

# PASSOVER NOTES

A COMPANION TO



THE FESTIVAL OF  
REDEMPTION



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*“You shall observe this as an institution for all time,  
for you and your descendants...”*

Exodus 12:24



Passover (*Pesach*) is the most widely observed Jewish holiday (80% of American Jews participate in a Seder). The holiday is filled with symbols that on the most basic level commemorate our people's exodus from Egyptian slavery, and celebrate the dawn of Jewish nationhood. On a much deeper level, these symbols are a powerful set of tools that evoke a transformative personal, religious and ethical experience. The power of celebrating Pesach (Passover) is not in remembering the past, but in using the past to transform the present and the future.

During the Passover *Seder*, we use the experiential sources of the Jewish values of freedom and justice. The *Seder* challenges us to relive our national slavery and indignity, and then re-experience the exhilarating gift of liberation. We make the journey as individuals, as families, and as a worldwide community. As we reenact the journey each year, we find ourselves renewed by the dream of a world filled with justice and freedom. We are also renewed with hope by sensing that if the Israelites could overcome 400 years of slavery, we can overcome any of the obstacles that stand between our present and the future we envision.

*Passover Notes* was compiled to unlock the power of these symbols and to serve as a companion on this journey. By deepening our connections to the themes and rituals of Passover, we hope that this booklet will make the holiday come to life in a way that helps you ask new questions and find new layers of wisdom.

**Note:** italicized/underlined words are defined in the Vocabulary. 2

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*Passover Notes is a project of Penn Hillel and were revised and edited by Rabbi Mike Uram*



Antique *redel*: a sharp-toothed wheel instrument used to make perforations in the dough, which was done to prevent any rising during the baking, and not to beautify the matzot.

# THE SEDER PLATE

Adapted from an Article by Hanna Tiferet Siegel

## THREE MATZOT

Three *matzot* are stacked together and separated from each other by a cloth or a compartment. In addition to the two breads that are used for *Shabbat* and festivals, recalling the *lehem mishne*, the extra manna that fell in the desert, a third bread is added. This third bread which is found in the middle compartment is the *lehem oni*, the bread of the poor. It is broken in half. One part represents the suffering of our past. The second part, which is hidden as the *afikomen*, is a symbol of the future which will reveal the hidden elements that will bring us closer to completeness.

*Matzah* is eaten three times during the seder: once by itself for the mitzvah of eating *matzah*, once with the bitter herbs, and once as the *afikomen* at the end of the meal. The three *matzot* remind us of the three actions in which Jews must be engaged: reaching upward toward God to develop a sense of spirituality, reaching inward to ourselves to develop wisdom and inner calm, and reaching outward to our world to engage in acts of *tzedek* (justice) that make our world a better place.

## MAROR / HAZERET

*Maror* and *Hazeret* are two forms of bitter herbs. The most commonly used bitter herbs are horseradish (whole slices or grated) and romaine lettuce. Horseradish is most often used for the blessing for *maror*, while some use *hazeret* for the *korekh* or sandwich of *matzah* with bitter herbs. The bitter herbs remind us of our bitter times in Egypt. They are also cleansing foods that open the sinuses and tear ducts and purify the blood as a springtime tonic.

## CHAROSET

*Charoset* is perhaps the favorite food of the seder evening. It is a sweet mixture of fruits and nuts into which the bitter *maror* is dipped. It reminds us of the mortar that was used to hold the bricks together when we were slaves in Egypt. The *charoset* is sweet, and when mixed with the bitter *maror*, it reminds us of the bitter sweet nature of life.

## Z'ROAH

The *z'roah* is a roasted bone with some meat on it. It reminds us of the *z'roah netuyah*, the outstretched arm with which God took us out of slavery. The *z'roah* represents the Pesach lamb sacrifice that each family offered on Passover eve in the Temple in Jerusalem. After the lamb was slaughtered, the meat was roasted and eaten by the family. *Ashkenazi* Jews don't eat roasted lamb on Passover because of the loss of the Temple, but many *Sephardi* Jews do eat lamb. Some people use a roasted lamb shoulder for the *z'roah* on the seder plate, while others use a roasted chicken neck, so as not to confuse it with the Passover sacrifice. In vegetarian families, there is a custom to substitute a roasted beet or a Pascal yam in place of the meat!

## BAYTZA



# THE SEDER PLATE

The *baytza* is a hard-boiled roasted egg that is used instead of another piece of meat, to remind us of the second sacrifice, the *hagiga*, which was offered at the Temple on each festival. There are many thoughts as to why the egg was used. It is the food that is served after a funeral and is therefore a symbol of mourning for the Temple. It is round and reminds us of the wheel of fate that turns and brings us from our mourning into hope. The egg is also a symbol of the springtime themes of birth and rebirth.

## KARPAS

The *karpas* is a vegetable that is not bitter, usually celery, parsley, or boiled potato. It is customary to use the fresh greens of spring, which can include many kinds of herbs like cilantro and chives. The boiled potato is an Eastern European custom, due to the cold climate, where the only fresh vegetables available were the sprouting potatoes in the root cellar. *karpas* is the first food eaten after the *Kiddush* - the blessing of the wine - and it is a symbol of the simplicity of life. The greens are dipped in salt water or cider vinegar that is placed in a bowl near the Seder plate. Dipping the greens into the salt water is a reminder of the tears we have shed in our suffering. It is also a reminder of the salty ocean, mother of all life on earth.

*karpas* can also be a great snack during the Seder. After the ritual is completed, many people pass around plates with cut green vegetables and innovations like steamed artichokes with a variety of dipping sauces.



### **AN ORANGE ON THE SEDER PLATE???**

One of the gifts of our tradition is that we are able to interpret and expand the customs that have been handed down to us. One new custom that has become very popular is the addition of an orange on the Seder plate. There is a great deal of confusion about the origin of this custom. Most people believe that it originated during an encounter that Dr. Susannah Heschel had while delivering a talk. It is rumored that a man in the audience interrupted her and said that a woman has as much place on the *bima* (the raised platform in the front of the sanctuary) as an orange has on the *Seder* plate. In a recent essay, Dr. Susannah Heschel explains the true events that lead to the creation of this ritual. She explains that the custom originated from her reaction to a feminist haggadah that was written by students at Oberlin. In it, a fictional tale depicted a woman who asked a *rebbe* if there was room for a lesbian in Judaism. His response was that "there's as much room for a lesbian in Judaism as there is for a crust of bread on the *Seder* plate!" According to the story, it was for this reason that feminists began to put bread crusts on the seder plate. Susannah Heschel liked the message but was not willing to actually put bread on the *Seder* plate, so she adapted the custom by putting an orange in its place. For these reasons, the orange on the *Seder* plate symbolizes the struggle of women, gays and all other marginalized groups in the Jewish community.

# THE ORDER OF THE PASSOVER SEDER

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***Kiddush:*** The blessing is recited over the first cup of wine by the conductor of the Seder and everyone drinks.

***Urchatz - Wash Hands:*** The hands are washed by pouring water over them, in preparation for eating *karpas*. In contrast to normal practice, no blessing is said. This change in custom is intended to provoke the children at the meal to ask the most famous question, “Why is this night different than all others?”

***Karpas:*** All who are present dip the *karpas* (a spring vegetable) into salt water (to symbolize tears) and then eat it. The eating of ‘finger foods’ indicates that our Passover meal is a regal banquet of free people. *karpas* can also make a great snack during the *Seder*. Try using steamed artichokes and dipping sauces.

***Yachatz - The Middle Matzah:*** The middle of the three pieces of *matzah* is broken into two parts. One is saved for everyone to eat at the beginning of the meal, and the other (the *Afikomen*) is hidden until the end of the meal.

***Maggid - Recite the Passover Story:*** At this point, the various Biblical and Rabbinic texts that talk about our enslavement and persecution are read and (more importantly) discussed. There are actually four distinct tellings, each of which begins with questions, proceeds to answers, and ends with an expression of praise. Interestingly, the one thing lacking from all of these texts is the actual story of the Exodus. The words we encounter are not intended to simply relate a factual history; rather, they are intended to provoke a discussion that translates the lessons of our history into the idiom of today. Don’t hold back, live the questions now... (R.M. Rilke) The *Maggid* is concluded with the second cup of wine.

***Wash Hands Again*** - This time, when we wash, we make a blessing, because we are about to eat Matzah.



# AWESOME FOURSOME:

## The Motif of FOUR in the Haggadah and the Festival

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The number four appears frequently, and in different contexts, in the Passover Haggadah and in the writings of our Sages on Passover and traditions related to the festival. The number four constitutes a kind of pivot around which subjects, ideas, sayings, and commentaries on the verses are cited.



### 4 **ARBA KOSOT** (The Four Cups of Wine) -

The drinking of four cups of wine on the Seder night apparently derives from two Biblical Sources:

- The first is the four repetitions in the book of Genesis (40:11-13):

*"And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand... and you will deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand, after the former manner when you were his butler."*

The bondage in Egypt commenced with the sale of Joseph by his brothers into slavery; likewise, Joseph's liberation from jail symbolizes the redemption of the children of Israel from the house of bondage in Egypt.

Therefore the Sages ordained the drinking of four cups of wine on Pesach for the four times in which the word "cup" is mentioned.

- The second source is in the book of Exodus (6:2-7), where four different terms of deliverance are cited:

*"God spoke to Moses: Tell the children of Israel: I will bring you out...I will rescue you...I will redeem you...I will take you for me as a people and I will be for you as a God..."* The four cups thus correspond to the fourfold promise of redemption.

### **THE FOUR QUESTIONS**

4 Four questions were intentionally inserted in the Haggadah in order to stress the number four. The notion of questions per se is instrumental to the idea of retelling the story of the exodus from Egypt in a meaningful way. That is, when people ask questions, it reflects a curiosity and interest that surpasses that involved in a perfunctory reading of text.

It is interesting to note that four questions do appear in the *Mishna*, but they differ partly from the questions found in a traditional haggadah: they ask about *matzah*, *maror*, the paschal lamb, and dipping (Tractate Pesachim, Babylonian Talmud).



#### 4 THE FOUR CHILDREN

An allusion to the four sons' questions is already found in the Torah: "And when your child asks you in time to come, saying: What is this?" (Exodus 13:14) The four children appearing in the Haggadah represent four human typologies: a wise person, a wicked person, a simple person, and a person who does not know how to ask. The wise person relates to the laws of *Pesach* (Passover) in order to learn them; the wicked person dissociates himself from the community of Israel and disdains the laws of *Pesach*; the simpleton wishes to know generally what is special about *Pesach*; and it is our duty to explain and interpret to the one who does not know how to ask.

#### 4 THE NUMBER FOUR - STYLISTIC REPETITION

In various places in the Haggadah we find four successive phrases, all relating to the same idea.

1. In the passage commencing with the words "*Avadim Hayinu*" (We were slaves): And even if we were all wise, all men of knowledge, all old men and all knew the Torah...
2. In the passage beginning with the words "*Vayotzienu Ha-Shem mi-Mitzraim*" (And the Lord brought us forth from Egypt): I myself, and not an angel, I myself and not a seraph, I myself, and not a messenger. I am the Lord.

#### 4 THE FOUR NAMES OF PESACH

The *Pesach* festival has many names (see p. 16), but the four most well-known are the following: **Chag ha-Pesach** ("the Feast of Passover"), **Chag ha-Matzot** ("the Feast of Unleavened Bread"), **Chag ha-Herut** ("the Feast of Liberation"), and **Chag ha-Aviv** ("the Feast of Spring").

#### 4 IN THE NARRATIVE - THE AGGADAH OF FOUR

*"Because of four things the Israelites were delivered from Egypt: They did not change their names; they did not change their language; they did not reveal their secrets and they did not abandon circumcision (Midrash Tehillim 114:4)."* This Rabbinic interpretation stresses that over thousands of years of Jewish history, the people retained their name - *Am Israel*, their language - Hebrew, they did not reveal their secrets and they preserved the *mitzvah* of circumcision.

- 4 **FOUR BENEDECTIONS** - We recite four different blessings over the food that we eat at the Seder. The blessings are: "**boreh peri ha-adamah**" - on the *karpas* (acknowledging that God creates the fruit of the earth); "**hamotzi lechem min ha-aretz**" - on the *matzah* (acknowledging that God brings forth bread from the earth); the blessing on eating *matzah* (acknowledging commandment to eat Unleavened Bread); and the blessing on eating *maror* (acknowledging the commandment to eat Bitter Herbs).

# RECALLING THE TEN PLAGUES

Adapted from *A Different Night*

The spilling of the drops of wine for the Ten Plagues in Egypt has been understood traditionally in opposite ways. Either it signifies sympathy for the enemy Egyptians who suffered as a result of the painful process of liberating the Jews from Egyptian tyranny; or it reaffirms the righteous vengeance of God's sword exercising judgment against a relentless, cruel and stubborn oppressor.

Reflect on the following collections of texts, and think about how you might or might not apply them to contemporary enemies, both physical and conceptual:

## On One Hand: The Joys of Justice

1. "When the wicked perish, There are shouts of joy!" - Proverbs 11:10
2. **The Song of the Red Sea:**  
"Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea... Then Moses and Israel sang to the Lord: ..."Your right hand, Lord, shatters the Foe. The foe said: 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil. My desire shall have its fill of them. I will bare my sword;' ... But You, God, made Your wind blow, the sea covered them." -Exodus 14:31; 156:1,9-10
3. **Rabbi Jacob Halevi Moulin** (15th Century Germany, an era of pogroms and expulsions):  
"The drops refer to the sixteen facets of God's avenging sword."
4. **Rabbi Shalom from Noitch:**  
"On the seventh day of Pesach (the anniversary of the crossing of the Red Sea), one should be sure to add the phrase 'the day of our joy' to the Kiddush, for the Egyptians were drowned in the sea.
5. **President Abraham Lincoln:**  
"If every drop of blood drawn by the lash must be paid by one drawn by the sword, it still must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'" - Second Inaugural Address, 1865, quoting Psalm 19
6. **Shylock** (William Shakespeare, "The Merchant of Venice", 1597):  
"Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?..."

## On the Other Hand: Restraints on Revenge

1. “If your enemy falls, do not celebrate. If he trips, let not your heart rejoice” - Proverbs 24:17
2. **Rabbi Yochanan:**  
“God is not happy at the downfall of the wicked... When the angels tried to sing songs of praise to God at the Red Sea, God silenced them: ‘My handiwork, my human creatures, are drowning in the sea and you want to sing a song of praise?’” - Babylonian Talmud Megillah 10b
3. **Don Isaac Abrabanel** (refugee of the Spanish Expulsion, 1492) :  
“By spilling a drop of wine, from the Pesach cup for each plague, we acknowledge that our own joy is lessened and incomplete. For our redemption had to come by means of the punishment of other human beings. Even through these are just punishments for evil acts, it says ‘Do not rejoice at the fall of your enemy’.
4. **Rabbi Simcha Cohen from Divinsk** (Lithuanian Talmudist):  
“The Torah never mentions ‘joy’ in relation to the holiday of Pesach as it does for Shavuot and Sukkot. On Pesach—unlike the other pilgrimage holidays—we do not recite all the Psalms of Hallel (except the first day) because as Shmuel quotes from Proverbs: *‘In the downfall of your enemy, do not rejoice;* We celebrate the exodus from Egypt, not the downfall of the Egyptians.’”
5. **Chief of Staff, General Yitzhak Rabin, Six Day War, June 1967** (later Prime Minister of the State of Israel, 1974-75, 1992-95)  
“War is harsh and cruel, filled with blood and tears. While the joy of victory seized the whole people, among the community of fighters themselves there is a strange phenomenon: they cannot celebrate wholeheartedly. There is a large measure of sadness, of shock, mixed into their festivities. Some fighters cannot celebrate at all. The frontline soldiers saw with their own eyes - not only the glory of victory, but also its price - their fellow fighters fell at their sides in pools of blood. I know that the price paid by the enemy also touched a deep place in the hearts of many. Perhaps the Jewish people have never been educated and never become accustomed to the joy of the conqueror. Therefore, our victory is received with mixed feelings.”



**Question:** What are the plagues affecting nations in our time?

## **DISCOVERING THE CUP OF MIRIAM**

*Adapted from Matia Rania Angelou*

In the late 1980's, Joyce Rosen led our *Rosh Chodesh* (New Month) group in a meditation on Miriam's well. She invited us to take the goblet, fill it with the healing waters of Miriam's well and drink. Stephanie Loo was so taken with the image of the well and the water that she began using a crystal goblet filled with spring water to remind her of the *mayim chayyim* (living waters) from Miriam's well. She called this goblet *Kos Miryam* (the cup of Miriam) and used it every Friday evening to welcome Shabbat. It was Stephanie who gave the cup its name and who wrote the first ceremony using *Kos Miryam*.

It seems to me that Stephanie discovered this custom more than she created it. It's as though *Kos Miryam* had been lost in history, and that it is just now being rediscovered. As Penina Adelman has said:

The ritual is "new in the sense that such a cup had never been used on the seder table... or for a *bat mitzvah* celebration... or during any of the other myriad of uses this particular group found for the Cup of Miriam. However, the ritual is "ancient" and even "traditional" in the sense that ... it felt so natural to start blessing this cup full of pure spring water from Miriam's well, using it at the appropriate times.

Indeed, we read The Book of Our Heritage: "There is said to have been a custom to draw water from a well at the end of Shabbat, for at that time, the water of the well of Miriam filled every other well and whoever came in contact with it, or drank it, was cured of all his ailments."

*Midrash* (Rabbinic interpretation) tells us that when Miriam died, the miraculous well that had been given by God in her honor disappeared, leaving the Israelites without a source of water in the desert. In our generation, Miriam's well has become a symbol of our thirst for spiritual nourishment. It is fitting that *Kos Miryam* is being used that this time in Jewish history, because we are now rediscovering the women of the Torah and beginning to relate to them differently. We are reading spiritually to uncover these women's lessons and to understand their teachings in a new way. Now is the time for women's voices to be heard along with men's voices.

## RECLINING TO THE LEFT? AN OUTMODED CUSTOM?

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*Adapted From A Different Night*

One of the four questions is: “Why on Seder night must we eat reclining, while on all other nights we may eat either reclining or sitting up?” Clearly the questions presupposes the social world of the Greco-Roman nobility, in which meals were eaten while reclining on their left arms leaving their right hand free to dip and taste. At each couch was a small table with individual portions, like today’s seder plate.

Since the European Middle Ages, it is no longer the way of nobility to recline. In fact, eating while reclining on pillows is considered the way of the sick. Avi HaEzri led the Ashkenazi tradition in declaring that commandment to recline, obsolete and no longer binding. (Rabbi Eliezer Ben Joel, 12th C. Germany).

However, most communities follow the view of Rabbi Y.M. Epstein that everyone should be provided with a pillow precisely because it is an outmoded and outlandish custom. For the point of the seder is to introduce changes into the meal, so that the children will be aroused to ask “Why is this night different from all other nights?” By the same token, it would be ideal for everyone to have their own seder plate.

This custom has power for the adults at the seder as well. By changing our ritual, we also change our reality. We see the world from new perspectives, discover insights that were previously hidden and we internalize one of the central themes of Passover; that regardless of what may have been in the past, there is always the possibility of a transformed present and future. The simple act of changing the way we sit, may remind us of simple ways our lives that can also be changed.

### **Why do we lean to the left?**

**There are a number of different answers to this question. The *Mishnah Brurah* (20th century legal commentary) points that we lean left in order to avoid choking and to free up our right hand which is normally used for eating. We also know from other cultures that the left hand was not used while eating because it was consider the hand used in the bathroom.**

## THE POWER OF PESACH CLEANING

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### *Preparing for the Pilgrimage*

*By Judy Sirota Rosenthal*

“It’s so much work!” remains the refrain around women’s preparation for Passover. The rigorous work of cleaning, shopping, and cooking are tasks we rarely consider in their own right. Most often, we think about them in terms of the goal and reward of the Seder, not as rituals.

But preparing for Passover could be very different if approached from a new perspective: Pesach is one of the three pilgrimage holidays, and the preparations for a pilgrimage enrich the process.

People going on a serious climb or trek prepare by walking around their neighborhoods with heavy backpacks. We clean, search and labor in our homes. Might this also constitute an important ritual preparation for our journey towards freedom?

For as we clean we can sort through the accumulations of the past year and decide, “Do I really need this?” As we gaze at an object or reread a note, we can examine our relationship to it and to the memories and associations it holds. Some things will remain precious; others no longer engage us. We may learn that we have completed the chapter of our lives it belonged to, or that we have integrated the memory into our very beings and can let it go. We may want to throw certain things away, to create a space for the reinvention of some part of ourselves. With these reflections, a transformation is taking place - whether or not we choose it.

As we let go of what we no longer need, we challenge the stagnation in our personal lives. Cleaning becomes a meditation during which we address the emotional crumbs and clogs. We can ask ourselves, “Is this a crumb of the past that is not my present? What is my attachment to this thing? Can I let it go? Am I freer having this or letting it go? Do I have these things because there is a hole in my spirit that needs to be filled?” As we search for *chametz*, we can imagine each crumb as some aspect of our lives or ourselves that no longer serves us. Are we willing to release that crumb even if there is nothing but empty space left behind, a space to grow into?

We can also reflect on perceiving this cleaning as a burden. Did we feel discomfort with this disruption to the flow of our ordinary lives, resentment that we have to unearth things that were just fine when they were hidden? We can ask ourselves, “Am I grateful for these Passover dishes, or are they a burden on me?”

What burdens do I carry or create in my life? Are they real, or something I hide behind? By thinking of Passover preparations as a burden, am I hiding from the opportunity for self-reflection that is waiting for me?"

The preparations for a pilgrimage are work, but they are sacred work. The cleaning ritual prepares us for pilgrimage because we are challenged to decide what is essential in this life. What do we each need or want to have as we go forward, knowing that our space and time are limited? By freeing ourselves of things, we create space to allow the unknown and the unexpected to enter. And if we allow the ultimate Unknown to be present with us, these moments may reveal hidden space in each of us that unfold in a life of their own.

## THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF HAMETZ

*Adapted from Rabbi Kerry Olitzky*

The rabbis suggest that *hametz* (leaven) transcends the physical world. This leaven also symbolizes a puffiness of self, an inflated personality, an egocentricity that threatens to eclipse the essential personality of the individual. Ironically, it is what prevents the individual from rising spiritually and moving closer to holiness. Thus, what *hametz* effectively does in the material world is exactly what it precludes in the realm of the spirit. That's why it has to be removed.

Rabbi Arthur Waskow calls this kind of *hametz* the "swollen sourness in our lives." Some people say *hametz* is also a term for the *yetzer hara* (our inclination toward evil), which is understood by the rabbis to be part of every individual's psycho-spiritual makeup. The *yetzer hara* is part of a complex of natural drives and urges (for sex and food and the like) that is held in balance by its opposite, the *yetzer tov* (inclination to do good).

Just as the rabbis understood that *hametz* can be used to make bread rise, it also has the potential to over-ferment and spoil the bread; neither is the *yetzer hara* totally evil nor the *yetzer hara* fully without guile. As yeast has its purpose, the *yetzer hara* has its function. But this drive to do evil requires balance in our lives, what the philosophers refer to as "the golden mean," something that will hold it in check from literally overwhelming the individual.

Therefore, as we clean our homes of *hametz* and avoid eating it during Pesach, we perform an external ritual which can have a powerful effect on our internal spirituality. It's not just about getting rid of certain type of grain, it is about using rituals to help us maintain the balance between our opposing inclinations.

## THE MANY NAMES OF PASSOVER

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In Jewish tradition and history, Passover is one of the festivals noted for its diversity of meanings. It is a festival that commemorates Jewish slavery in, and exodus from, Egypt; it is the national-unity festival of our people in the melting pot of distress and salvation; it is the family-unity festival that knows the wonder of being together as a family; and it is the spring festival in which the blossoming of nature symbolizes the renewal and awakening of a people delighting in life. Above all, it is the festival of freedom, the freedom of every single Jewish individual, and the freedom of the entire Jewish people.

**PASSOVER**— The Biblical narrative describes how the Angel of Death literally *passed over* the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt during the final plague (Exodus 12:23) This theme forces us to think about and struggle with the notion of a time of reckoning in which God separates the good from the bad - punishing the wicked and sparing the righteous.

**PESACH**—Also refers to the Pascal lamb that the Jews in Egypt were commanded to ritually slaughter and feast upon, after wiping its blood on their doorposts. Tradition records that the lamb was an Egyptian god. Thus, in order to be saved, Jews had to "slaughter," to renounce the way of life and religion of those among whom they lived.

**Z'MAN CHERUTEINU**— "Season of Our Freedom," is the name found in the liturgy, marking the establishment of the children of Israel as a free and independent people. It is a name which directly refers to this holiday's central theme of freedom. It took the United States of America until the latter part of the nineteenth century to truly embrace emancipation when Abraham Lincoln freed American slaves. Sadly, even in the twenty-first century, "Let My People Go," and "Freedom Now" are still relevant slogans in some parts of the world.

**CHAG HA-MATZOT**— "The Holiday of the Unleavened Bread," The Jews in Egypt needed to eat *matzah* because their freedom came so quickly. They left their enslavement with such haste, that there wasn't even time for their bread to rise. This theme of the holiday teaches us to remain optimistic, no matter how bleak the times appear, because the change for the better can come in the blink of an eye. One wonders whether the move from slavery to freedom can indeed be almost instantaneous.

# THE MANY NAMES OF PASSOVER

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**CHAG HA-AVIV** - "The Festival of the Spring" - not only identifies when Passover occurs but also adds an additional message explaining why redemption occurred when it did. Spring marks the rebirth of the earth, with the bursting forth of green life. The key idea of the holiday, as of Spring, is rebirth; the blossoming of nature symbolizes the renewal and awakening of a people delighting in life.

**CROSSING FEAST** - Philo (First Century Alexandrian Jewish philosopher) calls Passover the "crossing-feast" as he traces the name not to the passing over of the Israelites by the destroying angel (Exodus 12:23,27), "but to the crossing of Israel itself from Egypt... and no doubt also the crossing of the Red Sea."

**LAYL AL-RASS** - In Morocco, the Seder evening is called *Layl al-rass* ("Night of the Heads") as it was customary among Moroccan Jews to eat heads of sheep in commemoration of the paschal offering in the Temple.

## ***A Holiday by any Other Name***

The "Holiday of Liberation" is also the "Holiday of Spring," not simply by coincidence but by design. Following the bleakness of winter when everything is covered in shrouds of snow, spring marks the rebirth of the earth with the bursting forth of green life. Similarly, a people ensnared in oppressive slavery, doomed to a slow process of degradation or even extinction, bursts forth out of Egypt into a new life's journey leading to a land flowing with milk and honey. The watchwords of both spring and *Pesach* (Passover) are *rebirth* and *hope*. Thus, the spirit of renewed optimism aroused by the sights and smells of spring is reinforced in a Jewish context by Passover with its trumpeting of the possibilities of liberation. Passover reminds us that no matter how terrible our situation, we must not lose hope. Passover holds out the possibility of renewal, proclaiming that such change is as intrinsic to human nature as are blossoming trees to the natural world.

## THE COVENANT OF COMMON DESTINY: THE LEAP OF SOLIDARITY

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An Essay by Rabbi David Hartman

On Passover, Jews say, “We were slaves.” We were objects exploited by Pharaoh; and there is talk about a common suffering, a shared pain. We had no Law, no Torah in the first Passover; there was only a common suffering. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik called that kind of suffering “*brit goral*,” the **covenant of destiny**. This constitutes a bold statement concerning what Passover may mean.

Some might imagine faith to mean an inner transformation; a leap into God. Judaism, however, does not begin with a leap of faith, nor even a leap of commitment to *mitzvah* (commandment). Rather than with a spiritual transformation of personal identity, Judaism commences with a leap of solidarity, an unmediated empathy with our history.

I cannot emphasize too much how essential this is in order to clarify so much of Western civilization’s misunderstanding of Judaism. Judaism begins with an identification with a singular community that has a particular history. It is to say, “I am prepared to go into Egypt and suffer with this people.” It is the free and lordly prince Moses saying to slaves, “You are my brothers.” It is lining up with the Jews. Whether the line is in Buchenwald or Egypt, or any other place in history; it is saying, “Your destiny is mine. I share whatever life will give to you. It is my reality. I see no way of being safe if you are threatened.” Rejecting the option of trying to save one’s own life, Esther came forward. Revealing his Jewish identity to the Egyptians and his family, Joseph remembered his brothers and re-entered their lives. The Moses story, the Esther story, and the Joseph story present individuals who in some way might have been safe alone, but who for some reason make this choice to be visible as a Jew. “Your history is my history,” they tell their family.

What does this have to do with religion? If religion is doctrine, Judaism is not a religion. Jews, without knowing precisely how to define themselves, are a people saying, “For some reason, I cannot be other than with this *mishpacha* (family). Why, I don’t know. It is not a family defined by blood; I become part of this people through choice. I share what history and life will give, feeling that there is no option to be outside their struggles.”

The sense of being claimed by this people is reflected in Maimonides' claim that one who fulfills all the *mitzvot* [commandments] but does not share in Israel's joys and sufferings has no share in immortality (CF. MISHNEH TORAH, HILCHOT TESHUVAH III 11). **Peoplehood is our cathedral.** This is the strange category that makes Jews lonely in Western Civilization. We look tribal. We look ethnic. But it is not just that; rather, peoplehood mediates the living God of Israel. One has to be in Egypt first before one can stand at Sinai. Judaism begins neither with the Ten Commandments, nor with a pledge of faith. Rather than with the covenantal experience at Sinai, Judaism begins with the story of slaves in Egypt. I was a slave and God brought me out. I was there. Unless that suffering is my suffering, I have not begun to understand Judaism. That is why a Jew must eat the *moror*, the bitter herb. It symbolizes this pain of mine.

This is the mystical experience in Judaism. The Jew becomes a mystic not by becoming one with God but by absorbing the historical drama of this community. We leap into peoplehood. This was the most difficult thing to teach people who came to me to convert to Judaism. To expound about God, Torah, *mitzvah*, was easy, but the challenge was to help them understand that they have to be like Ruth. "Wherever the Jews go, you go. You are not free. You're totally claimed by Israel's history. I am claimed by these people's dream. I feel I must keep these dreams alive."

My grandparents have to live in what I do. Perhaps this explicates the deep meaning of the resurrection of the dead. I have to fashion a society where my grandparents' dreams have a place. It is not enough to build Israel on the basis of my own dreams. I have to construct in the light of all my *zeida's* and *bubbie's* dreams.

#### From the Haggadah...

**In every generation, one is obligated to see oneself as one who personally went out from Egypt. Just as it says, "And you shall tell your child on that very day: 'It is because of this that God did for ME when I CAME OUT OF EGYPT.'" [Exodus 13:8]**

**Not only were our ancestors redeemed by the Holy One Blessed Be He, But even we redeemed with them. Just as it says: "God took US out from there in order to bring US to the Land God swore to our ancestors." [Deuteronomy 6:23]**

# THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE EXODUS NARRATIVE

Adapted from an Article by Nahum Sarna

An interesting feature of the Exodus narrative is the favorable light in which the daughter of the wicked pharaoh (who saves baby Moses from the river) is portrayed. Her name is not given. If her father was indeed Ramses II, she would have been one of his fifty-nine daughters! Her motive for saving the crying baby is sincere and honorable; she is actuated by pity. Indeed, the story is remarkable for the prominent, fateful, and generally noble role played by the women - the midwives, the mother, the sister, the Egyptian princess, and soon, Jethro's daughter.

It should not be considered strange that the king's daughter conducts the negotiations and concludes the transaction regarding the care of the infant entirely by herself, without the assistance of her husband or another male. The legal position of women in Egypt was relatively high. Descent was strictly matrilineal, so that property descended through the female line. This meant that a woman possessed inheritance rights and could dispose of property as well. As a result, she enjoyed a certain measure of economic independence.

The particular arrangements that the princess made for the nursing and rearing of the child follow a pattern found in Mesopotamian legal texts that relate to the adoption of a foundling. There, "wet-nurse-contracts" as they are now called, provide for payment for the services of suckling and rearing the infant in the home of the wet nurse for a specified period, usually two to three years. Following the weaning, the child is returned to the finder, who then adopts it. This deferring of the adoption until after the weaning is probably explained by high infant mortality rates. The Code of Hammurabi, #194, makes a provision for just such a contingency - that the baby might die when in the cradle of a wet nurse - so it could not have been a rare occurrence. The documents dealing with these contracts derive from Mesopotamia, not Egypt. It is probable, though not certain, that there was a common practice in such matters throughout the Near East.

According to the RASHBAM (an 11th Century French Biblical Commentator), women must be involved in the celebration of Pesach because they were the catalysts of the redemption by continuing to procreate and to hide their children in order to thwart Pharaoh's genocidal plan. Therefore, women are obligated to drink four cups of wine at the Seder.

In contrast to the traditional exemption of women from time-specific *mitzvot*, all the commandments of the Seder night are their privilege and duty. The redemptive role of Moses' mother *Yocheved* and sister Miriam, like that of Queen Esther in the Purim *Megillah*, won women exceptional recognition in both Pesach and Purim.

## PASSOVER VOCABULARY

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**AFIKOMEN** - During the early part of the Seder, it is customary to break the middle piece of the three pieces of matzah on the table. One half is eaten at the beginning of the meal while the other half - the *afikomen* - is wrapped and hidden away to be eaten for dessert. Since the meal ends with the eating of the *afikomen* and the Seder cannot conclude without it, the custom arose for young children to find the *afikomen* and demand a present for its return.

**CHAMETZ** - A mixture of flour and water that is allowed to rise, thus becoming what we normally call “bread.” The laws of *chametz* are very strict, and prohibit not only eating it but even owning it during Passover. All these prohibitions on *chametz* are meant to mark off matzah as something special. Since we eat matzah in remembrance of the Exodus, we further refrain from eating *chametz* to emphasize the importance of matzah and its symbolism.

**HAGGADAH** (pl. Haggadot) - “Narrative,” derived from the Hebrew root meaning “to tell.” The *Haggadah* is a special pedagogic and liturgical text, some parts of which are quotes from the Torah, other parts of which were written some two thousand years ago, and still other parts of which date from the middle ages. The *Haggadah* is a script which guides our retelling of the story of the Exodus.

**HESSEBAH** - “Reclining,” borrowing from the oriental custom of eating in a reclining position as a sign of nobility and freedom, some follow the custom of reclining on pillows and leaning to the side while drinking the four cups of wine and eating matzah at the Seder.

**SEDER** - On the first two nights of Passover, we conduct a ritual meal called a *Seder*—literally, “order” in Hebrew. The meal has a very carefully constructed *order* consisting of many rituals which are mapped out by the *Haggadah*. The many symbols involved in this feast are meant to remind us on the one hand of the bitterness of slavery and, on the other hand, of the great joy of liberation. These rituals are intertwined with a retelling of the story of the exodus from Egypt.

**ASHKENAZI JEWS** - Jews of Eastern European descent.

**SEPHARDI JEWS** - Jews of Spanish descent.

# FOOD FOR PASSOVER

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## ***MATZOH BRIE***

- 2 sheets matzah
  - 2 eggs, beaten
  - Splash of milk
  - Salt and Pepper to taste
1. Wet matzah under running water. (The wetter the matzah, the softer the result.) Egg matzah also produces a softer pancake.
  2. Break it up into pieces the size of a cracker. Pour boiling water over the broken pieces until they are consistently soggy. Drain and press all the water out of the collander. Place drained matzah into large bowl.
  3. Pour in the eggs that have been scrambled and add salt/pepper as desired and stir.
  4. Fry mixture in frying pan in a little oil or butter. Make either small pancakes, or a large cake the size of your frying pan. This can be cut into wedges, or served to one hungry individual.
  5. Sprinkle with sugar, or cinnamon and sugar, or spread with fruit jam.

## ***MATZOH BALLS***

- 4 large eggs
  - 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
  - 1/2 cup seltzer
  - 1 cup matzah meal
  - Salt and freshly ground pepper
1. Mix eggs well with a fork. Add rest of ingredients and mix well. Cover and refrigerate for several hours.
  2. Dip your hands in cold water and make about ten balls slightly smaller than ping-pong balls.
  3. Bring water to a boil in a large pot. Add salt and place the matzah balls in the water. Cover and simmer for about thirty minutes until soft.

# FOOD FOR PASSOVER

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## *EGGPLANT LASAGNA FOR PASSOVER*

- 1 jar of tomato sauce
- 1 eggplant
- 8 cloves of garlic
- 2 onions
- 5 mushrooms
- 8 oz. of grated mozzarella cheese
- 1/2 cup of parmesan cheese
- 1/4 tsp. oregano, hot pepper flakes and rosemary (dried)
- 5 pieces of matzah

A food processor makes this very quick, but it's not necessary

1. Cut up the eggplant into quarters and then slice very thinly, sauté in oil until it reduces into mush.
2. Cut and chop the onions, mushrooms and garlic all together and sauté in oil, sprinkle in the spices, about a 1/4 tsp. of each, and mix all the eggplant and onions all together.
3. Grate the cheese, and spray Pam into a small rectangular baking dish.
4. Pour some sauce into the dish and lay down some of the *Matzah* into the sauce, like noodles.
5. Spread on the sautéed veggies, sprinkle on more spices, some parmesan cheese and more sauce.
6. Continue this until you use up your ingredients, ending with cheese on top.
7. Bake at 350 for about 35-40 minutes, slice up and it is like lasagna.....very tasty.

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