

Passover



Passover (meaning “passed over”), known as *Pesach* in Hebrew, is a major Jewish spring festival, celebrated on the fifteenth day of Nisan in the Hebrew calendar, and commemorates the Exodus from Egypt over 3,000 years ago. The Torah recounts how the Children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt by a Pharaoh who feared them. After many generations of oppression, God spoke to an Israelite man named Moses and instructed him to go and tell Pharaoh to let God's people go free. Pharaoh refused, and God brought down a series of 10 plagues on Egypt. The ritual observance of this holiday centers around a special home service called the seder (meaning “order”) and a festive meal; the prohibition of *chametz* (leaven); and the eating of *matzah* (an unleavened bread). Jews gather with family and friends in the evening to read from a book called the *haggadah* (meaning telling), a Jewish text which recalls the Passover story and sets forth the order of the seder, including the prayers, rituals, readings, songs, and questions to create conversations about the value of freedom. This is a holiday rooted in appreciating and sharing blessings.

The Seder



The seder is the centerpiece of the Passover experience. It is an elaborate meal that takes usually place on the first night(s) of the holiday, though it can be appropriate to observe the holiday in a special way each of the seven days that Torah commands our observance. The *seder* has 15 separate steps in its traditional order (as set forth in the *haggadah*). Many congregations hold a community seder during at least one night of Passover. MRT holds an annual seder, typically on the second night of Passover.

Setting the Table

Seder plate: The seder plate should be placed near the leader of the seder. It contains various symbolic foods referred to in the seder itself. During the course of the seder, they are pointed out, lifted up and displayed, and explained: The contents of a seder plate vary by tradition, but most of them contain the following:



Shank bone, *zaro'ah*, symbolizes the lamb that was sacrificed in ancient days

Roasted Egg, *beitzah*, represents the Passover offering of ancient days as well as the wholeness and continuing cycle of life

Bitter herbs, *maror* (typically horseradish, some use romaine lettuce), a reminder of the bitter lives of the Hebrew slaves.

Charoset, the mixture of apples, nuts, sweet wine, cinnamon and sugar in the Ashkenazic fashion or dates, nuts and sweet wine in the Sephardic tradition, reminds us of the bricks and mortar made by the Hebrew slaves. The sweetness of the mix helps us celebrate the mortar used in building our own homes in freedom.

Greens, *karpas*, (A green herb or vegetable (parsley, celery, watercress) used as part of the Passover seder to symbolize spring and rebirth

Orange, *tapuz*, in the modern world, our rituals continue to evolve, and in honor of Rabbi Sally Priesand being the first woman ordained as Rabbi in America, we add an orange. Why? Because an orthodox Rabbi argued that he would have an orange on his seder plate, before he would ever recognize a woman Rabbi.

Additional items: The following items are also placed on the table:



Three matzot (pl. of matzah), on a plate with a cloth or napkin cover. When the Jewish people left Egypt they did so in a hurry and had no time to wait for the bread they were baking to rise. The bread they baked was flat – matzah. The Torah commands us to eat matzah during Passover, commemorating the Exodus from Egypt. Eating leavened foods is prohibited.

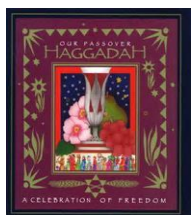
Hebrew slaves

Salt water, a reminder of the tears shed by the



Cup of Elijah, *Kos Eliyah* (A special cup used during the Passover seder to represent the prophet Elijah, who symbolizes the coming of the Messianic age.)

Cup of Miriam, *Kos Miriam*, (This symbol honors Miriam, the sister of Moses, who led us in celebration after crossing the Reed Sea, and on whose behalf wells of drinking water miraculously followed Israel through the wilderness. The cup of Miriam is a special goblet filled with water and placed on the Seder table.)



The Haggadah (pl. *haggadot*) There should be one for each person at the table. There are many different *haggadot*: some concentrate on involving children in the seder; some concentrate on the sociological or social justice aspects of Passover; there are even historical *haggadot* and critical editions.

Order of the Seder



Kaddesh: Sanctification

A blessing is recited over wine in honor of the holiday. The wine is then drunk. A second cup is then poured (but not yet drunk).

Urechatz: Washing

Participants wash their hands without a blessing in preparation for eating the *Karpas*.

Karpas: Vegetable

A vegetable (usually parsley) is dipped in salt water and eaten. The vegetable celebrates Spring and renewal, even while the joy is tempered by the salty tears we shed while in slavery. Parsley is a good vegetable to use for this purpose, because when you shake off the salt water, it looks like tears.



Yachatz: Breaking

The middle of the three matzot on the table is broken into two pieces. The smaller part is returned to the pile, the larger one is set aside for the *afikoman* (see below).

Magid: The Story

A retelling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt and the first Pesach. This begins with the youngest person asking The Four Questions, a set of questions about the proceedings designed to encourage participation in the seder. The *Magid* is designed to satisfy the needs of four different types of people: the wise one, who wants to know the technical details; the wicked one, who excludes himself (and learns the penalty for doing so); the simple one, who needs to know the basics; and the one who is unable to ask, who doesn't even know enough to know what he needs to know. At the end of the *Magid*, a blessing is recited over the second cup of wine and it is drunk.



Rachtzah: Washing

Participants wash their hands again, this time with a blessing, in preparation for eating the matzah.

Motzi: Blessing over Grain Products

Ha-motzi, the blessing for bread or grain products used in a meal, is recited over the matzah.

Matzah: Blessing over Matzah

A blessing specific to matzah is recited, and a bit of matzah is eaten.



Maror: Bitter Herbs



A blessing is recited over a bitter vegetable (usually raw horseradish; sometimes romaine lettuce), and it is eaten. This symbolizes the bitterness of slavery. The *maror* is dipped in *charoset*, a mixture of apples, nuts, cinnamon and wine, which symbolizes the mortar used by the Jews in building during their slavery (while the sweetness of the mixture celebrates the mortar we use to build our own homes in freedom). Note that there are two bitter herbs on the seder plate: one labeled *maror* and one labeled *chazeret*. The one labeled *maror* should be used for *maror* and the one labeled *chazeret* should be used in the *korech*, below.

Korech: The Sandwich

Rabbi Hillel was of the opinion that the *maror* should be eaten together with matzah and the paschal offering in a sandwich. In his honor, we eat some maror on a piece of matzah, with some charoset (we don't do animal sacrifice anymore, so there is no paschal offering to eat).



Shulchan Orech: Dinner

A festive meal is eaten. There are no particular requirements regarding what to eat at this meal, except that lamb cannot be eaten since the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed (and it can't have been sacrificed there) and no chametz is allowed, either. Among Ashkenazi Jews, gefilte fish and matzah ball soup are traditionally eaten at the beginning of the meal. Roast chicken or turkey is common as a traditional main course, as is beef brisket.

Tzafun: The Afikoman

The piece of matzah set aside earlier is eaten as "dessert," the last food of the meal. Different families have different traditions relating to the afikoman. Some have the children hide it, while the parents have to either find it or ransom it back. Others have the parents hide it for the children to find and whoever finds it gets a prize. While this idea helps keep the children awake and attentive throughout the pre-meal proceedings, the purpose of this ritual is remind ourselves even after a lavish meal ... a plain dessert brings us back into empathy with the story.



Barech: Grace after Meals

The third cup of wine is poured, and *birkat ha-mazon* (Grace after Meals) is recited. This is similar to the grace that would be said on any Shabbat, but with the special insertion for Passover. At the end, a blessing is said over the third cup and it is drunk. The fourth cup is poured, including cups set aside for the prophet Elijah and the prophetess Miriam. Elijah is supposed to herald the Messiah, and is supposed to come on Pesach to do this. The door is then opened to invite Elijah into our homes. Miriam's cup reminds us of the wells that followed Israel and the abundance that is available to all who have faith.



Hallel: Praises

The standard group of psalms that make up a full Hallel are recited at this point. A blessing is recited over the last cup of wine and it is drunk.

Nirtzah: Closing

A simple statement that the seder has been completed, with a wish that next year, we may celebrate Pesach in Jerusalem (i.e., that the Messiah will come within the next year, Jerusalem being wherever we live ... in peace). This can be followed by various traditional songs, hymns and stories.

