

4/3/2023 - PASSOVER

This Saturday (15 April, 2023) we honor and celebrate with our Jewish Brothers and Sisters as they observe Passover. For us Gentiles (or Non-Jewish people), I would like to share with you that I have learned about it.

Passover, also called Pesach, is a **major Jewish holiday** that occurs in the spring on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Nisan. One of the biblically ordained Three Pilgrimage Festivals, Passover is traditionally celebrated in the Land of Israel for seven days and for eight days among many Jews in the Diaspora, based on the concept of *yom tov sheni shel galuyot*. In the Bible, Passover marks the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egyptian slavery, when God "passed over" the houses of the Israelites during the last of the ten plagues. When the Temple in Jerusalem stood, the paschal lamb was offered and eaten on Passover eve, while the wave offering of barley was offered on the second day of the festival. Nowadays, in addition to the biblical prohibition of owning leavened foods for the duration of the holiday, the Passover seder is one of the most widely observed rituals in Judaism.

The **Passover Seder** (/ˈseɪdər/; Hebrew: סֵדֶר [ˈseder] 'order, arrangement'; Yiddish: סעידער *seyder*) is a ritual feast that marks the beginning of the Jewish holiday of Passover. It is conducted throughout the world on the eve of the 15th day of Nisan in the Hebrew calendar (i.e., at the start of the 15th; a Hebrew day begins at sunset). The day falls in late March or in April of the Gregorian calendar and the Passover lasts for seven days in Israel and eight days outside Israel. Jews generally observe one or two seders: in Israel, one seder is observed on the first night of Passover; many Jewish diaspora communities hold a seder also on the second night. The Seder is a ritual performed by a community or by multiple generations of a family, involving a retelling of the story of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt. This story is in the Book of Exodus (*Shemot*) in the Hebrew Bible. The Seder itself is based on the Biblical verse commanding Jews to retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt: "You shall tell your child on that day, saying, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.'" (Exodus 13:8) Traditionally, families and friends gather in the evening to read the text of the Haggadah, an ancient work derived from the Mishnah (*Pesachim* 10). The Haggadah contains the narrative of the Israelite exodus from Egypt, special blessings and rituals, commentaries from the Talmud, and special Passover songs.

Seder customs include telling the story, discussing the story, drinking four cups of wine, eating matza, partaking of symbolic foods placed on the Passover Seder plate, and reclining in celebration of freedom. The Seder is the most commonly celebrated Jewish ritual, performed by Jews all over the world.

While many Jewish holidays revolve around the synagogue, the Seder is conducted in the family home, although communal Seders are also organized by synagogues, schools and community centers, some open to the general public. It is customary to invite guests, especially strangers and the needy. The Seder is integral to Jewish faith and identity: as explained in the Haggadah, if not for divine intervention and the Exodus, the Jewish people would still be slaves in Egypt. Therefore, the Seder is an occasion for praise and thanksgiving and for re-dedication to the idea of liberation. Furthermore, the words and rituals of the Seder are a primary vehicle for the transmission of the Jewish faith from grandparent to child, and from one generation to the next. Attending a Seder and eating matza on Passover is a widespread custom in the Jewish community, even among those who are not religiously observant.



A Ukrainian 19th-century lubok representing the Seder table

The Seder table is traditionally set with the finest place settings and silverware, and family members come to the table dressed in their holiday clothes. There is a tradition for the person leading the Seder to wear a white robe called a kittel. For the first half of the Seder, each participant will only need a plate and a wine glass. At the head of the table is a Seder plate containing various symbolic foods that will be eaten or pointed out during the course of the Seder. Placed nearby is a plate with three matzot and dishes of salt water for dipping.

Each participant receives a copy of the Haggadah, which is often a traditional version: an ancient text that contains the complete Seder service. Men and women are equally obliged and eligible to participate in the Seder. In many homes, each participant at the Seder table will recite at least critical parts of the Haggadah in the original Hebrew and Aramaic. Halakha (the collective body of Jewish religious laws) requires that certain parts be said in language the participants can understand, and critical parts are often said in both Hebrew and the native language. The leader will often interrupt the reading to discuss different points with his or her children, or to offer a Torah insight into the meaning or interpretation of the words.

In some homes, participants take turns reciting the text of the Haggadah, in the original Hebrew or in translation. It is traditional for the head of the household and other participants to have pillows placed behind them for added comfort. At several points during the Seder, participants lean to the left – when drinking the four cups of wine, eating the Afikoman, and eating the korech sandwich.

Jews generally observe one or two seders: in Israel, one seder is observed on the first night of Passover; many Diaspora communities, sometimes excluding Reform and Reconstructionist Jews, hold a seder also on the second night. Seders have been observed around the world, including in remote places such as high in the Himalaya mountains in Kathmandu, Nepal.

I would like to close with a traditional Evening Jewish Blessing to all:

“Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the world, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Blessed are You, Our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has chosen us from among the peoples, exalting us by hallowing us with mitzvot. In Your love, Adonai our God, You have given us feasts of gladness, and seasons of joy; this Festival of Pesach, season of our freedom, a sacred occasion, a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt. For You have chosen us from all peoples and consecrated us to Your service, and given us the Festivals, a time of gladness and joy.

Blessed are You, Adonai, who sanctifies Israel and the Festivals.”

Shalom,