

# ALL ABOUT PASSOVER



## What is Passover?

Passover (*Pesakh* in Hebrew) is a holiday that celebrates the Jews' Exodus from Egypt. It's a time to celebrate our freedom and to remember and commit ourselves to the cause of those still in bondage. Its most essential ritual is the sharing of the *seder* meal.

## When is it?

Passover begins on the 15th day of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish calendar, and typically falls in April. Passover is celebrated for seven days by some Jewish communities and for eight days by others; the discrepancy dates back to the ancient Jewish calendar.

## What do I need to celebrate Passover?

**Bedikat Khametz** The night before Passover, it's customary to remove all *khametz* (leavened foods) from the household. Traditionally, this is done as a sort of hide-and-seek performed by candlelight or flashlight. Crumbs are gathered with a feather and wooden spoon and then thrown out or burned the next morning before the holiday officially begins. Leavened foods are banished from the household throughout the holiday; some Jews extend this to rice, corn and legumes, though that is a custom and not required.

**Matzah** This unleavened "bread of affliction" is eaten during Passover. It is a reminder that the Israelite slaves left Egypt in such haste that they did not have time to wait for their bread to rise.

**Seder** The ritualistic meal at the heart of Passover. It is a multi-sensory experience that includes a recounting of the Exodus through stories, songs, blessings, foods, dramatizations and discussions.

**Seder Plate** This plate contains the symbolic foods used during the *seder* meal:

- **Karpas** Greens symbolizing the freshness of spring. These are dipped in saltwater, which symbolizes the tears of slavery.
- **Kharoset** A sweet condiment, often made from apples, wine, nuts and cinnamon, symbolizing the mortar used by slaves.
- **Beitza** A roasted egg symbolizing renewal, spring and the offering historically made during this season at the time of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.
- **Maror** Bitter herbs symbolizing the bitterness of slavery.
- **Zeroa** A roasted bone symbolizing the sacrificial Passover lamb and God's outstretched arm, which led the Jews out of slavery in Egypt.

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**Haggadah** The text used at the *seder* to tell the story of the Exodus.

**Conversation** Passover is a good opportunity to discuss the themes of oppression and bondage, how they apply in modern times and how they might be eradicated.

**Shulkhan Oreikh** The festive meal eaten during the *seder*, which is a time to give thanks for blessings.

**Elijah** This Biblical prophet has a symbolic presence at the *seder*. It's traditional to pour a cup of wine into the "Cup of Elijah" and open the front door to allow Elijah to enter. His presence symbolizes the hope and faith that one day all people will live in peace.

## Additional resources and ideas

*Creating Lively Passover Seders: A Sourcebook of Engaging Tales, Texts & Activities* by David Arnow (a *Haggadah* companion that offers discussion topics, text study ideas, activities and readings).

*1001 Questions and Answers on Pesach* by Jeffrey M. Cohen (comprehensive information on Passover tradition and rituals).

*Let My People Go!* by Tilda Balsley (A rhyming story that describes the Ten Plagues and the Exodus. The story is in script format and can be performed as a play.)

*Only Nine Chairs* by Deborah Uchill Miller (a fun story about handling 19 guests at a *seder* when you only have nine chairs).

[myjewishlearning.com](http://myjewishlearning.com) — a transdenominational website with information about Judaism.

[reformjudaism.org/passover](http://reformjudaism.org/passover) — a great resource for Passover history, customs and how-to.

[facebook/jHUBCle](https://www.facebook.com/jHUBCle) — jHUB's Facebook page and a great resource for interfaith families.

## *Seder in a Box*

The holidays can be particularly stressful for interfaith families. So many traditions, so many rituals. That's why we created *Seder in a Box*, a simple kit which contains everything you need for a Passover seder in your home. You'll receive Passover recipes, a *Seder Plate* (ritual plate), *Haggadah* (the story of Passover used during the *Seder*), and more. A free gift from jHUB to interfaith families living in Greater Cleveland — shipped straight to your door.

## Still have questions?

For more information about Passover, jHUB and interfaith programs or Jewish culture, contact Rabbi Melinda Mersack, Director, at [mmersack@jecc.org](mailto:mmersack@jecc.org), 216-371-0446 x232 or Danya Shapiro, Program Associate, at [dshapiro@jecc.org](mailto:dshapiro@jecc.org), 216-371-0446 x207.

