

A Guide to Pesach by Oorah



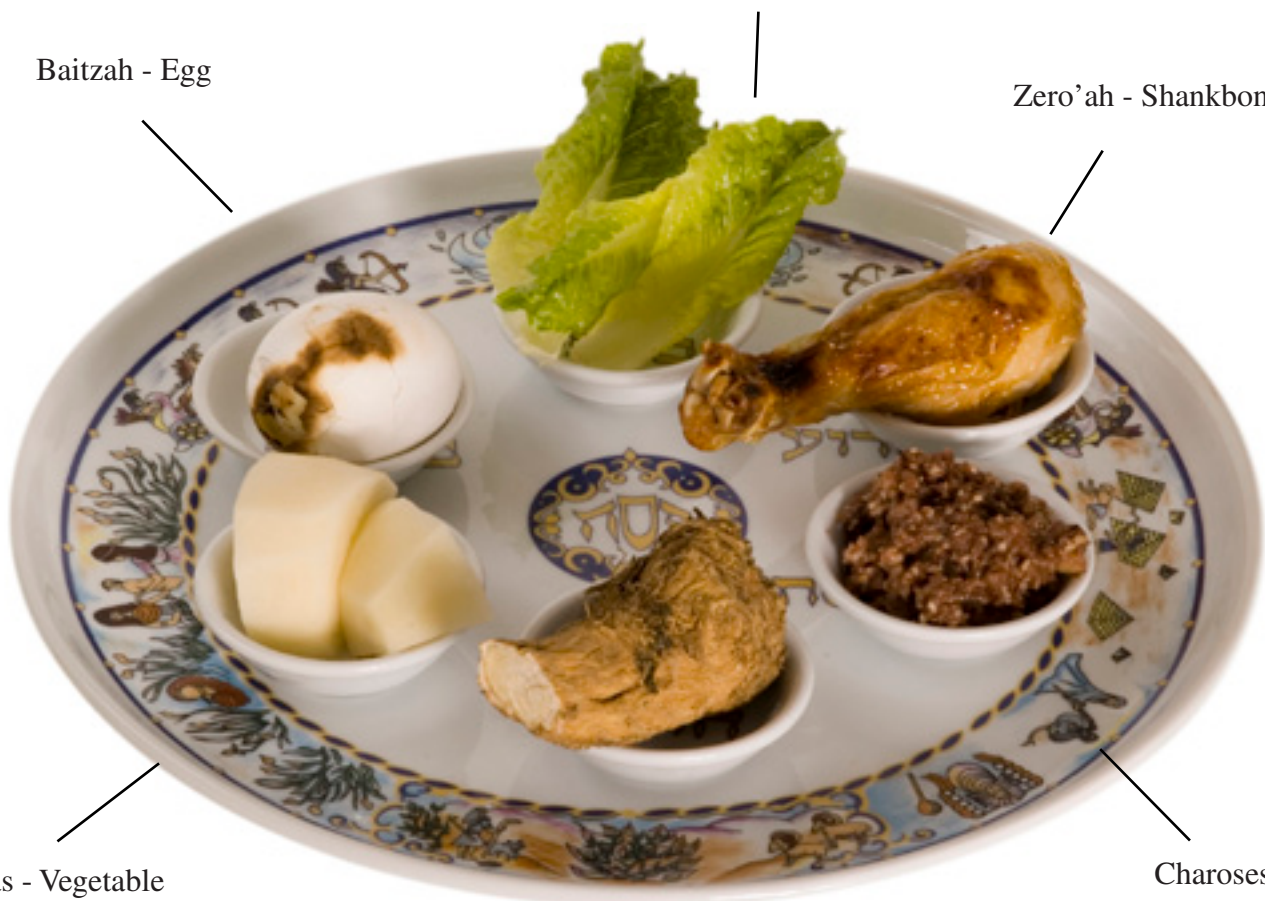
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The Seder Plate הקערה

Maror - Bitter herbs

Baitzah - Egg

Zero'ah - Shankbone



Karpas - Vegetable

Charoses

Chazeres - Bitter greens

We hope you will find the information provided within these pages to be helpful and enlightening. Use it to enhance your experience of the Jewish holidays, and to give your family a sweet, authentic taste of the beautiful tradition that is every Jewish child's birthright!

The Pesach Road Map

Oorah's "Road Map" guides are designed to help you "find your way around" the Yomim Tovim that mark the Jewish year. Our heritage is rich with traditions, rituals and special prayers that unite us with Jews throughout the centuries and throughout the world. But most importantly, they provide us with meaningful ways to become better connected to our own souls, our Torah, and of course, to G-d.

Table of Contents

1. The Facts: The When and Why of Pesach		4. The Seder	
The Story	2	What You'll Need	20
Mention in the Torah	6	Symbolic Foods	21
Calendar date	7	Hagaddah Highlights	22
Other Names for the Yom Tov	7	Involving the Children	27
2. Preparing for Pesach		5. Chol Hamoed	
Cleaning Your Home	8	Keeping It Festive	28
Kosher for Pesach Dishes	11	Counting the Omer	28
Kosher for Pesach Food	12	6. The Last Days of Yom Tov	
3. Getting Rid of Chometz		Isru Chag	29
Chometz and Its Meaning	14	7. A Pesach Tale	30
Selling Your Chometz	16		
Searching for Chometz	17		
Nullifying Chometz	18		
Burning Chometz	18		



Chapter I

The Facts: The When and Why of Pesach

Passover, known in Hebrew as Pesach, is Judaism's most widely celebrated holiday. Even families that observe few other Jewish traditions still gather on Pesach to reaffirm their Jewish identity and remember the miracles that brought us out of slavery and forged us into a unique nation. It is not surprising that this is so, because the essential cornerstone of the Pesach celebration is to pass this legacy onto our children. And Jews have done this in an unbroken chain since the day G-d set us free.

The Story

The Pesach story actually begins many years before the Jews became slaves to the Egyptian Pharaoh. It starts when Joseph, the son of our forefather Jacob, is estranged from his brothers and sold into slavery in Egypt. There, he successfully interprets Pharaoh's disturbing dream which foretells that the kingdom will enjoy seven years of plenty, and then undergo seven years of famine. With his wisdom and piety, Joseph is able to command Pharaoh's respect. He becomes his second-in-command. He oversees a great public-works project aimed at storing enough grain for the kingdom to weather the years of famine that lie ahead.

Joseph's brothers – the founders of the 10 of 12 Tribes of Israel – are living in the land of Israel (then called Canaan) with their father, Jacob. When famine strikes, Jacob sends his sons to Egypt to purchase grain. They must appear before Joseph in order to purchase their provisions. Although they do not recognize him, but recognizes them. After a series of dramatic encounters, Joseph reveals his identity and fully embraces his family, despite the estrangement that had led him to exile in Egypt. He arranges for his elderly father, Jacob, to come

with the extended family – 70 people -- to live in the fertile region of Egypt called Goshen. The family of Israel lives peacefully among themselves, enjoying the benefits of their relationship to Joseph, the Pharaoh's chief advisor.

Years pass, and Joseph and the Pharaoh die. A new Pharaoh arises. At this time the Egyptians feel threatened by the growing numbers of the Jews and their thriving society. Little by little, Pharaoh begins to enact restrictions against them, until ultimately, he enslaves the entire Jewish nation. Pharaoh employs every cruelty he can invent in order to make their lives bitter. He forces them to perform ceaseless, futile labor. When these measures fail to break them, he orders the Jewish midwives to kill all the male newborns.

It was against this backdrop that a couple named Yocheved and Amram bring a baby boy into the world. Hoping to save her child's life, Yocheved constructs a waterproof basket and sets the baby adrift in the Nile River. Her daughter, Miriam, creeps among the reeds along the river bank and follows the progress of the tiny ark, hoping to see it arrive somehow in safe hands. At that point, the Torah tells us, the daughter of Pharaoh, who had gone to the river to bathe, spots the basket and stretches out her arm to take it from the water. She names the baby "Moshe" – Moses – which means "drawn from the water."

Moses is raised as a prince in the Pharaoh's household. However, at an early age he begins to feel a kinship with the Jewish slaves. As a young man, he goes out among them and, seeing one Jew being brutally mistreated by an Egyptian taskmaster, he slays the Egyptian. Soon thereafter, he realizes that his deed will not remain a secret and he flees to the land of Midian. There, he meets Jethro, a high priest of the Midianites. He marries his daughter Tzipora who had embraced the Jewish faith.



One day while tending to Jethro's sheep in the midst of the wilderness, Moses encounters G-d's presence within a bush that is aflame but is not consumed by the fire. There, he hears G-d's voice and receives his mission to redeem the Jewish people from slavery. Moses does not believe he is the "man for the job." In fact, he insists that his older brother, Aaron, would be a far better choice. However, G-d had chosen His messenger, largely based upon the deep humility He sees in Moses' heart.

Moses must now return to Egypt and come face to face with Pharaoh. The first time he presents G-d's command to release the Jewish people from bondage, Pharaoh responds by making their work more difficult than ever. The people complain that their "savior" is inept, and Moses turns to G-d confused and pained by his nation's increased suffering. From this point on, G-d gives Moses and Aaron the power to initiate a series of disastrous plagues upon the Egyptians.

Some plagues affect the Nile, which the Egyptians hold sacred, the crops and the livestock. Others affect the population, producing vermin and infection. The ninth plague is a thick, total darkness so oppressive that one cannot see or even move in. The Divine origin of the plagues is made obvious by the fact that they do not affect the Jews or their land. However, Pharaoh's pride is not broken.

Finally, G-d prepares the Jews for their redemption. He commands that each family take a lamb (or baby goat) on the 10th day of the month of Nisan, and hold it in their houses. It is to be slaughtered and eaten four days later, on the 14th, along with matzah and bitter herbs. The Jews are told to daub the doorposts of their homes with the lamb's blood, and to remain indoors throughout the night.

Since lambs are also held sacred by the Egyptians, complying with this command demands a great deal of courage on the part of these



oppressed slaves. Even so they follow G-d's directions. At midnight, G-d enacts the Plague of the First-Born, in which the first-born male of every household, and the first-born of every animal, dies. G-d's force of destruction harmlessly passes over the Jewish homes daubed with blood. The streets are filled with the wailing of the horrified Egyptians, and Pharaoh, who had ordered Moses to never appear before him again, now searches frantically for him. He finally speaks the words Moses yearns to hear – to take his nation, from elders to children as well as livestock, out of Egypt to serve G-d.

The redemption happened so suddenly, that they had no time to allow their dough to rise. The Jews carry away their matzos – unleavened bread – to eat on the road. It is the same hard, simple bread they had eaten as slaves, but now it represents their freedom and their faith. They follow Moses and G-d out of Egypt and into the wilderness, with no idea of how they will survive to reach their destination. Six hundred thousand men, along with their wives and children, pour forth out of Egypt into freedom, ending 210 years of servitude.

The final, most dramatic moment in their escape, however, is still ahead. It is not long before Pharaoh begins to regret his decision to release the Jews. He sends forth his army, mounted on horse-drawn chariots, to bring them back. As the Jews reach the Reed Sea, the thunder of pounding hooves grows louder behind them, and the swirling sea lies before them. They are caught in a death trap.

G-d commands Moses to “lift up your staff and stretch out your arm over the sea and split it; and the Children of Israel will come into the midst of the sea on dry land.” Moses lifts his staff and G-d blows a strong east wind to separate the sea into walls of water. The wind lasts throughout the night, until the Jews are able to walk across the sea on dry land. Then, as the Egyptians follow in pursuit, G-d causes



their wheels to become stuck in the mud. He commands Moses to once again lift his staff over the water; the walls of water collapse upon Pharaoh's army and obliterates it.

When the Jews see their enemies bodies washing up upon the shore, they know that G-d has fought their battle. They break into a song of gratitude, which opens with the exuberant words:

“I shall sing to G-d for He is exalted above the arrogant, having hurled horse with its rider into the sea. The might and vengeance of G-d was a salvation for me. This is my G-d and I will build Him a sanctuary. This is my G-d and I will exalt Him....”

Pesach marks the Children of Israel's exodus from Egypt. But the Yom Tov (holiday) is meant to be more than a commemoration; it is a reliving of the moment. On the first Pesach, the Jewish people made a spiritual leap from the status of lowly slaves to that of a courageous people willing to follow Moses into the desert on nothing more than their faith in G-d. Where would they go? How would they survive the desert heat? What would they eat and drink when the provisions they carried ran out? The incredible spiritual elevation the Jews experienced on that day, embedded in the day itself, is there for every Jew to tap into when Pesach arrives.

The Torah Source

The story of the Jews' enslavement to Pharaoh and their redemption is detailed in the book of Shemos (Exodus) in the Torah. The celebration of Pesach is commanded in VaYikra (Leviticus) 23:5-8:

“In the first month on the fourteenth of the month in the afternoon is the time of the Pesach offering to G-d. And on the fifteenth day of this month is the Festival of Matzos to G-d; you shall eat matzos for a seven day period. The first day shall be a sacred holiday to you when

you may not do any work. You shall then bring sacrifices to G-d for seven days, the seventh day is a sacred holiday when you may not do any work.”

Pesach is one of the three pilgrimage festivals during which Jews from all over Israel would travel to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem to bring sacrifices and celebrate the Yom Tov.

The Dates

Pesach is celebrated in the Jewish month of Nisan on the 15th of the month. Like all Jewish holidays, the holiday begins the night before, after sundown, since the days of the Jewish calendar begin at night. Therefore, the first seder is held at night, after the 14th of Nisan.

Other Names for Pesach

The name “Pesach” is translated as “Passover,” and it refers to the event that finally triggered the Jewish people’s release from slavery. That event was the last of the ten plagues-the death of the first-born in each Egyptian family. The Jews were instructed to mark their doorposts in a special manner, and by doing so, they would earn protection against the forces of destruction that G-d set loose on that night. The Torah states that G-d “passed over” the marked Jewish homes.

Chag Ha-Aviv: Pesach is also called the Festival of Spring because it occurs in the spring. G-d orchestrated the Exodus to be in the spring when the weather is most pleasant. All the ways of G-d are as pleasant as possible. At times G-d must punish or test us, but this too is for our ultimate benefit.

Z'man Cheiruseinu: The Time of Our Freedom is another name for Pesach.



Chag HaMatzos: Pesach is also known by the name of the special unleavened bread – matzah – that is eaten during the holiday.

Chapter II

Preparing Your Home for Pesach

What do you need to do to your house to prepare it for Pesach, you might wonder? The answer, in short, is to get rid of all leaven, known in Hebrew as chometz. So to begin, let's define chometz: it is anything made of fermented grain. That means anything that includes fermented wheat, oats, barley, spelt or rye. This includes all kinds of breads and cakes, pasta products, beer and grain-based liquor.

Matzah, although it is made of grain, is permitted because special care is taken to make sure that the dough is baked before it is allowed to ferment (within 18 minutes of the time the flour and water are first mixed together).

The custom of Jews of Ashkenazi background (most of those whose families came from Europe), is to avoid Kitnios (legumes) on Pesach. This category includes rice, beans and corn. Jews of Sefardic background (from the Mideast, Africa, Spain or Portugal) in most cases, do eat kitnios on Pesach. Even among Ashekenazim, kitnios are not subject to the same stringent laws that apply to chometz. For instance, a Jew is allowed to own kitnios, but may not own chometz during Pesach.

Why do we need to get rid of the chometz? The Torah tells us that during Pesach, we are not permitted to eat, own or benefit from chometz.

Practically speaking, this means that starting several weeks before Pesach, one should begin to clean his house room by room,



checking for those cookies which the children snuck into bed, the bits and pieces stuck under the couch, between the cushions, or wherever people in the household go with food. If you are one of those who strictly enforce a “no food outside the kitchen” rule, you’re in luck. You won’t have as much searching and cleaning to do. But it still pays to make sure that no food was accidentally taken out of bounds.

If you have small children who tend to put their snack in their toys, you should also inspect and clean the toys. One way of cutting down this chore is to set aside toys for use during Pesach, clean those and put the rest away in a sealed bag, to be sold with your chometz (see section on selling chometz in Chapter 3).

As each room is cleaned and deemed “chometz-free,” it should be off-limits for food from that moment until Pesach arrives. Otherwise, you might find yourself re-cleaning and re-checking.

The Kitchen

The last rooms to be cleaned – usually just a few days before Pesach – are the rooms where one cannot help but harbor food. These include the dining room and kitchen.

It is these rooms – and especially the kitchen – that require the most effort and care. That is because the prohibition against eating chometz is more stringent than that against owning it. In regards to the law against owning chometz, crumbs don’t count. However one may not eat even the smallest crumb of chometz. Therefore, to observe Pesach properly, a person has to do everything possible to ensure that the places where he stores and prepares his food are completely free of chometz.

Below, we offer you a general guide as to the type of cleaning and



koshering (making items kosher for Pesach) needed for various areas of the kitchen.

Please do not take this information as complete instructions. Ask your rabbi or call Oorah for a more complete reference that will ensure that your Pesach preparations are done just right.

Oven and Stove: Self-cleaning ovens are generally made kosher by putting them through their cleaning cycle. Other ovens must be cleaned with chemicals and then left on their highest heat for a certain period of time.

Stovetops must be cleaned thoroughly and may have to be covered, as well, depending on their construction. The proper method for burners depends on whether they are electric or gas. One method for gas stoves is to turn up the flames and heat the burners until they are red-hot. Electric stoves that have uncovered coils can just be turned on to their highest heat and allowed to burn for a few minutes. The drip pans under the burners should be cleaned and covered with aluminum foil. For glass-top and other types of ranges, you should consult a rabbi regarding your specific model.

Refrigerator: The refrigerator has to be completely emptied out and cleaned, with a detergent or other cleaning agent. Wipe off crumbs and spills from the walls, bottom and gaskets. Remove shelves and drawers if possible, wash them thoroughly, and line the shelves.

You might find that, since you will be cleaning your refrigerator at least a few days before Pesach, you will still have chometz food that needs to be stored there. In that case, it can be helpful to line an area of the refrigerator and place those chometz items on the lining. When your kitchen is ready to be completely kosher for Pesach, you can remove the chometz and the lining.

Counters: How you make a counter kosher for Pesach depends on whether it is made of porous or non-porous materials, whether it is one smooth surface or has cracks or grout, and other factors. Some counters can be made kosher by cleaning them with detergent and then washing them down with boiling hot water. In some cases, the only proper method is to cover the counter. Many stores that cater to Jewish clientele sell materials with which to do this – plastic, cardboard, contact paper (which leaves a sticky residue) or, (if you want to make the investment) even a new countertop that you can lay on top of your regular counter.

Sinks: Stainless steel sinks can usually be cleaned thoroughly and doused with boiling water. If you have a sink that cannot be made kosher for Pesach, you may need to purchase a special insert for your sink, or you may simply line it with aluminum foil. Use extra heavy duty foil.

Woman Overboard!

Many women take Pesach cleaning to an extreme and turn it into their spring cleaning. Going through drawers and closets, putting away last season's clothes, laundering curtains, polishing chandeliers, repainting, waxing and so forth are all wonderful ways to get rid of the clutter and grunge, but, as one rabbi said, "If you don't eat on your chandelier, you don't have to clean it." If you follow that advice, you'll find your Pesach preparations far less time-consuming, and your Pesach far more enjoyable.

Kosher for Pesach Dishes

It's true that we don't eat our dishes or cooking utensils. But the care we give to avoiding any possibility of consuming chometz during Pesach makes it necessary to prepare Pesach dishes, silverware and cookware. This is because miniscule amounts of food get absorbed



within the walls of the utensils and leach into our Passover food.

If you're making Pesach for the first time, this is somewhat of an investment. But you'll find that your Pesach kitchenware lasts a long, long time, since it is only used for one week a year. Some items you will need are:

Dishes (some people have only one set for meat and use paper for dairy).

Silverware

Glasses

Pots and pans

Kettle

Cooking utensils (stirring spoons, ladles, spatulas, knives, peelers, etc.)

Appliances (blender, food processor)

Cutting boards

Measuring cups and spoons

Speak to your rabbi about the possibility of koshering some of your regular kitchenware.

Kosher for Pesach Food

The first thing you may notice about kosher for Pesach food is that a lot of it doesn't seem to have anything to do with chometz. Why, for instance, does a lollipop or a bottle of Coke need to be kosher for Pesach? Or what about a bag of sugar or a box of salt?

In some instances, the need arises out of the fact that there are so many ingredients in packaged foods that you can never really know what's in them. As for lollipops and Coke, both are made with corn syrup normally. The Pesach versions are made with sugar instead. As for the bag of sugar and the box of salt, there is nothing in there that counts as chometz. However, only with rabbinical supervision can you

be sure that these items were processed, packaged and stored in a way that kept them separate from any chometz that might have been processed in the same facility. As we pointed out in Chapter 2, the Torah prohibits eating even the smallest morsel of chometz.

With this information, you can understand why every packaged, canned or prepared food needs to be certified as kosher for Passover. These specially certified foods go on the market at least a month before the holiday, giving us ample time to stock up. You will need to buy all your kitchen staples special for Pesach, even if you have a just-opened package in your pantry. Make sure you have sugar, salt, spices, canned goods, sodas, juices, sauces and so forth. You might also want to indulge in goodies like candy, chocolate, prepared cakes, jams and honey.

Fresh fruits are all kosher for Pesach. Vegetables are largely acceptable, except for corn, peas and beans. Pesach recipes make heavy use of potatoes and eggs, so it is wise to buy extra. Most kosher dairy products have kosher for Pesach versions available during the holiday season, but you have to check the labels to be sure. Kosher meat also comes labeled for Pesach use, starting a few weeks before the holiday.

Matzah

And what about matzah? Many people use only a specially supervised type of matzah called shmurah (guarded) matzah, which is watched from the moment the wheat is harvested until the final product is shipped to the stores, all to ensure that the product never had the chance to become chometz. Shmurah matzah may be either hand-made or machine-made. The hand-made loaves are thin and round, whereas the machine matzos are square and symmetrical. Shmurah matzah is necessary for the seder.

Ask your rabbi if other types of matzah, which are not shmurah but are baked under strict supervision, are acceptable for your other meals during Pesach.

There are some matzos that are made with fruit juice or egg. These are usually labeled as “egg matzos,” and they are generally not permitted to be eaten during Pesach. However, elderly people or small children who cannot tolerate regular matzah may be allowed to eat egg matzah. If this is a consideration for you, you should check with your rabbi.

Until your kitchen is ready for Pesach, make sure to store your Pesach products in a clean, closed off area to avoid any chometz falling in. One may not derive any benefit from chometz on Passover. One may not sell chometz, use it in toiletries or pet food. Pet food and the like which contain chometz should be sold along with the other chometz.

Chapter III

Getting Rid of Chometz

Chometz and Its Meaning

We’ve defined chometz as any food made of wheat, barley, oats, spelt or rye, unless it is prepared in a specific way for Pesach. The word “chometz” comes from the Hebrew word for “sour,” and it refers to the fermentation that takes place when any of these grains is combined with liquid and allowed to rest. The fermentation process is what makes dough rise. Matzah is prepared quickly and the dough is kept in motion until it is placed in the oven. In this way, it never has the chance to begin fermenting.

As we explained earlier as well, certain legumes which can be used like flour are also prohibited according to Ashkenazi (European)

custom. These legumes are categorized as kitnios, and may not be used on Pesach.

Plain flour that is used during the year is also considered chometz, even when it is not mixed with water. That is because its processing involves softening the grains in water before grinding.

That is the explanation of chometz on the physical, tangible plane. But chometz has a much deeper meaning that Jewish thinkers have expounded upon throughout the centuries. It is a metaphor for the arrogance – the “puffed up” pride – that stands in a person’s way of a true connection to G-d.

A basic tenet in Jewish philosophy is that the more a person is enmeshed in his own ego, the harder it is for him to connect to his spiritual self. Someone who is arrogant cannot drop his preconceptions and open himself to truth. He decides what he thinks is true and no one can tell him anything different until, sometimes, a hard knock from life gets him to reconsider his position.

On the other hand, the humble person is open. His ego is porous enough to let G-d’s will and the Torah’s wisdom hold sway over him. He is ever eager to learn, to understand and to find the truth, even when it flies in the face of his own viewpoint.

Therefore, during the period of time in which we scrupulously scour our homes for chometz, we are also supposed to be scouring our hearts for arrogance and false pride. We should question our preconceptions and examine the decisions and direction we’ve taken in our lives. Just as we try to get our homes down to the bare shine of cleanliness, we are meant to get our souls down to the bare shine.

Now, returning to the physical aspect of chometz, we will take a

look at just how all-encompassing is the Torah's demand that we rid ourselves of it. Any area under our auspices – home, office, car, shed, garage, vacation home, etc. – must be either divested of all chometz or sealed off and “sold” to a non-Jew for the duration of the holiday. Beyond the cleaning and koshering mentioned in the previous section, how are these final stages of eliminating chometz accomplished?

Mechiras Chometz (Selling of Chometz):

While one is forbidden to own chometz during Pesach, one need not necessarily dispose of it. Instead, an Orthodox rabbi can act as your agent and sell your chometz to a non-Jew, removing the chometz from your possession for the duration of Pesach. This is called Mechiras Chometz. After Pesach, the chometz will be purchased back from the non-Jew.

Mechiras Chometz need not wait until your house is completely cleaned and organized for Pesach. Most shuls conduct this transaction during the week before the holiday; although it only takes effect when the time arrives, on the morning of Erev Pesach, that a Jew is no longer allowed to eat any chometz.

Although the sale virtually never results in your non-Jewish neighbor coming to your house to make use of his chometz, it is a real, binding contract. It actually permits the non-Jew access to and use of your chometz, and at the same time, removes your own right to access and use it. You must store this chometz in a sealed place. An hour or two after Pesach, the chometz is re-purchased from the non-Jew and reverts to your ownership.

Unprocessed kitnios (legumes) need not be sold. Kitnios products can sometimes even be used by the Jewish homeowner if necessary (for instance, if you have a baby that needs soy-based formula),

although it must be segregated from the Pesach food.

If you seal away children's toys that you have not cleaned and inspected for Pesach, the chometz adhering to them is also included in the contract. The contract provides a place to list the categories of items you are selling and to note where they are stored.

It may seem like a technicality, but Mechiras Chometz demonstrates to us how seriously the Torah takes the mitzvah that no chometz should be found among the Jewish people during Pesach. In fact, Jewish law holds that chometz which is not sold, but rather retained by a Jew during Pesach (even if it is stored away and not used) may not be used after Pesach.

If you do not know where to conduct Mechiras Chometz in your community, you may want to take advantage of Oorah's Mechiras Chometz service. Call us at 732-730-1000 ext. 159 and we will handle this important Pesach preparation for you. The transaction must be handled in a prescribed way in order to be halachically valid.

Bedikas Chometz (Search for Chometz):

Even after all is cleaned, stored and sold, there is a custom to maintain a small amount of chometz in your possession in order to perform the ritual of Bedikas Chometz. This is a last, thorough "once over" of your home to ensure that no stray bits of chometz remain. It is conducted on the night of Erev Pesach (the night before the first seder).

Here is how it works: After reciting the blessing (available at the beginning of most Hagaddahs or Pesach prayer books), the head of the household goes from room to room, using only a candle or a flashlight for light, and searches the corners, crevices, drawers, closets, etc. looking for any chometz items that may have been

overlooked during the cleaning. From the moment the blessing is recited until the end of the search, the only words spoken should be those essential to the search. When the search is completed, any chometz should be gathered in a safe location (usually in a paper bag) and the searcher recites a legal declaration, the purpose of which is detailed in the next section.

Prior to the search, it is customary for a member of the household to place 10 pieces of bread – carefully wrapped to prevent the spread of crumbs – around the house, in rooms where it is necessary to search. There may be more than one piece of bread placed in a room. It is wise for someone to make a count of how many pieces have been collected so that none will be accidentally left in place.

Bitul Chometz (Nullifying Chometz):

This is a declaration that is recited immediately after Bedikas Chometz is concluded. It nullifies any chometz that may – after cleaning, searching, and selling – still somehow accidentally remain in the owner's possession. It declares that such chometz is to be considered ownerless or as dust and ashes. However, it does not nullify the chometz that has been collected through the Bedikas Chometz process. For that, another version of the Bitul declaration is necessary (see below).

Biur Chametz (Burning of Chometz):

The chometz collected during Bedikas Chometz, along with any remaining chometz in your possession (for instance, the leftovers of breakfast if you've had a chometz breakfast on the morning of Erev Pesach), is destroyed through Biur Chometz. Many communities provide a central fire to which people bring their chometz to be burned. In other communities, people burn it themselves in a safe manner on their own property.

Biur chometz is performed in the later part of the morning of Erev Pesach. The deadline for Biur Chometz is announced in shul and made known to the community. It varies from year to year and location to location, but is based upon the last time at which chometz may be eaten, which is in turn calculated according to the number of daylight hours of the day.

After the destruction of the chometz is completed, the second version of the Bitul chometz declaration is recited, just to be sure that any chometz that has somehow escaped our notice is rendered null and ownerless.

After this point, the halacha (Jewish law) maintains that nothing more can be done to rid yourself of chometz. If you missed something and discover some chometz during the course of the eight-day holiday, you should seek your rabbi's advice as to how to dispose of it.

Clean at Last!

For many Jews, the feeling of having gone through all these preparations and rituals is one of unbelievable lightness – as if you've rid yourself of every bit of clutter and grime in your life. You'll go into Pesach a truly free man or woman, ready to absorb all the powerful spiritual riches of the seders and the rest of this uniquely Jewish holiday.

VI. The Seder

The seder is a banquet with a somewhat odd menu. Each item on the menu has a meaning that helps to depict the story of the Jewish people's Exodus from Egypt after 210 years of slavery. The Hagaddah is the guidebook that leads us through this banquet, providing both the text of the stories, songs and prayers to be recited, and instructions regarding various rituals to be performed.

One of the best preparations you can make for your seder is to incorporate a nap or some serious down-time into your Erev Pesach. Fool yourself into thinking that Yom Tov begins an hour earlier than it does, and then take your “found” hour and just relax.

If you can, peruse a Hagaddah with a good commentary in it to help you add some depth and meaning to the seder. Keep in mind that if children will be around your table, you will want to make sure that a good portion of your comments are aimed at them. Give them a chance to answer questions and tell what they know. After all, passing this legacy onto the next generation is one of the primary purposes of the seder.

But of course, even if there are no children present, re-installing this legacy into your own heart is vital too.

In this section, we provide you with a good, general outline of how to run a seder at home, and what to expect if you are a guest at a seder. The Hagaddah provides more complete instructions and explanations.

What You'll Need

The table should be set with the following items: At each place, a Haggadah, a small plate or saucer, and a cup that holds at least 3.3 ounces.

In the center of the table, you need the following items:

- Three matzos, covered
- A Kiddush Cup
- Wine
- Elijah's Cup
- Salt water

- Seder plate

Either on the table or off to the side, you should have prepared extra moror and karpas (see below for explanation) beyond what is on the seder plate and extra matzah to accommodate all the participants.

Two other items may be required by some of the participants:

- Kittel: There is a custom in some Jewish communities for the married men at the seder to wear a kittel, which is a special white robe also worn on Yom Kippur and by the groom under his chuppah. A kittel can be purchased at a Judaica store.
- Pillow: Leaning on one's left side while eating (a custom followed by ancient aristocracy) is a part of the seder. Therefore, participants should be provided with a small cushion or pillow.

The Seder Plate

A special Seder plate remains on the table throughout the first part of the seder. It contains the ritual foods that are used throughout the night, each representing another aspect of our experience of slavery and redemption. The Seder plate is placed in front of the person leading the Seder, and he dispenses the various foods around the table at the proper times. There are various opinions regarding the proper arrangement of these items. You can ask your rabbi which arrangement to use, or use your Hagaddah as your guide. Here is what the seder plate contains:

- * Maror (bitter herbs). This may be either freshly grated horseradish (not mixed with beets or vinegar) or romaine lettuce, or some of both. The maror represents the bitterness of slavery.
- * Charoses: This is a mixture meant to resemble mortar, which reminds us of the bricks the Jews made to build Egyptian cities. The recipe for this mixture varies from region to region, but Ashkenazi

Jews commonly use some mixture of grated apples, ground or chopped nuts, cinnamon and sweet wine or grape juice.

* Karpas: This is a vegetable which may be parsley, celery, or most commonly for Eastern European Jews, potatoes. Karpas is used to dip into salt water, to recall the tears shed by the Jewish people in their captivity.

* Zeroah: This is a roasted piece of meat or poultry. The ideal zeroah is a shankbone, which recalls the Pesach sacrifice brought every year in the Holy Temple. Many use a chicken wing, which is shaped somewhat like an arm, to recall that G-d took us out of Egypt "with a strong arm." It should be noted that this piece of roasted meat should not be eaten, as one is not allowed to eat roasted meat on the seder nights.

* Beitzah: A roasted or boiled egg commemorates the festival sacrifice that was also brought to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem at Pesach time. The egg is used because it is a food given to mourners, and it reminds us of our mourning over the loss of the Temple and the consequent loss of our opportunity to participate in the great Pesach pilgrimage of those days.

* Chazeres: This is an additional piece of romaine lettuce.

* Three whole matzahs should be placed on a separate plate, or in a special compartment built into some seder plates. The matzah should also be near the seder leader's place.

Hagaddah Highlights

There are five basic obligations that must be met in the course of the seder. These are: 1) eating matzah, 2) drinking four cups of wine, 3) eating maror, 4) telling the story of the Exodus and 5) reciting Hallel (Psalms of praise).

The seder is divided into 14 segments:

Kadesh: Recital of Kiddush

U'rechatz: Ritual washing of hands (without reciting a blessing) before eating vegetables

Carpas: Dipping the carpas into salt water and eating it

Yachatz: Breaking the middle matzah on the seder plate. The larger piece becomes the "Afikomen," meaning dessert. (See more on afikomen below.)

Maggid: Telling the story of the Exodus

Rochtzah: Ritual hand-washing (accompanied by a blessing) before eating the matzah

Motzi Matzah: Eating matzah

Moror: Eating bitter herbs

Koreich: Eating a sandwich of bitter herbs and matzah

Shulchan Orech: The festive meal

Tzafun: Eating the Afikomen

Boreich: Reciting the Grace After Meals

Hallel: Reciting Psalms praising G-d

Nirtzah: Singing special songs that conclude the seder

The Four Questions

Children who receive any Jewish education usually learn the "four questions." They are usually recited at the seder by the youngest child or children who are capable. The questions form a preface for "Maggid" narrative, which begins immediately thereafter. Each question highlights a way in which the seder meal differs from normal meals of the rest of the year. The "answer" to the four questions is the rest of the seder.

What is the purpose of this exercise? Mainly, it is meant to give the children a role to play, to keep their attention and focus their minds on asking and learning. But for the adult, too, the format teaches an

important lesson: You'll never know unless you ask. Admitting a lack of knowledge is the essential first step to any kind of growth, and therefore, before the seder goes into full swing, the Hagaddah tells us to open our minds, ask and learn.

The Four Sons

The number four arises once again. In this segment, the Hagaddah relates the inquiries of four different types of sons: the wise son, the simple son, the wicked son and the son who does not know how to ask. Each son represents a different attitude toward G-d and His Torah.

The wise son wants to know how to properly observe Pesach, with all its details. He is open to instruction and capable of deep understanding.

The simple son (some see simple as meaning uneducated, and others see it as wholehearted) is also eager to learn, but he is satisfied by a basic explanation.

The wicked son asks his father what the Pesach observance means to "you." His approach is cynical, and his wickedness is in his separation of himself from the Jewish people. However, as one commentator points out, he is still sitting there at the seder table. It is not the son himself, but his approach, that is rejected.

The child who cannot ask is either too young or too distant from his heritage to even ask a question. For him, the Hagaddah advises, the parent should initiate the conversation: "And you should tell your son on that day, saying 'It is for the sake of this that Hashem did for me when he took me out of Egypt.'"

The Four Cups of Wine

The Torah uses four expressions to describe our redemption from Egypt: G-d said to the Jews in Egypt (Exodus 6:6-8):

- “I will take you out from under Egypt’s burdens - Vehotzeiti”
- “And I will save you from their servitude - Vehitzalti”
- “And I will redeem you - Vega’alti”
- “And I will take you as My nation - Velakachti”

Each of these steps is essential in conveying to the Jewish people that they are the beneficiaries of G-d’s special Providence. Had the Jews simply been released from bondage, but not brought close to G-d through His miracles, guidance and protection, they would have long ago disappeared into the mists of ancient history. Instead, they became the recipients of G-d’s Torah and His agent for investing the world with sanctity and morality.

Drinking four cups of wine is an essential part of the seder. It is considered so important that the Sages taught that even if someone could not afford wine, he should sell other belongings – even clothes – to procure it. Men, women and children all have the obligation of drinking the four cups. Grape juice is an acceptable substitute if a person cannot drink wine.

The Ten Plagues

During this portion of the recitation of the Hagaddah, the ten plagues that G-d inflicted on the Egyptians are chanted. At the mention of each plague, one spills a bit of wine out of his wine cup onto a saucer.

Following this ritual, the Hagaddah launches into a detailed discussion among the Sages as to how many plagues were actually inflicted. Each Sage re-interprets the Torah’s account to add to the number of plagues.

Why does it matter? One answer is that the more plagues G-d inflicted, the greater is the miracle He did for the Jewish people.

Afikomen

Another facet of the seder that is specifically designed to keep the children awake and alert is the Afikomen. You may recall that back at the beginning of the seder, the middle matzah was broken in two. The larger of these pieces is traditionally “stolen” and hidden by either one of the children at the table, or by the seder leader himself. After the festive meal, the matzah must be found (by which ever party did not hide it).

If the seder leader hid it, the children find it and negotiate a prize with the seder leader to relinquish it. The result of this is usually an “afikomen present,” given after the holiday. If the children hid the afikomen, the leader once again comes out on the wrong end of the bargain, for if he doesn't find it, he must bargain with them to retrieve it. In either case, the game acts as a pretext to keep the children awake until the end of the meal.

The afikomen is the last item eaten during the seder. No other food may be eaten after this point except for the final two cups of wine which are part of the seder. (Water may also be consumed after the seder.)

Elijah's Cup

As the seder resumes (following the Grace After Meals), the Hagaddah instructs us to fill Elijah's cup, open a door and recite a verse asking for G-d to assert his justice upon the tyrants of the world.

The simplest explanation for this custom is that there is a

disagreement in the Talmud as to whether the seder should include four cups of wine or five. The first four cups correspond to the four expressions of redemption (see explanation above). But there is one more mention of redemption in the Hagaddah, and that is "I will bring you to the Land." This, the Sages teach, refers to the time of the future, final redemption. The extra cup is called the Cup of Elijah, expressing our faith in G-d that just as He has redeemed us in the past, so will He redeem us in the future, sending us His herald of redemption, Elijah the Prophet. In addition, since this time has not yet arrived, we do not drink the fifth cup.

One other note of interest stemming from this reasoning is that in the Talmud, discussions of unsettled questions of Jewish law often end with an expression stating that the answer will have to wait until Elijah arrives to answer our questions. The question of how many cups one needs for the seder is such a question, and thus, this cup belongs to Elijah.

Hallel and Concluding Songs

These Psalms of praise are begun before the meal and then continued after the meal. Although Hallel is recited in synagogue during every holiday, the seder is the only time when it is recited at night. These beautiful verses of praise and thanksgiving capture the joyous feeling we relive on this night, having witnessed our own miraculous salvation. There are many beautiful tunes used to sing these verses.

Finally, the seder ends with a series of songs, concluding with Chad Gadya (one baby goat), which is an allegory about the history and redemption of the Jewish people. You can find tapes or CDs in many Jewish bookstores that provide a variety of tunes for these songs.

The Future Redemption

Some commentators explain that while the first part of the seder recounts our redemption from Egypt, the post-meal portion of the seder refers mostly to the future redemption. In that light, the words “I’Shanah Habah B’Yerushalayim – Next Year in Jerusalem,” is a fitting ending to the seder. We pray that the next time we sit down together to partake of the Pesach seder, it will be at the rebuilt Holy Temple, in a world filled with holiness and peace.

Involving the Children

Relating the story of Pesach to the next generation is the central purpose of the seder. It’s a hands-on learning experience filled with rituals, customs, songs and excitement, all meant to open our children’s ears and heart to the story of the Jewish people’s redemption.

If your children are in Jewish schools, they will no doubt come to the seder very well prepared for the occasion. They may have songs, explanations of various parts of the seder and other stories and comments to add. If there will be many children at your seder, you might want to apportion the “jobs” ahead of time to avoid hurt feelings, competitiveness or, on the other side of the spectrum, so much participation that everyone gets tired and cranky a few pages into the Hagaddah. But overall, this is the children’s time to shine. Let them ask, let them tell, let them share.

If the children do not have much advance preparation, buy them some books and perhaps some Pesach music CDs at your local Jewish bookstore or online. Let them become familiar with the elements of the seder. Learn some of the Hagaddah’s concluding songs together with them, so that you can sing them at the seder.

Children’s Hagaddahs, which come with illustrations and child-

friendly commentaries, might be a help for the younger members of the family. Adults, too, often find these Hagaddah's clear and informative.

V. Chol HaMoed

Keeping It Festive

The third, fourth, fifth and sixth days of Pesach are called Chol HaMoed, which means that they possess features of both the everyday atmosphere (chol) and the festival (Ha-Moed). They are normal "weekday" days in that one is allowed to drive, cook, use electricity, write under certain circumstances, use money and engage in most other activities that Jewish law prohibits on Shabbat and Yom Tov.

However, these days are still part of the festival. Therefore, people who are able to do so often take these days as vacation days. They go on family trips, eat more elaborate dinners, and try to spend some extra time learning Torah or engaged in other spiritual pursuits. If you are interested in finding out more about the exact halachos (Jewish laws) involved in Chol HaMoed, you can contact Oorah or ask an Orthodox rabbi. The bottom line is that by making these days special, you enhance your Pesach experience tremendously, and really imprint the joy of this festival upon yourself and your family.

Counting the Omer

Beginning on the second night of Pesach, the Jewish people count out the 49 days that lead to the holiday of Shavuot. In the times of the Holy Temple, this period began with bringing a measure of barley, called an omer, as an offering on the second day of Pesach. Although we are no longer able to bring the Omer offering, the separate mitzvah of counting continues to apply today. The preferred time to count the omer is after the evening prayer in synagogue. There is a

special formulation one recites, which keeps track of the day as well as the week.

This period of seven weeks between Pesach and Shavuos is considered a time of tremendous potential for spiritual growth. It was during that time that the Jews in the wilderness advanced, day by day and step by step, from a nation of slaves to a nation ready to receive the Torah on Mount Sinai. They traveled through the desert under G-d's protection, ate the Manna that fell from Heaven to feed them, and thereby came to a deep, complete trust in G-d. During the period of the omer, we too can remind ourselves of all that G-d gives us each day, and thus nurture a greater closeness to Him as the days of the omer progress.

VI. The Last Days

In the Torah, Pesach is defined as a seven-day festival. An eighth day is observed only in communities outside of Israel. The last two days have the status of a full festival, and are celebrated much like the first two days, albeit without the seder.

Isru Chag

When Pesach is all over, there is still one more semi-festive day tacked on. That is called Isru Chag. There is an Isru Chag following Sukkos as well. The words literally mean "binding the festival." The day has no rituals or specific requirements related to it; its purpose is to provide a transition from the week-long festive spirit back into the routines of regular life. In times of the Temple, it was a day to return to one's home. In times since, it can also be a day to travel home from wherever one has spent the Yom Tov, and of course, to return one's kitchen to its year-round mode.

If you have a child in day school or yeshiva, he or she may have Isru

Chag as an additional day of Pesach vacation.

Besides the practical benefits of the day, it can best be used to review and relish the high-points of Pesach, and “bind the festival” to your mind and heart.

VII. Pesach Tales

Free Within

On Erev Pesach, 1978, Yosef Mendelovich sat in a Soviet prison cell. His face was gaunt with starvation, his body clothed in rags. For months, he had been preparing for this moment, and now, it was time to perform the mitzvah of Bedikas Chometz, the search for chometz. He had saved slivers of wax, drops of oil and bits of string to make the tiny candle he would now light in order to conduct his search. He had also found a way to provide himself with karpas, by salvaging an old onion and allowing it to sprout. For maror, he had taken the mustard from a mustard plaster the infirmary had given him. He knew that mustard wasn't the best form of maror, but it was the best he could do. For wine, he had managed to find some raisins that he left soaking, hoping they would ferment. “Raisin wine” is an acceptable form of wine when made properly.

Oddly, though he was confined behind the walls of a prison, he did not feel any irony in celebrating the festival of freedom, even in his limited way. His freedom was real, for he knew his identity and he knew his obligation. He did it without fear or doubt. That, to him, was real freedom, for one could have the whole wide world open before him and be paralyzed by the bondage of doubt, unable to find a direction in which to go.

Take and Give

The Skulener Rebbe was a great leader of Chassidim before and

after World War II. His devotion to his people was a rare source of light in the aftermath of the Holocaust. As Pesach approached, he busied himself preparing matzos for the surviving rabbis in Bucharest, Romania, where he resided. With a great effort, he hoped he could ensure that each could have one matzah for his community. One day, the son of another great leader, the Vizhnitzer Rebbe, arrived for his father's matzah.

"My father wants two matzos," the son reported.

The Skulener Rebbe did not refrain from giving him two matzos. Even though he did not understand why the Vizhnitzer Rebbe would ask for two matzos in such dire times, he had full trust that the Vizhnitzer Rebbe had a sound reason for doing so.

At the last possible moment on Erev Pesach, the boy returned, bringing with him one of the two matzos. The Skulener Rebbe was perplexed. "I thought your father needed two," he said.

"He did. One for my father, and one for the Skulener Rebbe. He was afraid you would give them all away and save nothing for yourself. Now you will definitely have a matzah for Pesach."

Chicken Soup Recipe

Soup:

One whole chicken
1 gallon water
1 onion cut in quarters
3 garlic cloves
2 teaspoons salt
¼ tsp black pepper
1 pound potatoes
4 large carrots cut in one inch slices
2 stalks celery cut in one inch slices

Matzo balls:

1 tablespoon chicken broth
1 1/4 cups matzoh meal
5 large eggs
1 3/4 teaspoons salt
2 tablespoons club soda
1/4 cup vegetable oil

Combine the soup ingredients. Put in large pot. Boil for 20 minutes. Close fire. In a mixing bowl, combine the matzo ball ingredients. Mix well. Put in the freezer for 45 minutes. Form matzo balls that are about 2 inches in diameter. When the soup is hot but not yet boiling, use a slotted spoon to place each ball into the soup. Bring soup to a boil. Cover and let it cook for 40 minutes. Serve hot.



Oorah wishes
you and your family
a happy and kosher
Pesach!

