

Getting Ready for Pesach/Passover 2017

This year, Passover begins at sundown on April 10th (the 15th of Nisan). According to the Reform interpretation of time, it ends at sundown on Friday, April 17th; according to other movements, it ends at sundown on Tuesday evening, April 18th (one day was added to the holiday in ancient time in order to ensure that it be celebrated at the correct time; many Jews continue this custom). For a more in-depth explanation of the differences in practice, go to <http://www.reformjudaism.org/passover-7-or-8-days>.

While Passover is probably one of the most loved and most celebrated of Jewish holidays, it is also one that is a cause of anxiety for many people. For those who didn't grow up with all of the traditions and customs, it can be overwhelming trying to figure out what to do—both to prepare your home, as well as to observe the holiday. (It can be overwhelming even for those who did grow up with them!). For more basic information, go to <http://www.reformjudaism.org/jewish-holidays/passover-pesach>.

Many Jews, including those who identify with the Reform Movement, choose to observe the holiday very strictly; others choose to observe only parts of it. Some choose to add a little more each year, in a never-ending effort to learn more and grow and deepen in their understanding and appreciation of the holiday. However much you choose to do, I hope that this short guide will help you “make Pesach” in a way that is meaningful to you.

Maot Chittim: “Money for Wheat”: As is the custom at many other times of the year, we think of others who are less fortunate than we. Particularly as we prepare for Pesach, we think of those Jews who may not have enough money to purchase *matzah* and the other necessary items to observe the holiday. It is customary to give *tzedakah* so that they may do so. You might want to contribute money or Kosher for Passover foods to Jewish Family Services, or to another organization that provides food for those who are hungry. You can also make a donation to my discretionary account, which I will give to an appropriate organization or recipient (most likely Mazon).

Preparing your house: One of the main *mitzvot* (“sacred obligations”) of Pesach is to not eat *chametz* (leavened bread or any leavening agent) during the holiday. Traditionally, one should not even *own* any *chametz*. Because this can pose a financial hardship for many, the ancient rabbis determined that you can sell any *chametz* which is still in your possession (boxed up and put in your garage for the duration of the holiday, for example) to someone else. It is then bought back after the holiday is over. If you want to sell your *chametz*, see the form at the end of this description.

Preparing yourself: This year, Passover offers an even more poignant opportunity to think about the many millions of people throughout the world who are still enslaved or fleeing oppressive regimes. Eating only *matzah* and other unleavened products can remind us of the painful realities of those living in poverty or trying to reach safer places with little food or

means along the way. Eating this way throughout the week of Passover can sensitize us to their plight, and remind us of our own abundance, and ability to share with others. From this perspective too, *chametz* can be seen as those parts of ourselves, our egos, that get puffed up from pride and a false sense of self and security. How fortunate we are; how much we have—relative to those who have so little. Perhaps we can give the amount we might otherwise spend on food this week to an organization that is supporting those who are current-day refugees. This year, the holiday challenges us to consider how we might be able to help others live in greater freedom.

Chametz: With Passover, as with all aspects of Jewish life, there is a spectrum of observance. The basic mitzvah (what I like to translate as “sacred obligation”) is to not to eat leavened products (*chametz*). Therefore, we don’t eat food made with wheat, rye, barley, oats, spelt—unless the making of these products is supervised, in order to ensure that these have not leavened (Exodus 12:15-20). Leavening is caused when the grain or its products come in contact with water (this doesn’t include being moistened by other liquids, such as undiluted fruit juices).

According to Talmudic tradition, grain cannot become *chametz* until it is milled into flour. At that stage, if it comes into contact with water for a period of 18 minutes, it is assumed that the process of leavening has begun. So the *matzah* that we buy in the store (as well as all the Kosher for Pesach products that are now so readily available) have been carefully supervised to make sure that it has not yet reached the leavening stage. (Whew!) Some people who want to be really, really strict make a point of eating *Shmura Matzah*, which is *matzah* made from wheat that has been supervised from the time of reaping.

There are several types of leaven: those that are grain and its products, and those that have some sort of leaven product mixed in. There are a large number of products in this latter category; therefore, many items need a *hechsher* (certification) to show they are free of an admixture. Ashkenazi Jews later added rice, corn, peas, beans, peanuts to this list (because when made into flour, they can be mistaken for flour. Legumes and corn are not allowed, because they may have been confused with grain. Beverages that contain grain alcohol are forbidden (whiskey and bourbon--from fermented cereals--are prohibited, whereas brandy--from fermented grapes or other fruits--is permitted!). For a more extensive discussion of foods that are/are not permitted, and some of the items that are a bit controversial, go to <http://www.reformjudaism.org/food-restrictions-passover-explained-chametz-and-kitniyot>.

Cleaning the House: If you want to stretch and deepen your own observance of Pesach, you must engage in a very thorough cleaning: washing and scrubbing countertops, sinks, the oven and range, the refrigerator. Remove any/all *chametz* (or box up and tape shut, or cover with tin foil). Kitchen utensils and dishware normally used in the home all year round are not used during *Pesach*; if they are all metal or all glass, they can be kashered (made kosher). The laws of *kashering* appliances, dishes and cutlery is extensive; you can easily find guidelines on the internet, such as

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Passover/At_Home/Kashering.shtml?HYJH. Special dishes and utensils for *Pesach* are taken out of storage, cleaned and used.

Searching for *Chametz*: On the evening before the Seder (Sunday, April 9th), as soon as the sun goes down, it is time to thoroughly search your house for *chametz* (by this point you would have already finished up, donated, or boxed up any of your *chametz* products, so this is largely symbolic). It is customary to distribute 10 small pieces of some form of *chametz* beforehand, so that there is something to find! Just don't forget where you put all the pieces! Then say the blessing below, and quietly, by the light of a candle, go around the house and sweep with a feather any *chametz* that you find into a spoon, and deposit all pieces in one pile (perhaps in a coffee can).

Ba-ruch ah-tah Ado-nai e-lo-hay-nu meh-lech ha-olam ah-sheer ki-de-sha-nu b-mitz-vo-tav v-tzi-va-nu al bee-ur chametz.

Blessed are You, Eternal our G-d, Source of all in the universe, who has given us opportunities for holiness through the *mitzvot*, and given us the holy opportunity of removal of *chametz*.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל
בְּעוֹר חֶמֶץ.

Finally, after the search, set the *chametz* pieces aside until the next morning. Recite the following: "Any *chametz* or leaven which is in my possession and which I have not seen, nor disposed of, nor knew about, may it be considered as null and ownerless as the dust of the earth." The next morning, Monday, April 10th, before 10:00 a.m., burn the *chametz* that was found together with the bag and the feather. Don't forget to include any leftovers from breakfast!

Recite the following declaration after the *chametz* is burned:

"Any *chametz* (leavened bread) or leaven that is in my possession whether I have seen it or not, whether I have disposed it or not, may it be considered as null and as ownerless like the dust of the earth."

Put out all of your Pesach dishes, foodstuffs, and items. Set your table for your *Seder*, or—if you are going to one—get ready for that. If you need a *haggadah*, there are now many that can be purchased, or even downloaded from off the internet. One that is particularly relevant for these days is the T'ruah Haggadah, which can be purchased or downloaded and printed out at home: <http://live-truah.pantheonsite.io/resources/the-other-side-of-the-sea/>. It has modern and classical texts which look at fighting modern slavery. I've always also liked **A Different Night: The Family Participation Haggadah**, by Noam Zion and David Dishon (The Shalom Hartman Institute, Jerusalem, Israel. Go

through the *haggadah*, decide which parts you will do, and which you will ask others to read. You are now ready for the holiday! Enjoy!

The Seder itself . . .

Here are a few suggestions to make your Seders (s'darim) more meaningful.

- This year, take time during your Seder to address some pressing contemporary issues. T'ruah has some great resources: <http://www.truah.org/resources/crying-out-against-mass-incarceration-haggadah-supplement/>, as well as a new haggadah that addresses human trafficking issues (it can also be downloaded: http://www.truah.org/?post_type=resource&campaign=&program=&resource-types=&holiday=pesachpassover¶sha=&subject=&s=).
- The Reform Movement also offers some excellent resources: <http://www.reformjudaism.org/jewish-holidays/passover-pesach>. It also offers a section to add during the Four Children that addresses racial justice (<http://www.reformjudaism.org/jewish-holidays/passover/four-children-racial-justice-haggadah-insert>).
- Invite participants to come in costume!
- Divide up the parts of the *haggadah* ahead of time, and ask different participants to be responsible for bringing their own creative interpretation to that part. They could do a skit, relate it to a contemporary situation, write a poem, etc.
- Talk about forms of modern slavery today, and think about ways that you can help address this contemporary plague.
- Buy small things that represent the plagues, and put them around the tables.
- Have children make centerpieces for the tables.

Other Resources

My People's Passover Haggadah, Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries, Vol. 1 & 2, Edited by Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, Ph.D. and David Arnow, PhD. (also the author of Creating Lively Passover Seders: A Sourcebook of Engaging Tales, Texts, and Activities) (Jewish Lights)

1001 Questions and Answers on Pesach, Jeffrey M. Cohen, (Jason Aaronson, Inc., 1996).

Selling Chametz

Not only must we not eat any *chametz*, but the Torah also tells us not to have any *chametz* in our possession throughout the holiday (Ex. 12:19). In order to observe this mitzvah, some people will sell their *chametz* to another person who is not bound by this same mitzvah. If you would like the rabbi to help sell your *chametz*, please fill out the form below and send to Rabbi Zari @ rabbi@khnseattle.org by, Friday morning, April 7th at 10:00 a.m.

Authorization to Sell *Chametz*

I, _____, hereby authorize Rabbi Zari Weiss to act as my agent to sell in my name and on my behalf, all *chametz* owned and possessed by me (knowingly or unknowingly), wherever it may be (at home, place of business, or elsewhere) in accordance with the requirements and provisions of Jewish law.

Name _____

Address (home) _____

Address (Business) _____

It is also a mitzvah to make a voluntary donation for *Maot Hittim*, which is money that will enable Jews less fortunate to purchase food for Passover.

I enclose \$ _____ for *Maot Hittim* (checks may be made out to KHN—Rabbi’s Discretionary Account). Please return this form to Rabbi Zari at rabbi@khnseattle.org no later than Friday morning, April 7th at 10:00 a.m.