

Passover

Watch overview videos:

1. What is Passover (2:23)
<http://www.history.com/videos/ask-a-rabbi-what-is-passover#ask-a-rabbi-what-is-passover>
2. History of Passover (3:59)
<http://www.history.com/videos/history-of-passover>
3. Meaning of Redemption (4:43)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoBeR6tjs3w>

Basics:

Pronunciation: PEH-sach (♫<http://bit.ly/1e2sBuG>)

Meaning: pass over

Jewish Date: 15th of Nisan

Secular Date: Generally falls late-March to early-April

Length: 7 (Israel) or 8 (Diaspora)

Themes: redemption from slavery, spring

Hebrew Words Guide: <http://bit.ly/1ad6j6B>

Overview & History:

Read: <http://bit.ly/195uXrv>

- Passover commemorates the story of Exodus; the freeing of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, called Mitzrayim in Hebrew, which means “narrow place” or “place of constriction.”
(Pronunciation: meets-RAH-yeem - ♫ <http://bit.ly/15f0xS5>)
- The holiday is a merging of ancient spring holidays that celebrated the barley harvest (Chag ha-Aviv) and the commemoration of the Exodus and festival of unleavened bread (Chag ha-Matzot), both of which are mentioned in the Torah
- The teaching is that we must not just retell the story, but experience it over and over to personally be freed from bondage in every generation.
- The holiday is primarily a home-based holiday with the central service called a "Seder," which means "order."
- The prayer book used for the Seder is called a "Haggadah."
 - Detail of the liturgy of the Haggadah is below in the "Liturgy" section
 - The prayer book has a very specific structure that has been developed over more than a thousand years.

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- The dates for the compilation of the original Haggadah is unknown, but it is believed to date back to the Mishnaic period, approximately 3rd or 4th, Century CE but possibly as early as the 1st century CE
- The oldest known complete Haggadah dates to the 10th century CE, and was part of a larger prayer book.
- The oldest Haggadot that are stand-alone manuscripts date to the 13th (Golden Haggadah) and 14th century (Sarajevo Haggadah).
- More Orthodox and traditional communities still use a Haggadah that closely resembles the ones from the Middle Ages.
- Over the course of the 20th century, outside the Orthodox community, there has been a large amount of experimentation and innovation with the Haggadah to make it more personally relevant and connect it to modern experience. Much like the printing press helped to bring the Haggadah to the masses, the Internet has democratized creation and distribution of the Haggadah for those outside the Orthodox communities.
 - 16th Century: 25 printed of Haggadah
 - 17th Century: 37 versions
 - 18th Century: 230 versions
 - 19th Century: 1250 versions
 - 20th Century: 3000 versions
 - Translation to English began in the first decade of the 20th Century
 - Incorporation of modern political references began in the 1940s, which used the Seder to explore a variety of political issues around slavery and liberation
 - 1970s and 1980s saw a growth in Haggadot that dealt with women's and feminist issues, including the addition of a Kos Miriam (Miriam's Cup).
 - In the 1990s we saw the beginnings of the "personal liberation" Haggadah, which transformed the Seder into a ritual for spiritual liberation

Customs & Halakhah

Halakah below is based on Orthodox tradition, as that is the denomination with the greatest concern for strictly following halakhah, and as balanced for Ashkenazic vs. Sephardic custom as possible. Specific halakhah around the seder is listed under "liturgy."

Read:

- Pesach Laws & Customs: <http://bit.ly/15PTrpH>
- Laws of Pesach (Ashkenazic): <http://bit.ly/1ggBbrH>
- Laws of Pesach (Sephardic): <http://bit.ly/16MK2Ad>
- Laws of the Seder: <http://bit.ly/16MJzxJ>

Summary

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- The teaching is that we must not just retell the story, but experience it over and over to personally be freed from bondage in every generation.
- Mimouna: a unique celebration of Moroccan Jews on the night following Pesach. It is a celebration with baked goods – filled with Chametz, especially a special kind of pancake
 - Read: <http://bit.ly/H5dkOr>
- Laws of Passover are in two main categories:
 - Prohibition of Chametz
 - Positive actions to fulfill obligations of Passover
- Chametz: wheat, barley, rye, spelt, and oats, after combination with water
 - Pronunciation: khah-MEHTZ (♫ <http://bit.ly/1ggBm6q>)
 - Se'or – sourdough or other non-edible items that are used to ferment other dough, also prohibited during Passover
 - Kitniyot: (Hebrew: קטניות) Ashkenazic avoid foods on Passover that are similar in texture to banned chametz, and flour can be made from. Examples: legumes, rice, and corn.
 - Removal of Chametz
 - Read: <http://bit.ly/1bAG6UO>
 - Bitul Chometz - nullification of ownership of chometz
 - M'chiras Chometz - sale of chometz
 - Bedikas Chometz. - searching and destroying (burning) of chometz
- Mitzvot of Seder
 - Seven mitzvot performed at Seder:
 - Two from Torah:
 1. telling the Exodus story
 2. eating matzah
 - Five are Rabbinic (Talmudic)
 - eating bitter herbs (Maror)
 - eating the Afikomen
 - saying psalms of praise (Hallel)
 - drinking the four cups of wine
 - demonstrating our freedom (e.g. reclining while we eat)

Liturgy

Read: <http://bit.ly/1fSjz2X>

Traditional Elements of the Haggadah (from <http://bit.ly/19s016S>)

Below are the traditional elements of the Haggadah liturgy. Most haggadot also include a great deal of poetry, songs, and commentary.

- **Introduction:** Review with participants the order of the Seder by listing all of the sections. Take this opportunity to welcome all guests to the Seder and focus

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everyone's attention on the theme of the evening, which is traditionally 'freedom.' It's also a good time to thank those who helped to prepare the meal!

- **Kadesh:** [Blessing] Drink the first cup of wine while reclining in a comfortable position.
- **Urchatz:** Hand washing (without blessing); it is customary to do this before dipping food.
- **Karpas:** [Blessing] Greens dipped in salt water; the greens symbolize Spring and the salt water reminds us of the tears of our ancestors who endured slavery. (Pronunciation: kahr-PAHS - ♪ <http://bit.ly/195AqOM>)
- **Yachatz:** There are three ritual matzot on the table. Break the middle matzah and one half becomes the afikomen(which is then hidden to be found later in the seder).
- **Maggid:** This section includes the main part of the seder and is comprised of the following sections.
 - Four Questions; traditionally recited by the youngest child at the table
 - Four Children; commentary on the four types of approaches to the questions
 - Telling of the Exodus story including our ancestors slavery in Egypt
 - Ten Plagues; a highlighted part of the Exodus story
 - Drink the second cup of wine and sing Dayeinu
- **Rachtzah:** [Blessing] Hand washing before the meal, this time with the traditional blessing.
- **Motzi-Matzah:** [Blessing] Matzah is shared and eaten (traditionally this is taken from the top and remaining half of the middle of the ritual matzot).
- **Maror:** [Blessing] Horseradish (bitter herb) is eaten.
- **Korech:** "Hillel Sandwich" is eaten; a bite made with matzah, maror, and charoset.

- **Shulchan Orech:** Haggadaot are put aside while eating the festive meal!
- **Tzafun:** The hidden afikomen (from ritual matzah at begging of seder) must be found (or ransomed), then shared and eaten; this is traditionally the last thing eaten for the remainder of the night.
- **Barech:** Birkat Hamazon, grace after meals, is recited and includes the third cup of wine.
- **Hallel:** Includes psalms to be sung, the fourth cup of wine, and the filling Elijah's cup.
- **Nirtzah:** This concludes the Seder with songs and wishes for next year (in Jerusalem!).

The Seder Plate & Table:

- Read: <http://bit.ly/GGTY29>
- Plate:
 - Depending on tradition has 5-7 items.
 - Karpas – Green vegetable (parsley)
(Pronunciation: kahr-PAHS - ♪ <http://bit.ly/195AqOM>)

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- Charoset – mixture of fruit and nuts, which symbolized the mortar used in brick making for Pharaoh
(Pronunciation: khah-ROH-seht - 🎵 <http://bit.ly/19sauPF>)
- Maror – bitter herb (horseradish or bitter lettuce), which symbolized the bitterness of slavery
(Pronunciation: mah-ROHR - 🎵 <http://bit.ly/16ruE9X>)
 - Hazeret – a second bitter herb, for which there are varying rationales for including. (<http://bit.ly/GGVdi4>)
- Z'roa – roast lamb shank bone that symbolizes the lambs that were sacrificed to ensure that the “Passover” occurred
(Pronunciation: z'-ROH-ah - 🎵 <http://bit.ly/1ad67nN>)
- Beitzah – roasted egg that represents the Temple sacrifices and the cycle of life.
(Pronunciation: behy-TSAH - 🎵 <http://bit.ly/17JJj09>)
- Table:
 - Salt Water (Ashkenazic) or Vinegar (Sephardic)
 - Matzah – three matzot wrapped in a cloth or container
 - In mystical traditions the matzah is included on the seder plate.
 - Read page 40 of: <http://bit.ly/195m8Ok>
 - Elijah’s Cup – cup of wine poured for the Prophet Elijah, who is “invited” to all ceremonies have to do with redemption.

Modern Variations & Additions

Many of these variations and additions may not be acceptable in the Orthodox communities.

- Miriam’s Cup
 - The custom of adding a Miriam's Cup to the Seder began in the 1980s and is credited to a Rosh Chodesh group in Boston, MA (USA) and specifically to a woman named Stephanie Loo Ritari.
 - The addition of a Miriam's Cup (Kos Miriam) and an honoring of the sister of Moses and a prophetess in her own right, named as such in the Torah, has become commonplace in many non-orthodox Seders.
 - Many different approaches to including a Kos Miriam exist, see a personal favorite way: <http://bit.ly/17cQuK7> and a wide variety: <http://bit.ly/GFNz7b>
- Orange on the Seder Plate
 - Tradition that began in the 1980s
 - First suggested by Susannah Heschel as a way to show that Gays and Lesbians and other marginalized people should be included as a fruitful part of our society
 - Urban legend mis-represents as having come from a male Rabbi saying, "a woman has as much of place on the Bimah, as an orange on a Seder plate"
 - Birthed a variety of additional items that could be symbolically added to a seder plate to represent other issues:

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- Beet: replaces lamb shank for many vegetarians (Talmud, Tractate 114b), or Jews who starved during Holocaust
- Flower or Seed: replaces egg for some vegans
- Olive: peace in Middle East or to remember the economic insecurity caused by the destruction of olive trees
- Tomato: symbolizes contemporary slavery
- 4th Matzah: for Soviet Jews and those not able to practice Judaism
- Potato or peelings: solidarity with those suffering from food inequality and starvation
- Artichoke: interfaith families
- Modern Plagues
 - Some have chosen after the traditional 10 Plagues to list plagues of the modern world. Clearly what constitutes a modern plague depends entirely on worldview. For ideas around this see: <http://bit.ly/1acYU7i>
- Four Children
 - Adaptation of “four sons” section of Haggadah to “four children” or adding “four daughters”
- Alternative or Additions to “Four Questions”
 - Some add new questions or use alternative questions to align the questions with the theme of their seder.
 - See <http://bit.ly/17JC2xm> and <http://bit.ly/16rrVNH> for ideas

Sources and Bibliography

Books:

- The Jewish Holidays: A Guide & Commentary, Michael Strassfield
- Seasons of our Joy, Arthur Ocean Waskow
- The Jewish Book of Days, Jill Hammer
- The Rosh Chodesh Table: Foods at the New Moon, Judith Solomon
- Seasons for Celebration, Karen L. Fox and Phyllis Zimmler Miller
- Celebrating the Jewish Year: The Spring and Summer Holidays: Passover, Shavuot, The Omer, Tisha B'Av; Rabbi Paul Steinberg and Janet Greenstein Potter
- Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols, Ellen Frankel and Betsy Patkin Teutsch
- New American Haggadah, Jonathan Safran Foer
- History & Haggadah, Yosef Hayim Yerushalami

Websites:

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- <http://www.askmoses.com/en/article/582,464/What-does-the-Cup-of-Elijah-signify.html>
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- <http://m.npr.org/story/135320205>
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