



PASSOVER
GUIDE
5785

APRIL 12 - 19

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The festival of Passover, or Pesach as it is called in Hebrew, celebrates one of the central events of Jewish history, the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt. While all Jewish festivals, holidays, and lifecycle events encourage participation in the Jewish community, Pesach in particular serves as a powerful model for Jewish families. Pesach preparations and celebrations teach Jewish history by recreating Jewish events in the home. Many of the rituals associated with Pesach focus on the importance of perpetuating Judaism. The Pesach Seder entertains children while encouraging them to relive Jewish history.

The significance of Pesach is best evidenced by the fact that the Ten Commandments begin with the declaration, "I am the Lord your God who delivered you from the land of Egypt." The very fact that God introduces Himself as Redeemer rather than Creator serves to emphasize the importance and centrality of this holiday to the Jewish people.

PESACH IS KNOWN BY FOUR NAMES:

1. Z'man Cherutainu - The time of our freedom. This commemorates the liberation of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt (circa 1270 B.C.E.).
2. Chag HaAviv - The festival of spring. This symbolizes the agricultural aspect of Pesach; it marks the end of the winter and the beginning of spring.
3. Chag HaMatzot - The festival of matzah. In their haste to leave Egypt the children of Israel could not wait for their bread to rise, and thus their "bread" became matzah.
4. Pesach - Derived from the Hebrew word Pasach which means to pass or leap over; because God "passed" over (thus "Passover" in English) the houses of the Israelites when the plagues were visited upon the Egyptians.

According to the Torah, Pesach is celebrated for seven days (for Jews living in Israel and most Reform Jews; and 8 days for the traditional Jewish communities living in the Diaspora) during Nisan, the first month of spring in the Jewish calendar. The festival begins on the 14th of Nisan; this year on Saturday, April 12, 2025. Those who observe the festival for seven days observe the first and last days as full-festival days (this year, April 13 & April 19); individuals celebrating eight days observe the first two and last two days as full-festival days with certain rituals and prohibitions (this year, April 13 & 14; April 19 & 20). The days in between the full-festival days are called Chol HaMoed ("intermediate" days), during which fewer prohibitions are observed.

PREPARING FOR PESACH: MAOT CHITTIM

In past generations, Jewish communities around the world maintained a special fund to provide flour for the needy for baking matzah for Pesach. This fund, known as Maot Chittim (“wheat money”) eventually evolved into an all-inclusive charity for distributing food and money at Pesach time. Please consider making a donation to our Kantor Family Center for Justice, or the Jacobson Family Food Pantry at The Ruth & Norman Rales Jewish Family Services so that the disadvantaged of our community might also be able to celebrate Pesach in joy and with plenty.

PREPARING FOR PESACH: THE HOUSEHOLD

The home is the center of Jewish life, and there are special Pesach rituals to prepare the household appropriately. Even if you do not host a Seder, your household should reflect the special nature of the festival week.

During Pesach, food and its preparation are important. The following recommendations and guide-lines are presented in the hope that you and your family will choose to intensify your observance and thus your awareness of Passover’s meaning.

Do a thorough “spring cleaning to prepare your home for the festival. Using different foods, dishes, and utensils in a home scrubbed clean for Pesach will help you establish the special sanctity of space and time. These changes impress themselves upon the imagination of children, heightening their fascination with the festival.

PROHIBITIONS AGAINST CHAMETZ

WHAT IS CHAMETZ?

Chametz results when one of the five species of grain: barley, rye, oats, wheat, and spelt, or their derivatives is allowed to remain undisturbed in contact with water for 18 minutes or more. Chametz results instantly when these grains are exposed to hot or salted water. In other words, chametz is that food which (1) has been or could become subject to a leavening process, or (2) food that has come in contact with leavened foods.

Examples of chametz are ordinary bread, crackers, cakes, breakfast cereals and any baked goods made from leavened flour. Matzah is bread baked without leavening.

WHAT IS KITNIYOT? IS IT PERMISSIBLE TO USE THEM ON PESACH?

Most Sephardic Jews do eat kitniyot - rice, millet, corn, and legumes (beans, peas, peanuts) during Pesach. Ashkenazic Jews traditionally do not (yet most will allow the use of kitniyot derivatives, such as corn syrup and peanut oil). The reason is not that they are chametz or otherwise prohibited in the Torah, but rather because (1) in the Middle Ages the concern existed that these foods were stored and processed in ways that brought them into contact with a grain (i.e., real chametz) and so they were forbidden for Passover use, and (2) when turned into flour, they look like chametz products and the rabbis were concerned about the "appearance" of eating chametz during Pesach. Today we have no fear of these products being mixed with chametz, and we are not worried about "appearances" when even traditional Jewish authorities have permitted Pesach "donuts," "pancakes" and "muffins" - all of which look like their chametz counterparts. So, many Jews are starting to eat fresh corn and beans (string beans are a vegetable and are permitted) during Pesach. And, as Sephardic Passover products from Israel make their way in greater abundance to America, perhaps we will see an increased acceptance of the eating of not only peanuts but other kitniyot as well.

WHY DO WE REMOVE CHAMETZ FROM THE HOME?

The Torah is more stringent regarding chametz than any other forbidden food. It prohibits not only consumption but also possession of chametz. Bedikat Chametz (the search for chametz) on the night before Pesach and biur chametz (the disposal of chametz) the next morning, are predicated on this requirement. The chametz prohibitions serve to recall the miraculous nature of the Exodus when "... Egypt exerted itself upon the (Israelite) people to send them out of the land hurriedly...The people picked up their dough before it became leavened, their leftovers bound up in their garments on their shoulders...They baked the dough they took out of Egypt into cakes of matzah, for they could not be leavened, for they were driven from Egypt and could not delay, nor had they made provisions for themselves." (Exodus 12:33-34, 39)

The weeks leading up to Pesach are a good time to eat up all of the chametz in your home. Since Jewish law prohibits the possession of chametz, you might choose to donate your non-perishable chametz to a food pantry or soup kitchen the week before Pesach, as a special festival mitzvah to help individuals in your community, or you may choose to store your chametz in an out-of-the-way place that will not be accessed or opened during the entire holiday. It is also customary to store away everyday dishes, utensils, pots and pans that are "chametzdik" (in contact with chametz during the rest of the year), and use different dishes, utensils, pots and pans, especially for Pesach.

BEDIKAT CHAMETZ/THE SEARCH FOR LEAVEN & BIUR CHAMETZ/THE DISPOSAL OF CHAMETZ

This ritual symbolizes the final cleaning of the house of all chametz and signifies that the house has been made into a Pesach sanctuary. Bedikat Chametz normally takes place the night before the first Seder. This year, with Pesach beginning on Saturday night, April 12, the search for chametz should end before sundown on April 10, 2025.

The bedikat chametz ceremony is dramatic, compelling, and enjoyable, particularly for children. Before the search begins, “hide” pieces of bread in various places around your home. Be sure you know how many pieces of bread you have hidden and where - otherwise you could still have chametz in your home during the festival.

Traditionally, the search is conducted in the dark, with the aid of a candle for light, and a feather and wooden spoon to collect the chametz. Today, however, many people use flashlights instead of candles. The chametz is put into a bag and disposed of the next morning, traditionally by burning. This year, the burning of the chametz should occur on the morning of Friday, April 11, 2025.

BEFORE THE SEARCH BEGINS, RECITE THE FOLLOWING BLESSING:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַי, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל בַּעוֹר חֲמֵץ.

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu al biur chametz.

Blessed are You, Eternal our God, Sovereign of the universe, who sanctifies us through the mitzvot and had commanded us about removing the chametz.

AFTER THE SEARCH, RECITE THE FOLLOWING BLESSING:

כֹּל-חֲמִירָא וְחֲמִיעָא דְאַכָּא בְּרִשּׁוּתֵי דְלָא חֲמִתֵּיהּ וְדְלָא בְעֲרַתֵּיהּ לְבִטּוּל וְלֵהוּי כְעַפְרָא דְאַרְעָא.

Kol chamira vachamia d'ika virshuti d'la chamiteih ud'la vaariteih livtil v'lehevei k'afra d'ara.

All chametz and leavening that may still be in my property which I have not seen or have not removed, or whose existence I have no knowledge of, shall be null and disowned and deemed valueless as the dust of the earth.

MEKHIRAT CHAMETZ - THE SALE OF CHAMETZ

As part of the preparation for Pesach, Jewish law requires a transfer of ownership of all non- “Pesachdik” food and utensils that remain on the premises during the entire holiday. A local Rabbi can usually handle this “sale” (the rabbis at CBI can handle this for you). The sale is handled in such a way that the ownership of the stored chametz reverts back to the original owner once the holiday is over. This year the sale of chametz should take place on Friday, April 11, 2025.

THE SEDER

The Seder (“order” in English) is vastly more than a family dinner; it is a religious drama of the highest significance, designed to help Jews re-experience redemption from Egypt. The Seder consists of three parts: the service before dinner, dinner, and the service after dinner, which includes readings and songs. To achieve the fullest religious content, as well as enjoyment, plan the Seder around the personalities of the participants. Each family is different; each Seder leader lends his/her own characteristics to the observance. The aim is to conduct the Seder as a celebration, filled with joy and drama.

First Seder

Saturday, April 12, 2025

Second Seder

Sunday, April 13, 2025

AFTER THE CANDLES ARE LIT, RECITE THE FOLLOWING:

BLESSING OVER THE CANDLES

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ, בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ, לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל יוֹם טוֹב.

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Yom Tov.

Blessed are You, Eternal our God, Sovereign of the universe, who sanctifies us through the mitzvot and has commanded us to kindle the Festival light.

KIDDUSH, BLESSING OVER THE WINE

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, borei p'ri hagafen.

SHEHECHEYANU

(FIRST NIGHT ONLY)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהֵחֵיבֵנו וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעְנוּ לְזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higiyanu laz'man hazeh

Blessed are You, Eternal our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has kept us alive and sustained us, and brought us to this festive season.

PREPARING THE SEDER TABLE

In honor of the holiday and in celebration of freedom, the table is set in a most festive manner with the finest utensils. In front of the Seder leader a special Seder plate is placed. All the symbols of the Seder are placed on this one dish. While many people use special ceremonial plates with places marked for each item, any plate can be used.

Three whole pieces of matzah should be placed in either a special cloth matzah cover with three sections or wrapped in a napkin folded over to separate and cover them. Some Seder plates have a tiered structure underneath the plate in which the matzah can be placed. Three matzot are used because, in addition to representing the two whole loaves of bread that are traditional for Shabbat and festivals, we include a third matzah on Pesach symbolizing the bread of affliction ("lechem oni" in Hebrew), which we divide during yachatz (a time during the Seder which examines the meaning of matzah). The three matzot are also symbolic of the three categories of Jews: Priests, Levites, and Israelites.



In recent years, many families have begun a tradition of including a fourth piece of matzah - the matzah of oppression. During the Soviet oppression of Jews, this fourth piece of matzah was introduced along with readings and discussions about Jews who do not have the freedom to commemorate the Exodus from Egypt. Many families continue this tradition of the fourth matzah, in recognition of Jews who lack physical, intellectual, and/or religious freedom.

THE SEDER PLATE



OTHER ITEMS FOR THE SEDER TABLE

In addition to the Seder plate and the three (or four) matzot, the table should also be set with:

- A bowl of salt water for dipping the karpas.
- Kiddush cups, or wine goblets, and wine (grape juice is permissible, as it, too, is “fruit of the vine”) for each person to fulfill the mitzvah of drinking four cups of wine at the Seder.
- A special wine cup filled with wine and set in the middle of the Seder table for Elijah the Prophet (traditionally believed to be the one who will herald the coming of the Messiah). This cup of wine symbolizes continued faith in the coming of the messianic era.
- A water pitcher and bowl for the ritual washing of hands. (Also supply a towel.)
- A Haggadah for all participants, so all may follow and participate in the Seder.
- Pillows or cushions for reclining at the table in the manner of free people at banquets in 6 ancient times, thus signifying freedom from Egyptian bondage.

THE HAGGADAH

To commemorate the Exodus, the rabbis composed the Haggadah, a small book that is read aloud at the Seder. The Haggadah sets out the order (“Seder” in Hebrew and hence the name for the evening) of the rituals, meals, and the telling of the Pesach/Exodus story. Reading the Haggadah aloud fulfills the Torah’s command to tell your children the story of the liberation from Egyptian bondage. One teaching of the Haggadah embodies the unique spirit of Pesach: “In every generation, a man is obligated to regard himself as if he personally was liberated from Egypt.”

THE SEDER ORDER IN THE HAGGADAH

KADESH

The sanctification of the day, recited over the first of the four cups of wine.

WHY: Kiddush is recited on the eve of every festival and Shabbat. It is customarily said over wine, a symbol of joy, as it is written, “and wine gladdens the heart of man” Psalm 104:15). Kiddush is a reminder that God gave man the power to sanctify time, and to sanctify the Sabbath and festival days.

UR'CHATZ

Hygienic hand washing before eating the Karpas.

WHY: In the period of the Second Temple, there was much concern with the laws of ritual purity. Some held the opinion that before dipping any food in liquid (which was considered a conveyor of ritual impurity), the hands should be washed as an act of purification. This custom, and most of the laws of purity, has fallen into general disuse, but Ur'chatz is retained in the Seder as a reminder of this procedure that was observed in the times of the Temple.

KARPAS

Eating a green vegetable dipped into salt water (though vinegar is also acceptable).

WHY: Many scholars speculate that this practice goes back to the ancient Roman banquet custom of beginning a meal with hors d'oeuvres and dip. A number of other reasons have been given for the custom. (1) Karpas is a symbol of spring--of the renewal of the earth that takes place in the month of Nisan, and thus it is a symbol of the hope for freedom born anew in every heart.(2) The salt water is usually interpreted as symbolizing the bitter tears shed by the Israelites while in Egyptian bondage. (3) The salt water also represents the oceans and the vegetable represents the earth; together they symbolize the world and the hope for its unity and harmony. (4) The curse on Adam was "you shall eat the herbs of the fields," and "by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread." Karpas, salt water (the sweat of the brow), and matzah are eaten to symbolically remember that while living in an unredeemed world, the yearning still persists for final redemption and the return to the Garden of Eden.

YACHATZ

Breaking the middle matzah in two, the larger half is wrapped in a napkin and set aside as the afikoman, which is eaten at the conclusion of the Seder.

WHY: The most common explanation links the breaking of the matzah to the phrases lechem oni and lechem sheoniyn alav d'varim harbeh. Lechem oni is translated as "the bread of affliction and poverty." This emphasizes the poverty sustained by the Israelites when they were enslaved; we eat matzah as a reminder of that poverty. Lechem sheoniyn alav d'varim harbeh is translated as "the bread over which many things are said." This second phrase reminds us of the significant and symbolic place matzah has in the observance of the Seder as well as throughout the entire festival.

MAGGID

Telling the Pesach story includes the following well-known sections:

- The Four Children.
- The Four Questions.
- Avadim hayinu, Mi-tekhilah - slavery, idolatry.
- Arami oved avi - oppression and Exodus. The Ten Plagues.
- Be-khol dor va-dor - redemption. The Second Cup of Wine.

MOTZI MATZAH

The blessings for matzah.

MAROR

The blessing for eating bitter herbs.

WHY: To symbolize the bitterness that the Israelites experienced in Egypt.

KOREKH

Eating the matzah and maror sandwich.

WHY: As a reminder of the opinion and practice of Hillel: that during the time of the Temple one would make a sandwich of the Pesach offering/sacrifice, matzah, and maror, and eat them together in fulfillment of the verse, "with matzot and bitter herbs they shall eat it" (Numbers 9:11).

SHULKHAN OREKH

The festive meal.

TZAFUN

The Search for the Hidden.

Toward the end of the meal, it is customary for the children to look for the Afikoman, which the leader of the Seder has hidden (tzafun). Another custom has it that the children "steal" the afikoman during dinner and hide it from the leader so the Seder cannot be finished. Either way, the leader pays a ransom/reward for its return. It is then eaten as the dessert and the meal is officially over.

WHY: The Pesach offering was eaten at the end of the meal when people were most satiated. In remembrance of this, the afikoman is eaten at the end of our meal.

BAREKH

This section includes:

- Grace after the meal.
- The Third Cup of Wine.
- Starting the counting of the Omer. (Recited on the second night only.)
- In every generation - historical section.
- Opening the door for Elijah the Prophet.

HALLEL

Recitation of Psalms praising God.

NIRTZAH HAL

The conclusion, The Fourth Cup of Wine.