



## A GUIDE FOR CELEBRATING PASSOVER - פסח - PESACH SEASON OF FREEDOM❖OF JOY❖OF THE EATING OF MATZAH



### ❧THE HISTORY AND MEANING OF PASSOVER❧

The Passover story begins with Joseph, favorite son of Jacob, whose prophetic dreams incurred the envy and ire of his brothers. Eventually betrayed and sold into Egyptian slavery, Joseph's good luck brings him the opportunity to interpret the dreams of the king's royal cupbearers, baker and finally of the Pharaoh himself. The Pharaoh was so impressed that he elevated Joseph to the position of prime minister. In his new position, Joseph had the opportunity to meet his brothers who had come to Egypt in search of food. Joseph asked his brothers and their aged father to move to Egypt and for many years the children of Israel, as they were known, lived in comparative ease and peace.

After the death of Jacob and Joseph, a new Egyptian administration assumed power. Joseph's good deeds and work for Egypt were quickly forgotten; the new Pharaoh feared the numbers of the Israelites and took oppressive steps to reduce them to slavery. In this suddenly changed environment, the Jews labored under the heavy hands of taskmasters. The Pharaoh feared that someone would overthrow him and he was plagued with dreams of his demise. He ordered that all male babies born to Jewish women be destroyed by casting them into the River Nile. It was at this time that Moses was born to Jocheved and Amram. To save her son, Jocheved placed Moses in a reed basket waterproofed with black pitch and floated him down the Nile.

That very day, the Pharaoh's daughter, coming to bathe in the river, saw the floating basket, retrieved it, and received permission to adopt the child giving the baby to Miriam, Moses' sister, who had been on guard. Miriam took her baby brother home to be raised.

Grown to manhood, Moses went into the fields and saw at first how his people were suffering. In solemn thought one day, Moses received a sign from God. He noticed a lowly thornbush burning and out of the bush came a voice. It was the voice of God telling him that he had been selected to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt.

Moses planned for Israel's redemption from slavery with his brother Aaron. Pharaoh was asked to allow the Jews to leave Egypt but he refused to permit his valuable slaves to leave the land. Ten dreadful plagues including frogs, lice, boils, hail and locust, were visited on the Egyptians. The final plague was the death of all the Egyptian first-born. The first-born Jews were saved because God asked Moses to warn the Jews of the plague and to mark their doors with the blood of lambs so that the Angel of Death would pass over their houses.

On the evening of this "Passover," the Jews prepared to depart Egypt. They baked bread in preparation for the journey but in their haste to leave, they had to take unleavened bread (Matzot). Thus began a forty-year sojourn in the desert. Now the Jews were free, no longer slaves, free to live, to think, to worship, to direct their own way of live.

### ❧PREPARING YOUR HOME AND YOURSELF FOR PASSOVER❧

While this can be a complicated procedure and depends upon your personal level of observance, it is important to think ahead about preparing your home for Passover. There are books in our library to assist you but as Passover approaches it is important that those in a Jewish household create a difference in their home and lives during Passover. It is a custom to remove all *chametz*, (foods not suitable for Passover) from your kitchen. You can designate a cabinet and tape it up or put unsuitable foods in the basement. Sealed foods can be stored or donated to a food shelf. Clean out your kitchen thoroughly - a Jewish spring cleaning! The entire cooking area should be scoured. A wide variety of "Kosher for Passover" foods can be found at major supermarkets. If you are just getting started with Passover observance at home, begin by cutting out all bread, pasta and cakes. Move toward using paper or purchase inexpensive "For Passover only" dishes. But don't be overwhelmed, plan, shop and think about your holiday at home and in your everyday life. Think about school lunches, special meals at work, etc. Get help if you want or need more information and specific guidelines, (far too long to include in this guide) for making your home and yourself Passover ready. It is central to celebrating and experiencing the holiday of Passover.



## ❧THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTICIPATING IN OR CREATING A SEDER❧

Many families would like the pleasure of observing the Passover at home but are reluctant to do so because some are self-conscious about conducting a seder with the same force as those who came before, mothers or fathers, uncles or aunts or, even worse, a zayde (grandfather). For others it may be the first time in one's family to take on the joy and responsibility of telling the Passover story in their home through a Seder. Remember that the Seder, above all, tells a story, the story of how the Jewish People moved from slavery to freedom. It makes use of a book and great props to help in the telling. It is heart-lifting and joyful to gather family, friends, and acquaintances around a table to relive Jewish history. It is essential to fulfill this obligation as we renew our lasting commitment to working for freedom for all peoples in our day.

***If you are a member of the Jewish community who is interested in participating in a seder, let Mount Zion Temple know, we will help you find a chair around someone's table!***

## ❧YOU CAN DO IT! MAKING A HOME SEDER❧

*Here are some tips which will help you make a home Seder, large or small, successful:*

1. Make sure that everyone has a Haggadah. There are many beautiful Haggadot now on the market and you have a wide choice. Most synagogues and several book stores carry a wide variety. Resist the give-aways and do try to have your seder guests working out of the same Haggadah!
2. Don't feel that your Seder must be too formal. You may interpolate into the various parts of the service your own comments. This has always been important to the seder experience. You may ask others to do the same. Keep the service moving along, by assigning readers around the table, take time to ask questions, encourage guests to stop and respond. Develop games and activities for young children. A wide variety of Passover activity books are available for younger participants.
3. Look over the Haggadah before the night of the Seder. Decide in advance which parts you can do in Hebrew and which in English, what you might edit and where you can stop for discussion questions or games for the young kids.
4. Make an attempt to sing the songs of the festival. Some will sing the songs in one style; others will use another melody. Some will read Hebrew one way and some another. The very melange of the Hebrew dialects and the variations in the manner of reading portions of the service will illustrate the diversity of Jewish life and add a special flavor to the proceedings. Ask participants to share their seder memories and for those new to the Seder ask them for their reactions.
5. Have the guests recite as many of the blessings as possible in unison, and even certain segments can be read in unison - so as to engage the attention of everyone and make each one feel that she or he is participating in the service.
6. As for the Afikoman, take the time to conceal the matzah carefully in advance. Many hide one matzah for each child so that all children can be winners! Tell the children at the beginning of the Seder an Afikoman hunt will take place after the Seder and then give special prizes to all the kids.

Traditionally, Passover is a time when you can derive both merriment and inspiration from the great saga of the Exodus. Don't lose the opportunity of introducing the Passover spirit into your own home. Both you and your children will feel amply rewarded for the little effort entailed.



## ❧ MEET THE SEDER PLATE! ❧

**Seder:** Seder, a Hebrew word which means order and refers to the order of the service accompanying the meal on the first or second evening of Pesach. The Seder is not merely a dinner, it is a religious celebration.

**Pesach:** Pesach, translated Passover, comes from the Torah where it is stated that God saved the Jewish people by "passing over" their houses as God smote the houses of the Egyptians.

**Haggadah:** Haggadah, which means telling, is the name of the book from which we read the service for the Seder. There are a wide variety of Haggadot (plural) to choose from and it can be fun to browse through the many choices and styles.

**Matzah:** Matzah is Hebrew for unleavened bread. The word for leavening in Hebrew is **chametz**. Matzah is called the "bread of affliction" and as already indicated signifies the hasty provision the Jews ate while leaving Egypt. The three pieces of Matzah represent the religious divisions of ancient Israel: the Kohanim, the Priests; the Levites, the assistants to the Priests; and the Israelites, the rest of the people of Israel.

**Maror:** Maror means bitter herbs, usually in the form of horseradish. This is eaten in order to remind us of the bitterness the Jews suffered as slaves in Egypt.

**Charoset:** A mixture of apples, nuts, cinnamon and wine to call to mind the mortar out of which the Jews made bricks for Pharaoh.

**Cup of Elijah:** Each person at the Seder drinks four cups of wine or grape juice. The four cups symbolize the four-fold promise of redemption which God pledged to Israel. A large goblet of wine which is placed on the table is called the cup of Elijah. Elijah is supposed to be an invisible guest at the Seder. According to Jewish legend, this prophet will announce the coming of the Messianic Age.

**Afikoman:** Half of the middle piece of the three Matzaht placed under a special cover on the table, is hidden during the Seder. It is called the afikoman. At the end of the meal children are given the opportunity to find it and are given prizes. Then the afikoman is distributed to all present. After partaking of the afikoman, a Greek word for dessert, it is customary to eat nothing else.

**Ma Nishtana:** The four questions the youngest child asks at the Seder are sometimes called the ma nishtana. These are the first two Hebrew words of the questions. The narrative of the Haggadah is the reply.

**Roasted Egg:** The roasted egg recalls the special sacrifice which was made in the Temple on all holidays.

**Roasted Lamb Bone:** The roasted lamb bone stands for the paschal lamb the Hebrews offered as a sacrifice on the evening before they left Egypt.

**Parsley (or other greens) and Salt Water:** Parsley is eaten at the Seder to indicate that Pesach is a spring festival. It is dipped in the salt water to make us think of the tears the Jewish mothers shed when their sons were taken from them.



*Our Sisterhood Gift Shop has a fine selection of Seder plates, Matzah covers, Elijah's Cups, Haggadot and Judaica. Call the Temple Office for information and hours.*

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## ❧PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF PASSOVER❧

When I think of Passover of days gone by, I am transported back to my grandmother's seder table. I can taste the Matzah ball soup, latkes, and gefilte fish. My excitement rises as my brothers and I, along with cousins, plan to steal the Afikoman. My grandfather, patriarchal and good-natured pretending not to know where it had gone or who the culprits were. As a child, Passover meant good food, good fun, and a little mischief. All those spirits are still there, for then, as now, Passover is a family time. Today I add reflection to the list. I pay close attention to the story and the miracles therein. I think of all I have to be grateful for as I enjoy the good food, good fun and the mischief in the eyes of my children. For after all, Passover is a family time.

-Aaron Mack

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Passover memories that I can recall began when I was five. My family lived in Iowa, and every spring we would drive to Minneapolis to spend Passover with my Auntie Eva and her husband, Uncle Dave, who happened to be an orthodox rabbi and shochet, a ritual butcher. My sister and I always had a new dress and shoes for our trip to Minneapolis for Passover. The excitement of arriving began with the beautifully set table. The living room was small, but we managed to seat anywhere from twelve to eighteen people around a long rectangular table. My Uncle Dave would sit at the head of the table farthest away from the kitchen. His chair always had arms on it and a large pillow. On his right was a small table with water for washing. On his left was a table for Matzah. The seder plate sat directly in front of him as did Elijah's cup. What I especially remember was that all the children, usually six or eight, sat on either side of Uncle Dave. The adults sat farther away. Uncle Dave wanted the Passover story to be told to the children. Those of us who could read, would take our turn. Back in those days, we didn't get grape juice, but had wine. I remember how hot we all would be after two glasses of wine and a cup of soup. But Uncle Dave made the story so exciting.

It was not unusual for the seder to last four hours. And as closely as we watched, we never could figure out how the Afikoman was hidden. Every year until I was in high school, we went to Uncle Dave's. When he retired, he moved his family to Jerusalem and I never saw him again. He passed away when I was in college.

Today my husband and I are establishing memories for our own children. I hope that when my children reach my age, they can write of their own Passover memories.

-Anne Schaeffer

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I have attended seders for most of my adult life. However, until recently, I have never fully observed this mitzvah--in the past, as someone who was not Jewish, I appreciated Passover because it celebrates humankind's triumph over oppression. But I would pause each time the Haggadah referred to "Our People." The word "our" which refers to the Jewish People, was not part of my reality. Now, as a Jew by Choice, Pesach has taken on a deeper personal meaning because it finally connects "me" to "we", to "us", to "our." These four words of inclusion, used throughout our seder are further connected to additional groupings of four -- the four questions, four children, four promises and four glasses of wine found in the seder.

In each generation the seder service teaches us to look upon ourselves as though we personally were among those who went forth out of Egypt. In doing so, we recognize that the struggle for freedom is a continuous one which we are duty-bound to contribute to through faith and action. For me, the number four is important because it reminds us of struggle, freedom, duty and faith. These four messages serve to connect me to our journey as a People, my continuing journey as a Jew.

-Jim Jarvis

MAY THIS PASSOVER BE ONE WHERE YOUR JEWISH JOURNEY LEADS YOU ALONG A PATH OF MEANING AND CELEBRATION

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