



The Richmond Jewish Day School

# A Family Guide for Passover



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# PASSOVER

And this day shall become a memorial for you, and you shall observe it as a festival for the L-RD, for your generations, as an eternal decree shall you observe it. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, but on the first day you shall remove the leaven from your homes ... you shall guard the unleavened bread, because on this very day I will take you out of the land of Egypt; you shall observe this day for your generations as an eternal decree. - Exodus 12:14-17

Pesach begins on the 15th day of the Jewish month of Nissan. It is the first of the three major festivals with both historical and agricultural significance (the other two are Shavu'ot and Sukkot). Agriculturally, it represents the beginning of the harvest season in Israel. However, the primary observances of Pesach are related to the Exodus from Egypt after generations of slavery. This story is told in Exodus, Ch. 1-15. Many of the Pesach observances are instituted in Chs. 12-15.

The name "Pesach" comes from the Hebrew root פֶּסַח, meaning to pass through, to pass over, to exempt or to spare. It refers to the fact that G-d "passed over" the houses of the Jews when he was slaying the firstborn of Egypt. In English, the holiday is known as Passover. "Pesach" is also the name of the sacrificial offering (a lamb) that was made in the Temple on this holiday. The holiday is also referred to as Chag ha-aviv חַג הָאֲבִיב, (the Spring Festival), Chag ha-Matzoth חַג הַמַּצּוֹת, (the Festival of Matzahs), and Z'man Cherutenu זְמַן חֵירוּתֵנוּ, (the Time of Our Freedom) .

## **PESACH LAWS AND CUSTOMS**

Probably the most significant observance related to Pesach involves the removal of chametz (leaven) from our homes. This commemorates the fact that the Jews leaving Egypt were in a hurry, and did not have time to let their bread rise.

Chametz includes anything made from the five major grains (wheat, rye, barley, oats and spelt) that have not been completely cooked within 18 minutes after coming into contact with water. Orthodox Jews of Ashkenazic background also avoid rice, corn, peanuts, and legumes (beans) as if they were chametz. All of these items are commonly used to make bread, thus use of them was prohibited to avoid any confusion. Such additional items are referred to as "kitniyot."

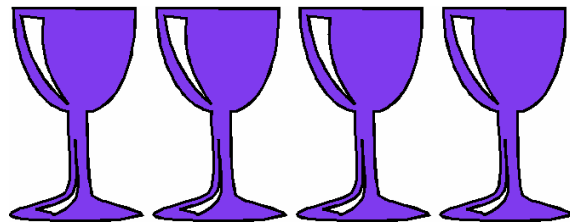
We may not eat chametz during Pesach; we may not even own it or derive benefit from it. We may not even feed it to our pets or cattle. All chametz, including utensils used to cook chametz, must either be disposed of or sold to a non-Jew (they can be repurchased after the holiday).

The process of cleaning the home of all chametz in preparation for Pesach is an enormous task. After the cleaning is completed, the morning before the seder, a formal search of the house for chametz is undertaken, and any remaining chametz is burned. The grain product we eat during Pesach is called matzah. Matzah is unleavened bread made simply from flour and water and cooked very quickly. Some people observe an additional strictness during Pesach known as gebrochts, from a Yiddish word meaning "broken". Those who observe gebrochts will avoid any matzah product that has come into contact with liquid after being baked.

The day before Pesach is the Fast of the Firstborn, a minor fast for all firstborn males, commemorating the fact that the firstborn Jewish males in Egypt were not killed during the final plague.

On the first night of Pesach (first two nights for traditional Jews outside Israel), we have a special family meal filled with ritual to remind us of the significance of the holiday. This meal is called a seder **סדר**, from a Hebrew root word meaning "order," because there is a specific set of information that must be discussed in a specific order. It is the same root from which we derive the word "siddur" **סידור**, (prayer book).

Pesach lasts for seven days (eight days outside of Israel). The first and last days of the holiday (first two and last two outside of Israel) are days on which no work is permitted. Work is permitted on the intermediate days. These intermediate days on which work is permitted are referred to as Chol Ha-Mo'ed, as are the intermediate days of Sukkot.



The Pesach Seder

**הסדר של פסח**

*And if your son asks you in the future, saying, What are the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, that the L-RD our G-d commanded you? You will say to your son, We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt; and the L-RD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. The L-RD gave signs and wonders, great and harmful, against Egypt, against Pharaoh, and against all his household, before our eyes: And he brought us out of*

*there to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised our fathers. -*

Deuteronomy 6:20-23

The text of the Pesach seder is written in a book called the haggadah. The haggadah tells the story of the Exodus from Egypt and explains some of the practices and symbols of the holiday.



Kaddesh, Urechatz,

Karpas, Yachatz,

Maggid, Rachtzah,

Motzi, Matzah,

Maror, Korech,

Shulchan Orech,

Tzafun, Barech,

Hallel, Nirtzah

קדש ורחץ  
 כרפס גסס  
 מגיד נחצה  
 מוציא מצה  
 מרור כורת  
 שלסן עורת  
 צפון ברת  
 הלל נרצה

Now, what does that mean?

**1. Kaddesh: Sanctification**

קדש

A blessing over wine in honor of the holiday. The wine is drunk, and a second cup is poured.

**2. Urechatz: Washing**

ורחץ

A washing of the hands without a blessing, in preparation for eating the Karpas.

**3. Karpas: Vegetable**

כרפס

A vegetable (usually parsley) is dipped in salt water and eaten. The vegetable symbolizes the lowly origins of the Jewish people; the salt water symbolizes the tears shed as a result of our slavery. Parsley is a good vegetable to use for this purpose, because when you shake off the salt water, it looks like tears.

**4. Yachatz: Breaking**

יחץ

One of the three matzahs on the table is broken. Part is returned to the pile, the other part is set aside for the afikomen

**5. Maggid: The Story**

מגיד

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 Four Questions are also known as Mah Nishtanah (Why is it different?), which are the first words of the Four Questions. This is often sung.

The maggid 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 maggid, a blessing is recited over the second cup of wine and it is drunk.

**6. Rachtzah: Washing** רחצה

A second washing of the hands, this time with a blessing, in preparation for eating the matzah

**7. Motzi: Blessing over Grain Products** מוציא

The ha-motzi blessing, a generic blessing for bread or grain products used as a meal, is recited over the matzah.

**8. Matzah: Blessing over Matzah** מצה

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

**9. Maror: Bitter Herbs** מרור

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 charoset, a mixture of apples, nuts, cinnamon and wine, which symbolizes the mortar used by the Jews in building during their slavery.

**10. Korech: The Sandwich** כורכ

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).

**11. Shulchan Orech: Dinner** שולחן עורך

A festive meal is eaten. There is no particular requirement regarding what

to eat at this meal (except, of course, that chametz cannot be eaten). Among Ashkenazic Jews, gefilte fish and matzah ball soup are traditionally eaten at the beginning of the meal. Roast chicken or turkey are common as a main course, as is beef brisket.

#### 12. Tzafun: The Afikomen צפון

The piece of matzah set aside earlier is eaten as "desert," the last food of the meal. Different families have different traditions relating to the afikomen. Some have the children hide it, while the parents have to either find it or ransom it back. Others have the parents hide it. The idea is to keep the children awake and attentive throughout the pre-meal proceedings, waiting for this part.

#### 13. Barech: Grace after Meals ברכה

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. At the end, a blessing is said over the third cup and it is drunk. The fourth cup is poured, including a cup set aside for the prophet Elijah. The door is opened for a while at this point.

#### 14. Hallel: Praises הלל

Several psalms are recited. A blessing is recited over the last cup of wine and it is drunk.

#### 15. Nirtzah: Closing נרצה

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). This is followed by various hymns and stories.

## **COUNTING OF THE OMER**

Beginning on the second night of Passover, the 16th day of Nisan, Jews begin the practice of the Counting of the Omer, a nightly reminder of the approach of the holiday of Shavuot 50 days hence. Each night after the evening prayer service, men and women recite a special blessing and then enumerate the day of the Omer. On the first night, for example, they say, "Today is the first day in (or, to) the Omer"; on the second night, "Today is the second day in the Omer." The counting also involves weeks; thus, the seventh day is commemorated, "Today is the seventh day, which is one week in the Omer." The eighth day is marked, "Today is the eighth day, which is one week and one day in the Omer," etc.

When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, the Omer was an actual offering of a measure of barley, which was offered each day between the 16th of Nisan and the eve of Shavuot. Since the destruction of the Temple, this offering is brought in word rather than deed.

One explanation for the Counting of the Omer is that it shows the connection between Passover and Shavuot. The physical freedom that the Israelites achieved at the Exodus from Egypt was only the beginning of a process that climaxed with the spiritual freedom they gained at the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Another explanation is that the newborn nation which emerged after the Exodus needed time to learn their new responsibilities vis-a-vis Torah and mitzvot before accepting God's law. The distinction between the Omer offering—a measure of barley, typically animal fodder—and the Shavuot offering—two loaves of wheat bread, human food—symbolizes the transition process.

## **RECIPE FOR CHAROSET**

**חֲרוֹסֶת**

This fruit, nut and wine mix is eaten during the seder. It is meant to remind us of the mortar used by the Jews to build during the period of slavery. It should have a coarse texture. The ingredient quantities listed here are at best a rough estimate; I usually just eye-ball it. The recipe below makes a very large quantity, but we usually wind up making more before the holiday is over. Other fruits or nuts can be used.

- 4 medium apples, 2 tart and 2 sweet
- 1/2 cup finely chopped almonds
- 1/4 cup sweet wine
- 1/4 cup dry wine
- 1 Tbs. cinnamon

Shred the apples. Add all other ingredients. Allow to sit for 3-6 hours, until the wine is absorbed by the other ingredients. Serve on matzah.

