

A Passover *seder* is a service held at home as part of the Passover celebration. It is always observed on the first night of Passover and in many homes, it is observed on the second night as well. Participants use a book called a *haggadah* to lead the service, which consists of storytelling, a *seder* meal, and concluding prayers and songs.

The Passover Haggadah

The word *haggadah* comes from a Hebrew word meaning "tale" or "parable," and it contains an outline or choreography for the *seder*. The word *seder* literally means "order" in Hebrew, and there's a very specific "order" to the *seder* service and meal.

Steps in the Passover Seder

There are many components to the Passover *seder* plate;

karpas	parsley	initial success
charoset	fruits/nuts	mortar
maror	Horseradish/romaine	bitterness of slavery
z'roa	lamb shank	sacrifice and offering
beitzah	roasted egg	offering to temple

Below is a brief description of each of the 15 parts of the Passover *seder*. These steps are observed to the letter in some homes, while other homes may choose to observe only some of them and focus instead on the Passover *seder* meal. Many families will observe these steps according to their family's tradition.

Kadesh (Sanctification): The *seder* meal begins with *kiddush* and the first of four cups of wine that will be enjoyed during the *seder*. Each participant's cup is filled with wine or grape juice, and the blessing is recited aloud,

Blessed are You, L-rd, our G-d, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Blessed are You, G-d, our G-d, King of the universe, who has chosen us from among all people, and raised us above all tongues, and made us holy through His commandments. And You, G-d, our G-d, have given us in love, festivals for happiness, feasts and festive seasons for rejoicing the day of this Feast of Matzot and this Festival of holy convocation, the Season of our Freedom, a holy convocation, commemorating the departure from Egypt. For You have chosen us and sanctified us from all the nations, and You have given us as a heritage Your holy Festivals, in happiness and joy. Blessed are You, G-d, who sanctifies Israel and the festive seasons.

then everyone takes a drink from their cup while leaning to the left. (Leaning is a way of showing freedom, because, in ancient times, only free people reclined while eating.)

Urchatz (Purification/Handwashing): Water is poured over the hands to symbolize ritual purification. Traditionally a special hand washing cup is used to pour water over the right hand first, then the left. On any other day of the year, Jews say a blessing called *netilat yadayim* during the handwashing ritual, but on Passover, no blessing is said, prompting the children to ask,

What makes this night different from all [other] nights?

On all nights we need not dip even once, on this night we do so twice!

On all nights we eat chametz or matzah, and on this night only matzah.

On all nights we eat any kind of vegetables, and on this night maror!

On all nights we eat sitting upright or reclining, and on this night we all recline!

Karpas (Appetizer): A blessing over vegetables is recited, and then a vegetable such as lettuce, cucumber, radish, parsley or a boiled potato is dipped in salt water and eaten. The salt water represents the tears of the Israelites that were shed during their years of enslavement in Egypt.

Yachatz (Breaking the Matzah): There is always a plate of three matzot (plural of *matzah*) stacked on the table — often on a special *matzah* tray — during a *seder* meal, in addition to extra *matzah* for the guests to eat during the meal. At this point, the *seder* leader takes the middle *matzah* and breaks it in half. The smaller piece

is then put back between the remaining two *matzot*. The larger half becomes the *afikomen*, which is placed in an *afikomen* bag or wrapped in a napkin and is hidden somewhere in the house for the children to find at the end of the *seder* meal.

Alternatively, some homes place the *afikomen* near the *seder* leader and the children must try to "steal" it without the leader noticing.

Maggid (Telling the Passover Story): During this part of the *seder*, the seder plate is moved aside, the second cup of wine is poured, and participants retell the Exodus story.

The youngest person (usually a child) at the table begins by asking the Four Questions.

Each question is a variation of: "Why is this night different from all other nights?"

Participants will often answer these questions by taking turns reading from the *haggadah*. Next, the four types of children are described: the wise child, the wicked child, the simple child and the child who doesn't know how to ask a question. Thinking about each kind of person is an opportunity for self-reflection and discussion.

The wise one, what does he say? "What are the testimonies, the statutes and the laws which the L-rd, our G-d, has commanded you?" You, in turn, shall instruct him in the laws of Passover, [up to] `one is not to eat any dessert after the Passover-lamb.'

The wicked one, what does he say? "What is this service to you?!" He says `to you,' but not to him! By thus excluding himself from the community he has denied that which is fundamental. You, therefore, blunt his teeth and say to him: "It is because of this that the L-rd did for me when I left Egypt"; `for me' - but not for him! If he had been there, he would not have been redeemed!"

The simpleton, what does he say? "What is this?" Thus you shall say to him: "With a strong hand the L-rd took us out of Egypt, from the house of slaves."

As for the one who does not know how to ask, you must initiate him, as it is said: "You shall tell your child on that day, `It is because of this that the L-rd did for me when I left Egypt.'"

As each of the 10 plagues that struck Egypt is read aloud, participants dip a finger (usually the pinky) into their wine and put a drop of liquid onto their plates. At this point, the various symbols on the seder plate are discussed, and then everyone drinks their wine while reclining.

Rochtzah (Handwashing Before the Meal): Participants wash their hands again, this time saying the appropriate *netilat yadayim* blessing. After saying the blessing, it is customary not to speak until the recitation of the *ha'motzi* blessing over the *matzah*.

Blessed are You, L-rd, our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning the washing of the hands.

Motzi (Blessing for the Matzah): While holding the three *matzot*, the leader recites the *ha'motzi* blessing for bread. The leader then places the bottom *matzah* back on the table or *matzah tray* and, while holding the top whole *matzah* and the broken middle *matzah*, recites the blessing mentioning the *mitzvah* (commandment) to eat *matzah*. The leader breaks pieces from each of these two pieces of *matzah* and provides for everyone at the table to eat.

This Matzah that we eat for what reason? Because the dough of our fathers did not have time to become leavened before the King of the kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to them and redeemed them.

Thus it is said: "They baked Matzah-cakes from the dough that they had brought out of Egypt, because it was not leavened; for they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay, and they had also not prepared any [other] provisions."

shall tell your child on that day, `It is because of this that the L-rd did for me when I left Egypt."

Matzah: Everyone eats their *matzah*.

Maror (Bitter Herbs): Because the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, Jews eat bitter herbs as a reminder of the harshness of servitude. Horseradish, either the root or a prepared paste, is most often used, although many have taken on the custom of using the bitter parts of romaine lettuce dipped into *charosef*, a paste made of apples and nuts. Customs vary from community to community. The latter is shaken off before the recitation of the commandment to eat bitter herbs.

Blessed are You, L-rd, our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning the eating of Maror.

Korech (Hillel Sandwich): Next, participants make and eat the "Hillel Sandwich" by putting *maror* and *charoset* between two pieces of *matzah* broken off of the last whole *matzah*, the bottom *matzah*.

Thus did Hillel do at the time of the Bet HaMikdash: He would combine Passover — lamb, Matzah and Maror and eat them together, as it said: "They shall eat it with Matzah and bitter herbs."

Shulchan Orech (Dinner): At last, it's time for the meal to begin! The Passover *seder* meal usually begins with a hard-boiled egg dipped in salt water. Then, the rest of the meal features *matzah*ball soup, brisket, and even *matzah* lasagna in some communities. Dessert often includes ice cream, cheesecake, or flourless chocolate cakes.

Tzafun (Eating the Afikomen): After dessert, participants eat the *afikomen*. Remember that the *afikomen* was either hidden or stolen at the beginning of the *seder* meal, so it has to be returned to the *seder* leader at this point. In some homes, the children actually negotiate with the *seder* leader for treats or toys before giving the *afikomen* back.

After eating the *afikomen*, which is considered the *seder* meal's "dessert," no other food or drink is consumed, except for the last two cups of wine.

Barech (Blessings After the Meal): The third cup of wine is poured for everyone, the blessing is recited, and then participants drink their glass while reclining. Then, an additional cup of wine is poured for Elijah in a special cup called Elijah's Cup, and a door is opened so that the prophet can enter the home. For some families, a special Miriam's Cup is also poured at this point.

Hallel (Songs of Praise): The door is closed and everyone sings songs of praise to God before drinking the fourth and final cup of wine while reclining.

Nirtzah (Acceptance): The *seder* is now officially over, but most homes recite one final blessing: *L'shanah haba'ah b'Yerushalayim!* This means, "Next year in Jerusalem!" and expresses the hope that next year, all Jews will celebrate Passover in Israel.