



**InterfaithFamily.com**

Encouraging Jewish Choices & A Welcoming Jewish Community

# GUIDE TO PASSOVER FOR INTERFAITH COUPLES

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## **What is Passover/Pesach?**

Passover is to many Jews the most important of all Jewish holidays. It has that status not only because it recounts the foundational story of Jewish history, the Exodus from Egypt, but also because many Jewish families come together on Passover for a full family celebratory meal. In some Jewish families this is as or more important a family time as Thanksgiving or Christmas. Passover celebrates the biblical story of the Israelites' liberation from Egyptian slavery through a ritualized meal called a seder.

Some people celebrate Passover for eight days, while others celebrate it for seven.

## **Passover: The Family Holiday**

According to the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-'01, more American Jews observe Passover than any other Jewish holiday--even more than light Hanukkah candles. What this observance means varies widely from family to family. Jewish families celebrate Passover in a variety of ways, from strictly following dietary rules for eight days, to holding a festive meal that includes most typical Passover foods, to simply gathering together as a family.

## **The Seder: A Ritual Meal**

Seder is the Hebrew word for order. This meal at Passover has an order to its rituals and to the way the foods are served at the table. There is a religious service before the meal that follows the liturgy in the haggadah, which means the telling in Hebrew. At most seders, all participants have a copy of a short booklet called a haggadah at their elbow, to follow the order of the seder.

The seder is set up like a dinner party in the ancient world. Reclining like Greeks or Romans, we drink wine during a seminar on the Exodus from Egypt before the main meal. (Most families accomplish this reclining by sticking a pillow in the service leader's chair, but you might get one, too.) Then there is a great feast with wine, and following the meal the singing of blessings and songs. The haggadah instructs the eating of ritual foods to help tell the story and set the mood.

## **Haggadah: The Passover Guide and Storybook**

The haggadah, Hebrew for "the telling," is the liturgy for the Passover seder. The traditional haggadah (plural haggadot or haggadahs) includes the preparation ritual of removing hametz (non-kosher-for-Passover food) from the home before Passover, a listing of the order of operations of the seder and a retelling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt, with additional prayers and songs.

Most of the haggadah is in Hebrew or Aramaic, the ancient languages of Jewish life and prayer in the Middle East, usually with a translation on the facing page. Many modern haggadot have a retelling of the story without much Hebrew or Aramaic, and may include readings and songs from other traditions and parts of history that fit with Passover themes.

Haggadot will often have song lyrics and musical notation to help new singers learn the melodies. Modern haggadot may have an accompanying CD to play along with the story to help the non-singers at the table or for seders where everyone is a newcomer to the experience. Some publishers have included transliteration of the Hebrew into English letters, so that everyone can join in with the Hebrew singing and chanting at the meal.

If you are a first-time guest at the seder, your hosts will provide a haggadah for you to use, and you can follow the lead of your hosts about how to participate. If you are planning a seder at your house for the first time, we have included a list of some suggested haggadahs you can purchase or download from the internet (see Additional Resources, page 20). You can go in person to your local Judaica shop, synagogue gift shop or Jewish bookstore to browse through the choices, or shop on the web.

**So you got invited to your boyfriend/girlfriend's house for seder... Does that mean you should expect a ring?**

In some families, bringing a boyfriend or girlfriend home for Passover indicates a strong level of commitment. In other families, holiday tables are open to everyone, and the more the merrier; your partner may not intend to signal anything by bringing you home. You may not know until you get there--unless you ask. Because Passover is a family holiday with the status of Thanksgiving or Christmas, you can learn a lot about your partner's family as a Passover guest, even if he or she didn't bring you along to show that the relationship is serious.

## Your Turn to Host the Seder?

Perhaps you've turned to this guide because you have married into a Jewish family and this year, it's your family's turn to host the Passover seder. Passover is a perfect holiday to honor your own background while teaching your children about Judaism and connecting with your Jewish relatives. The themes of liberation and family origins in the traditional haggadah text can expand to include your experience. We've included a bibliography of resources for families leading a Passover seder to help you make something meaningful for everyone.

Here's the short list of what you'll be doing:

- Preparing the house for Passover
- Inviting guests (this doesn't require formal invitations! A phone call or email will do it.)
- Planning the seder service, including providing copies of the haggadah you choose for each participant
- Planning and coordinating the cooking of a festival meal, including wine or grape juice and ritual foods. To satisfy most Jewish guests, you'll need to do your best to prepare foods that are kosher for Passover. To be safe, pick up a Passover cookbook or a Jewish cookbook from the bookstore or library--they will have lots of kosher-for-Passover recipes.
- Enjoying your family and friends the night of the seder!

It can be a lot of work to host a seder, and we hope that your enjoyment on seder night will be considerable.

## **When is Passover, Anyway? A Guide to Jewish Time**

Usually when Jewish people speak of something being on Jewish time, they are joking and they mean it's going to be late. There is also a Jewish time--a sense of months and even of days--that is part of Jewish religion and spirituality. Passover, like all Jewish holidays, starts and ends at sundown, and is tied to the phases of the sun and the moon. Passover always falls on the same date in the Jewish calendar. Like all Jewish holidays, Passover floats through the secular calendar. The Jewish calendar is set up to keep Jewish holidays at the same season of the year and the same phase of the moon; Passover will always begin on a full moon in the spring.

In many Reform Jewish communities, Passover is celebrated for seven days, not eight. In more traditional Jewish communities--including both Orthodox and Conservative communities--Passover is celebrated for eight days.

Here are the dates of Passover--starting and ending at sundown--for the next 10 years:

- April 19, 2008-April 27, 2008 (ends April 26 if celebrated for seven days)
- April 8, 2009-April 16, 2009 (ends April 15 if celebrated for seven days)
- March 29, 2010-April 6, 2010 (ends April 5 if celebrated for seven days)
- April 18, 2011-April 26, 2011 (ends April 25 if celebrated for seven days)
- April 6, 2012-April 14, 2012 (ends April 13 if celebrated for seven days)
- March 25, 2013-April 2, 2013 (ends April 1 if celebrated for seven days)
- April 14, 2014-April 22, 2014 (ends April 21 if celebrated for seven days)
- April 3, 2015-April 11, 2015 (ends April 10 if celebrated for seven days)
- April 22, 2016-April 30, 2016 (ends April 29 if celebrated for seven days)
- April 10, 2017-April 18, 2017 (ends April 17 if celebrated for seven days)
- March 30, 2018-April 7, 2018 (ends April 7 if celebrated for seven days)

All dates are from [www.hebcal.com](http://www.hebcal.com), where you can enter your zip code and find out what time any holiday or Shabbat begins in your area.

## **Wait, the First Seder? There's More Than One?**

In addition to being tied to nature, the Jewish calendar is also connected to Jewish history. It was the custom in the Second Temple period to start the new months in the Jewish communities in Babylonia (present-day Iraq) and elsewhere when the new moon was sighted in Jerusalem. Because of the uncertainty surrounding when the new moon appeared in Jerusalem, it became a Jewish custom outside of Palestine to observe all holidays for two days. Some Jews still do this, and hold a seder on both the first and second night of Passover. Others hold only one seder, on the first night.

## **Pre-Passover Preparation**

Before Passover begins, many Jews have already begun their holiday observance in a flurry of preparations. Preparing for Passover includes both a literal house cleaning and a ritual one. Traditional Jews remove any foods that are leavened or fermented, like bread, vinegar or beer, or that contain any ingredients that could be made into something fermented, like flour. By searching for and removing all the leavened foods, such as bread, pasta and crackers (called "hametz" in Hebrew), traditional Jews ready their kitchens for the Passover foods they will eat at the seder and the rest of the week of Passover.

Some families try not to have any hametz at all in their possession. One way to do this is to plan ahead and eat up all the leavened food before the cleaning begins, or to donate sealed-up packages of hametz to food banks. Since food is expensive and Passover is only one week long, some Jewish families sell any unused portions of leavened products to neighbors who aren't Jewish, and then buy them back after the holiday. That way, the hametz isn't technically in their possession, even though they are actually storing it in sealed-up boxes in the basement, and even though they sold the food for some tiny amount of pocket change. Some congregations use the legal fiction of the hametz "sale" as an excuse to give money to tzedakah (charity): they deputize their rabbi to sell the food for them, and give him or her a check to be their agent. The rabbi sells the leavened food to non-Jews and donates the agent money to charity.

After the householders have cleaned thoroughly, they may perform a ritual called bidikat hametz, the Search for Leavening. In this ritual, one person hides 10 bread crumbs throughout the house and then the family searches for them by candlelight, using a feather to scoop them into a paper cone or envelope, and taking them outside and burning the whole thing (feather and all) with the inclusion of a wooden spoon or stick to make sure the fire lasts long enough to consume the crumbs. If you want to try this ritual, you can see more detailed instructions at <http://www.askmoses.com/article/199,67426/How-do-I-do-the-Search-for-Chametz-Bedikat-Chametz.html>.

Removing the hametz is a symbolic way to remind us to pay attention to aspects of our character that have become inflated, like pride and vanity. Some use this ritual to think about what the metaphorical hametz is in their lives, and to take the opportunity to cleanse themselves of it. As they search for the ten pieces of bread spread through all the rooms of the home, they can also look into all the corners of their lives and leave no hidden parts of themselves unexamined. The act of removing the leavening can also help us give away the objects that we have accumulated that might benefit others, like extra winter clothing or towels and blankets and toys. Along with the literal benefits of regular thorough house cleaning, this is also an opportunity to engage the whole family in thinking through this ritual and their lives.

In modern Jewish lives, removal of the packaged hametz may be stored in the basement or in a cabinet with tape over it saying "do not touch until after Passover". Some Jewish families don't perform the ritual of removing hametz, and some only "Keep Passover" for the seder meal. There is no ritual or proscription in Judaism that is followed by everyone, nor are they followed the same way in every home and every year. If you're a guest, it is always best to ask your host what their traditions are and how you might help to keep those traditions when you are preparing to arrive.

## **Inviting Guests**

It is also a tradition to invite guests to the seder. Many people will invite travelers, neighbors, and friends, both Jewish and not Jewish. The idea at Passover is to be hospitable and inclusive, to the best of a household's ability. There is a tradition of leaving an empty place setting and chair at the table for the biblical prophet Elijah, who in Jewish legend will herald the coming of the messiah. This seat is often seen as a way of leaving one chair for a last minute invite, but some families leave the chair empty.

## **Passover Cooking**

Cooking for Passover is complicated and has provided an opportunity for Jewish culinary invention. Passover food has to be made with ingredients that don't contain leavened ingredients. They also can't be made with forbidden ingredients like barley and wheat that can become leavened.

Since most Jews in the United States are descended from immigrants from Eastern Europe, they tend to follow the stricter rules of the rabbis in the Ashkenazi tradition, including extra prohibitions on legumes, such as peas, beans and lentils. If the family you are visiting is from the Middle East or North Africa and follows the Sephardic tradition, they might eliminate leavened food but still eat rice and legumes. Or the family might have been influenced by both traditions, and you might find them ridding the house of rice but still eating peanut butter on their matzah. There is a lot of variation.

The main restriction is on grains that might be ground into flour and fermented with yeast to rise. The exception is, of course, matzah. Matzah is a large flat bread made of wheat flour or other grains permitted on Passover. Matzah bakers mix the flour with water only and bake it immediately in a hot oven so that it does not have a chance to rise.

Jews have a long tradition of grinding matzah into a flour-like consistency, called matzah meal, to make ersatz versions of non-Passover foods. It can be very confusing to go into a supermarket and find Passover cereal, Passover pasta and Passover cake mix, when you know that traditional Jews are avoiding regular cold cereal, pasta and cake mix. This is just the modern version of Jews rising to the culinary challenge of Passover, to keep the laws that commemorate the Exodus from Egypt without giving up all of life's goodies.

Your best bet for finding kosher-for-Passover recipes is a Passover cookbook or kosher cookbook, both of which are available at most bookstores and libraries.

## Passover Foods: Foods That Tell the Seder Story

The ritual foods of Passover tell the biblical story of the Exodus from Egypt and the story of the rabbis who wrote the haggadah.

- **Matzah** is the primary story-telling food at Passover. It represents our fleeing Egypt and having to make bread in haste, without time to rise, and it represents affliction and the poverty of slavery in its flat, tasteless, dry form filled with holes. There are three matzot on the seder plate, piled on top of each other. The middle matzah is broken at the beginning of the meal; half is hidden at the beginning of the meal and searched for at the conclusion of the meal. It is called the Afikoman (see below). Matzah is the only bread that is eaten with a Passover seder meal.
- **Haroset** is a sweet thick or chunky fruit and nut dip that is meant to symbolize the mortar that Jewish slaves built Egyptian buildings with. Jews of European descent usually make it with apples, nuts, honey, sweet wine and cinnamon. Jews from other lands have other ingredients, but it is always ground or chopped to resemble mortar, and is usually brown in overall color.
- **Salt water** represents the tears of slaves and the water of the sea that parted so the Jews could cross into freedom.
- **Parsley** represents the rebirth of spring and the hope for the harvest that happens in late spring in the Middle East, at the end of the rainy season.
- **A roasted egg** represents rebirth, and the roasting reminds us of the Passover sacrifice brought to the Temple in Jerusalem in ancient times.
- **A shank bone of a lamb** also represents the Pascal offering made at the temple in Jerusalem in the early spring. Sometimes a chicken neck is substituted for the bone, and in vegetarian homes, a beet or a carrot may be substituted.
- **Maror** is any bitter herb, often horseradish or bitter greens like chicory or endive, and represents the bitterness of slavery.
- **Hillel sandwich** is a sandwich made of matzah, maror and haroset. Its combination of sweet and bitter tastes reminds us that life is a combination of joy and pain. Hillel is known as one of the greatest rabbis of all time, and he is the leader of the primary school of Jewish thought at the beginning of the first millennium.
- **Afikoman**, the Greek word for dessert, is a piece of the middle matzah on the seder plate, and is hidden at the beginning of the seder and hunted at the end of the seder to keep the children engaged. In some households, the seder is not finished until the afikoman is ransomed back to the family and a little piece is eaten by everyone.
- **An orange** is added by some Jews to represent the historical marginalization of homosexuals and/or women.
- **Olives** are sometimes included to represent the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. Other symbolic foods have been added to the seder plate over the years--Passover is a very flexible holiday, and different families and communities adapt it to their concerns and passions.

## Passover Foods: Traditional Foods (or, What Is This?)

The food we serve at the Passover meal also tells our own family stories through traditional dishes.

Passover foods are alien to most people who have not celebrated the holiday before. All families have different traditions, but there are some foods common to most Jewish households in the United States.

- **Horseradish** is what most American Jews use for the ritual bitter herbs in the Passover seder. If you've never had it, be careful: it's related to mustard and wasabi, and is strong and pungent.
- **Matzah ball soup**, either chicken or vegetarian based, is a favorite holiday food. Matzah balls are dumplings made from matzah meal and eggs.
- **Gefilte fish** is a poached fish ball or patty made of chopped deboned freshwater fish, eggs and matzah meal. Many families eat it with horseradish to give it a kick.
- **Matzah or potato kugel** is a sweet or savory pudding served as a side dish at the Passover meal.
- **Tzimmis** is a mixture of fruits and vegetables, often carrots, potatoes and dried fruits. Sometimes meat or chicken is added, and the tzimmis cooked into a sweet and savory side dish.
- **Sponge cake, macaroons, meringues** and other eggy desserts are traditional for Passover.

## **Passover Themes Meaningful to Interfaith Families**

The Passover story is the primary story in Jewish history, and one Jews retell in short form at every prayer service in the words "...God, who freed us from Egyptian bondage..." Passover is an occasion to retell the whole story. But telling the story is not enough.

Passover is a holiday that the Jewish community has used, throughout the centuries, to remind us of our heritage of freeing others because we were freed. It is the "slavery to freedom" theme that is central to our command to be more than simply good people, but to be people who pursue justice for others.

Along with an end to slavery, in the literal sense, Passover also has the power to teach us about other types of liberation. We might focus on warfare, on poverty, on healthcare systems, on homelessness, on bigotry, on abuse in the home and a whole host of other issues important in a world of creating and restoring justice.

Passover is also a story about journeys. Therefore it might be a time to tell our spiritual journeys to each other. We might help each other by discussing and attempting to solve problems that have been plaguing us (pun intended) for weeks or months. And each of the Passover foods that tell the Exodus story also helps us to tell our current stories.

Regardless of the themes chosen, by any particular seder gathering, conversation and supportive argument is key to a successful Passover meal. While some homes don't choose this path, it is customary in traditional Jewish homes.

## **Engaging Children and Adults**

The Passover seder is meant to be engaging. The most traditional seder features storytelling, singing, foods as teaching tools, questions and answers, and an emotional journey.

Children have a special role in the seder. It's traditional for the youngest child to recite the Four Questions in the haggadah. Passover traditions have a strong sense of play. In many families the adults hide the afikoman for the children to find, or the children steal the afikoman and hide it from the adults. Many Passover customs exist solely for the purpose of making the children ask more questions.

Today, we can enhance our seders with puppets and plays, toy plagues to throw at each other, poetry and songs of freedom. People use the format of the seder to celebrate themes of freedom and justice, and the connection of the Jewish historical experience with those of other people. There are Black-Jewish seders that share the history of slavery. There are Israeli-Palestinian seders that share the pain of occupation and violence. And there are rainbow seders for all kinds of inclusive learning and community.

If your family is leading a seder, you can make it meaningful to all who come to the table: children and adults, Jewish and non-Jewish relatives and friends. We have provided a list of haggadahs and other Passover resources to help you create an engaging seder that addresses the universal themes of liberation and family origins of Passover (see Additional Resources, page 20).

## **Temple Seders: What to Expect**

The Passover seder is a home observance, and was not traditionally done in synagogue. Here in the U.S., congregations and Jewish organizations have offered public seders for generations. They exist to offer a large community experience of Passover to people who might otherwise be alone on the holiday or unable to create their own seder. Some people will participate in a temple seder one night and attend a home seder on another night of Passover. Temples also offer model seders that are usually geared for the Passover beginner and for families with young children who may not yet be ready to create a big holiday experience at home. You can practice at a model seder and then go home and make your own.

Temple seders make good learning experiences for interfaith families, especially when neither partner in the household has led their own seder. These seders are also good for single people who are away from family. They also serve as a comfortable training ground for people who are considering or have just gone through a conversion process. Anonymity in large crowds often can feel more comfortable for learning than feeling put on the spot at a small private gathering. In any case, however, the job of the leaders is to make the guests feel comfortable enough to join in and safe enough to say no to participating if they are uncomfortable.

Temple seders are often shorter than home seders and are also good for people who want the full experience without the time in preparation and the duration of the meal itself.

For seders in your area, see InterfaithFamily.com's Connections in Your Area (<http://interfaithfamily.planitjewish.com>).

## **Church Seders: What to Expect**

Church seders are a relatively new phenomenon. They came about as a result of the Catholic Church's public apology to the Jewish community for continuing the belief that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus. Once the Church changed its stance on the Jews in the 1960s, it freed up the Christian world to accept the Jewish life of Jesus. Celebrating Passover would have been his tradition as well.

These seders are either intended to recreate a 2,000-year-old meal and celebration, or are similar to the modern Jewish seder which has foods and discussions that are influenced by millennia of experimentation and interaction with the communities in which Jews have lived throughout the world.

While temple seders are built to retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt, Church seders are usually structured around the story of the Last Supper. Many Christian scholars agree that the Last Supper in the New Testament is a symbolic seder meal. It is there to connect the life, death and resurrection of Jesus with the life, slavery and ultimate freedom of the ancient Israelites. Church seders may also share the rituals of a Jewish Passover seder so that worshippers can experience something like what Jesus may have experienced in his lifetime. These are all goals consonant with Christian theology, but do not create a Jewish Passover seder.

Some organizations create interfaith seders around liberation themes. These are all interesting and worthy uses of the Passover seder format, but are not the same as a Passover seder in a family setting.

## Additional Resources

### Online Resources

Barenblatt, Rachel, ed. *The Velveteen Rabbi's Haggadah for Pesach*.

<http://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/2008/03/velveeen-rabbis.html>

A non-denominational haggadah with a lot of readings in English, transliterations for Hebrew text and good jumping-off points for discussion.

InterfaithFamily.com Staff. "Tips for Interfaith Families: How To Make a Seder Inclusive."

[http://www.interfaithfamily.com/holidays/passover\\_and\\_easter/Tips\\_for\\_Interfaith\\_Families\\_How\\_to\\_Make\\_a\\_seder\\_Inclusive.shtml](http://www.interfaithfamily.com/holidays/passover_and_easter/Tips_for_Interfaith_Families_How_to_Make_a_seder_Inclusive.shtml)

Wiener, Julie. "What you need to know about the seder." *The Island Packet*, April 9, 2008.

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/23884119/>

### How-To Guides

Arnow, David. *Creating Lively Passover Seders: An Interactive Sourcebook of Tales, Texts & Activities*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004.

Kay, Alan Abraham, and Jo Kay. *Make Your Own Passover Seder: A New Approach to Creating a Personal Family Celebration*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

Raphael, Geela Rayzel. "Five Interfaith Passover Readings You Can Add to Your Haggadah." InterfaithFamily.com.

[http://www.interfaithfamily.com/holidays/passover\\_and\\_easter/Five\\_Interfaith\\_Passover\\_Readings\\_You\\_Can\\_Add\\_to\\_Your\\_Haggadah.shtml](http://www.interfaithfamily.com/holidays/passover_and_easter/Five_Interfaith_Passover_Readings_You_Can_Add_to_Your_Haggadah.shtml)

### Cookbooks

Shulman, Zell. *Passover Seders Made Simple*. New York: Wiley, 2001.

A cookbook and guide to planning the menu at your seder.

Wasserman, Debra. *No Cholesterol Passover Recipes*. Baltimore, Md.: Vegetarian Resource Group, 1995.

A vegan Passover cookbook that conforms to strict Ashkenazi Passover kashrut guidelines.

### Haggadahs for Reading and Study

Dishon, David, and Noam Zion. *A Different Night, The Family Participation Haggadah*. Albuquerque, N.M.: Shalom Hartman Institute, 1997.

This non-denominational haggadah is very complete, and makes a good source for reading and study.

Elwell, Sue Levi. *The Open Door: A Passover Haggadah*. New York: Central Conference Of American Rabbis, 2007.

A Reform movement haggadah that is available as a book for purchase, or may be downloaded online at <http://ccarnet.org/publications/haggadah/>.

Hoffman, Lawrence A., and David Arnow. *My People's Passover Haggadah: Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries Volumes 1 and 2*. Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008.

### User-Friendly Haggadahs

Codor, Liora, and Richard Codor. *Richard Codor's Joyous Haggadah: A Children and Family Cartoon Haggadah for Passover Seder*. New York: Loose Line Productions, Inc., 2008.

A new children's haggadah with lively pictures.

Congregation Beth Adam. *Beth Adam - The Seder: A Contemporary Haggadah*. New York: Congregation Beth Adam, 2006.

A non-theistic, humanist seder that contains most of the traditional rituals but no mention of God.

Roekard, Karen. *The Santa Cruz Haggadah*. Capitola, Calif.: Hineni Consciousness Press, 1992.

An accessible haggadah for adults with cartoon illustrations.

Silberman, and Ozeri. *The Jewish World Family Haggadah: With Photographs by Zion Ozeri*. Akron, Ohio: I Books, 2005.

This glossy haggadah is beautifully illustrated with photographs that show Jewish diversity.

Levitt, Joy, and Michael Strassfeld. *A Night of Questions: A Passover Haggadah*. Elkins Park, Pa.: Reconstructionist Press, 1999.

A good haggadah for children and newcomers.