonate there. From Jerusalem, the whole world is cast into perspective.

The name Jerusalem means "city of peace." Peace, shalom, is more than the absence of conflict; it is the seamless harmony of humanity genuinely embracing a common vision. Jerusalem is a vision of God in our lives, a metaphor of a perfected world. Jerusalem gives us hope to achieve what we as a people must do, to sanctify this world