



THE SEDER CEREMONY

The Passover *Seder* is a time when families come together to relive our Exodus from enslavement in Egypt, and rejoice in our receipt of the *Torah* on Mount Sinai. Passover is, in essence, the birthday of the People of Israel, the defining event that brought us together for the first time as a nation and set the stage for our arrival in the Land of Israel after hundreds of years in exile.

More than just our physical exile, however, the Exodus was also a redemption of the soul. The *Torah* tells us that we were redeemed from Egypt “in haste.” Why was that so? Couldn’t *Hashem* have redeemed us in a more leisurely manner? One answer is that in Egypt the Jewish people had sunk to the 49th level of impurity. According to the *Maharal*, we had lost the characteristics of righteousness that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had imbued in our people years before. Had *Hashem* not rescued the Children of Israel in haste, we would have lost the last vestiges of our faith in Him, and would have succumbed to Egyptian society as a persecuted subclass instead of the exalted recipients of our precious *Torah*.

Passover, through the *Seder*, is an active demonstration of both our spiritual and physical redemption from Egypt; the foods we eat, prayers we say, and the stories we tell bring this experience to life. Our guide is the *Haggadah* — a book filled with Scripture, Rabbinic teachings, songs, prayers and rituals — a work unique to the holiday of Passover.

The *Seder* service is divided into 14 sections (the word *Seder* means “order”):

- ✚ **Kadesh** — Sanctifying the day over a cup of wine
- ✚ **Urchatz** — Washing the hands prior to eating karpas
- ✚ **Karpas** — Eating a vegetable like potatoes or parsley or celery dipped in salt-water
- ✚ ~ **Yachatz** — The breaking of the middle *matza*
- ✚ ~ **Maggid** — The story of our Exodus from Egypt
- ✚ ~ **Rachtza** — Washing the hands in preparation for eating the *matza*
- ✚ ~ **Motzi-Matza** — Eating the required amount of *matza*
- ✚ ~ **Maror** — Eating the required amount of bitter herbs dipped in *charoset*
- ✚ ~ **Koraich** — Eating the “Hillel Sandwich” of *matza* and *maror*, dipped in *charoset*
- ✚ ~ **Shulchan Oraich** — Eating the festive meal
- ✚ ~ **Tzafun** — “Dessert,” through eating the required amount of *Afi komen (matza)*
- ✚ ~ **Barech** — Grace After Meals
- ✚ ~ **Hallel** — Prayers in praise of *Hashem*
- ✚ ~ **Nirtzah** — Conclusion of the *Seder* and the festive songs



The Seder

≈At the beginning of the *Seder*, many Sephardic communities have a young child go outside the door of the house and knock.

“Who’s there?” ask those on the inside.

“An Israelite,” responds the child.

“Where are you coming from?” they ask.

“From Egypt,” says the child.

“Where are you going?” they ask.

“To the Land of Israel!” the child exclaims.

The child then re-enters the house, and the *Seder* begins.

THE SEDER PLATE

The *Seder* plate, upon which all the symbols of Passover are placed, is at the center of the celebration. A large plate is set at the head of the table (and in many households, before each guest at the *Seder*) and includes the following items:

✚ **Three matzot** (covered)

✚ **A roasted meat bone** on the upper right, to remember the time when our ancestors would offer the *Korban Pesach* (Passover Sacrifice) in observance of the holiday.

✚ **A roasted egg**, on the upper left, as a remembrance of the additional festival offering by our ancestors in celebration of Passover.

✚ **Maror** (bitter herbs: horseradish or romaine lettuce leaves) placed in the center and at bottom, to remind us of the bitter slavery suffered by our people during their long stay in Egypt.

✚ **Charoset**, on the lower right, a mixture of nuts, apples, cinnamon, and wine, that serves as a symbol of the mortar used for making the bricks with which our ancestors built cities for Pharaoh.

≈ Many in the Sephardic community add to the *charoset* fruits to which our People are compared, such as raisins, pomegranates, cinnamon, ginger and other sweet ingredients.

✚ **Karpas** (potatoes, parsley, or any vegetable) on the lower left, to be dipped in salt-water during the *Seder* service, signaling the festive nature of the meal and to arouse the curiosity of the children.

≈ Some in the Sephardic community dip the *karpas* into vinegar instead of salt water. Since everyone is obligated to drink four cups of wine during the *Seder* ceremony to commemorate the redemption of our people, each person attending the *Seder* should have his or her own cup of wine. *Ashkenazim* say a *bracha* over each of the four cups of wine.

≈ Most *Sephardim* only recite blessings over the first and third cups of wine.

