

The Passover Seder Night - A Basic Information Guide About Passover by [Dorit Sasson](#)

Passover celebrates the journey of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, probably in the 1200s B.C.E. The story of Passover (Pesach in Hebrew) is told in the Bible in Chapter 12 of the Book of Exodus. It begins with the death of Joseph and the rise of a new Egyptian Pharaoh, which brings in an era of slavery for the Israelites.

The celebration of Passover begins after sundown on the 14th day of Nissan, the first month of the Jewish year. The central activity of the Pesach celebration is the telling of the story of the Exodus (long journey from captivity in Egypt) to future generations. Jewish families gather in their homes at a ceremonial feast called the Seder, which means 'order' in Hebrew. At the Seder, Jews read the story of the journey of the Israelites from a significant book known as the Haggadah. The Haggadah not only tells the story of Passover, but also gives procedures for conducting the seder. There are also special foods, which symbolize the journey from Egypt which have their place on the Passover seder plate and are referred to in the Haggadah.

Passover Symbols

There are special symbols on the Passover Seder plate. Each symbol has special significance to the theme of religious freedom for the Jewish people.

- **Matzah** - otherwise known as unleavened bread. According to the Bible, when the Israelites fled from religious persecution, they did not have time to let their bread rise. They made flat, unleavened bread instead. Therefore, Jews eat matzot. (plural form for matzah).
- **Horseradish** - This food underscores the bitterness of the Jewish experience.
- **Haroset** (Hebrew) - A combination of chopped nuts and apples (called Haroset in Hebrew) symbolizes the building mortar used by the Hebrew slaves in their forced labor.
- **Karpas** - a vegetable, usually parsley, is dipped in salt water and eaten. The vegetable symbolizes the beginnings of the Jews; the green 'Parsley' represents the fields of Goshen while the salt water symbolizes the tears due to the years in bondage.
- **Maror** - or bitter herbs. Sometimes romaine lettuce is used but most Jews use raw horseradish to symbolize the bitterness of slavery. The maror is dipped in charoset for building the hope for sweeter times for the Jewish people.

Special Passover Traditions

- Hiding the Afikoman - Children love searching a piece of matzah that is hidden. Different families have different traditions relating to the Afikoman. Some families give a special gift like money.
- A retelling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt and the first Passover. This begins with the youngest person asking The Four Questions. The Four Questions are also known as Mah Nishtanah (Why is it different?), which are the first words of the Four Questions, and is often sung.

Preparing for Passover

Passover is a very difficult and enormous holiday to prepare for. Jews are not allowed to keep wheat, rye, barley, oats and spelt, which are typically used for bread making - otherwise known as 'chametz'. Chametz is sold to non-Jews. There should be no crumbs in the house. All areas that have contact with food must be cleaned from top to bottom. Observant Jews start cleaning their houses a few weeks before Passover. Pots and pans are literally disinfected.

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Appendix #2j