



setting the

Passover

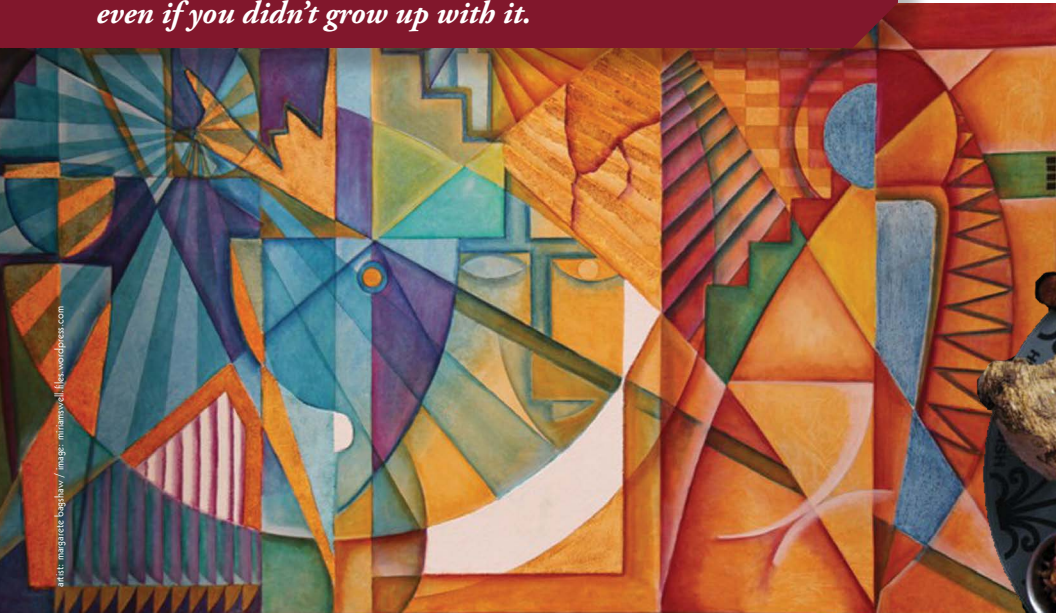
table

18 DOORS

Unlocking Jewish

Passover

Are you feeling overwhelmed by all the details of Passover? Let us make it easy for you to host a seder, even if you didn't grow up with it.



For generations, as Jews prepared for Passover, they have said:

All the hametz
(leavened foods, forbidden during Passover)
in my possession,
whether I have **seen** it or not,
whether I have **removed** it or not,
is hereby nullified and ownerless
as the dust of the earth.

In other words, *I did the best I could and now I will put aside any worries and just enjoy the celebration!* Isn't it great that Jewish tradition knew we could get overwhelmed and gave us this? No need to be a slave to tradition on the holiday of freedom! This booklet gives you background information so that everyone can adapt and customize their experience, even if they have never hosted or even been to a seder before.

Seder

Your Passover table will be set for the ritual meal with ceremonial objects determined by traditions and customized by your creativity. One major goal of the evening is to make the children sit up and take notice so they ask questions. There are many ways to make your table feel different from other nights. You might want to use tablecloths and fine china, decorate the table with flowers and place cards, or drape the room with curtains so it looks like a tent. All these changes are welcome and encouraged. Then every child and adult will notice that this night is different from other nights.



The ritual meal that includes the telling of the story of Passover is called a *seder*. In Hebrew, *seder* means “order.” This story of freedom is told in a set order, which becomes the name for this Passover meal. This order is spelled out in a book called the Haggadah. There are many, many versions of this book, which dates back almost 2,000 years. Because we are commanded to expand upon the story, the Haggadah contains ancient interpretations, as well as stage directions and explanations, for the Passover meal. You might ask each of your guests to bring their favorite Haggadah and compare commentaries or explanations or you could borrow or purchase Haggadot (plural of Haggadah) for each guest.

The seder begins with the lighting of candles. As with Shabbat, candles mark the beginning of the holiday. Some families light one white candle for each family member, others light two for each woman. Wine is also blessed, but with a special Passover blessing.

Seder Plate

The seder plate shows the symbols talked about in the story of Passover as told in the Haggadah.

Some families have a central seder plate on the table, while others make many so that every participant can see the symbols in front of them as the story unfolds.

KARPAS or “crudités”:

Representing the spring season when the first greens appear in the garden. The rebirth of plant life parallels the rebirth of the Jewish people as they escaped bondage in Egypt. Some families use a boiled or baked potato instead of greens, a tradition leftover from a time when greens were hard to find.



HAROSET or “clay”:

Meant to look like the cement used by the Israelite slaves to build the towns in Egypt, this combination of ground nuts, wine and fruit was made with apples in the north and dates in the south of Europe. You can make both or invent a new combination.



MAROR or “bitter”:

Bitter herbs remind us of the bitterness of slavery. You may use horseradish root or ground horseradish or another bitter vegetable, like romaine lettuce. The rabbis of the Talmud preferred romaine lettuce because at first it tastes sweet and only later becomes bitter, much like the experience of the Israelites in Egypt. Some families dip the maror into the haroset to lessen the bitterness.



BEITZAH or “egg”:

A roasted egg symbolizes the second sacrifice that was traditionally offered in the Temple in Jerusalem on every pilgrimage festival (Sukkot, Passover and Shavuot).



ZEROA or “shank bone”:

A lamb shank bone represents the lamb that the Israelites sacrificed before leaving Egypt. To escape the tenth plague, death of all first born children, the slaves were instructed to slaughter a lamb. Its blood was then spread on their doorposts, a sign for the angel of death that it was a Jewish home that should be passed over without harm. Vegetarians may want to substitute something of a similar shape like a turnip or sugar cane, or a red beet for its bloody color.



HAZARET or “horseradish”:

Some seder plates have a 6th place for an additional bitter herb which is used for the Hillel sandwich (a combination of bitter herbs and haroset).

Optional add-ons to the seder plate:

CANDY:

Some families add candies to the seder plate and reward each child who asks a question with a sweet treat.

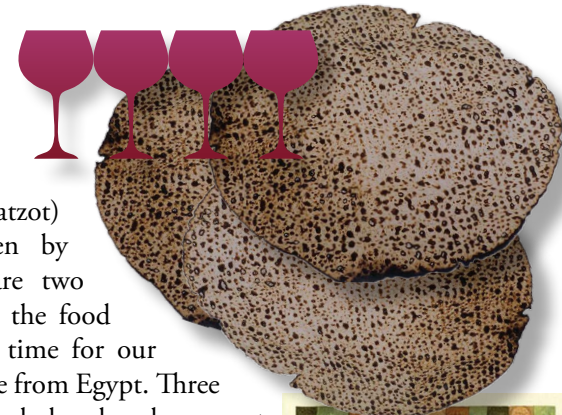
BRICKS:

Jewish Union soldiers in the Civil War could not make haroset to symbolize mortar. Instead, they put a real brick on their plate.

ORANGE:

A newer addition to seder plates, originated by Suzannah Heschel, the orange represents our need to be inclusive of all who feel marginalized within the Jewish community. It was conceived as an affirmation of our welcome of gays and lesbians; however the origins of this custom quickly become mythologized, with many believing the orange represents women's equality in Judaism.

Other Ritual Items



THREE MATZOT:

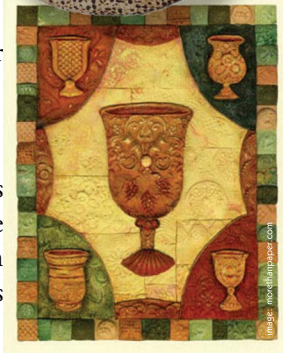
Matzah (singular, the plural is matzot) is the cracker-like bread eaten by Jews during Passover. There are two explanations for this: matzah is the food of poor slaves or there was no time for our bread to rise in our hurried escape from Egypt. Three matzot are covered with a cloth and placed under or next to the seder plate. You will also need enough matzah for your guests to eat during the seder.

SALT WATER:

We dip the greens in salt water. This represents the tears of the Israelites, whose sons were taken from them by the Pharaoh. You may need multiple bowls so all guests can easily dip. You may choose to add other dips for the greens as well.

WINE:

We are commanded to drink four cups of wine (or grape juice) during the seder, so each guest needs their own wine cup. Why four? God made four promises to the children of Israel: I will take them out, I will rescue them, I will redeem them and I will make them my people. Some people also connect each cup to one of the matriarchs: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.



CUP OF ELIJAH:

A large cup filled with wine is placed in the center of the table for Elijah. Why? Because Elijah will accompany the Messiah, he symbolizes our hope for redemption. We open the door and invite Elijah, the prophet of hope and happy endings, as part of the seder ritual.

CUP OF MIRIAM:

A modern custom is to fill a cup with water and place it next to the cup of Elijah. Miriam, the prophet, has many connections to water. She watched over her baby brother Moses as he floated in a reed basket in the Nile and led the women in song after the miracle of the splitting of the sea. A well is said to have followed the Israelites as they traveled through the desert because of Miriam's faith.

HAND-WASHING STATIONS:

In emulation of the ancient priests, ritual hand washing is performed twice during the evening. This may be done at the kitchen sink or with a bowl and pitcher placed near the table.

PILLOWS:

Reclining while eating was a sign of freedom in the ancient world. The Haggadah tells us to recline when we drink the four cups of wine, eat matzah, the Hillel sandwich and the afikomen. Pillows make reclining easier!

AFIKOMEN GIFT(S):

Afikomen is the Greek word for dessert. Near the beginning of the seder, the middle of the three matzot is broken and only one part is returned to the plate. The other half is designated as the afikomen, the last thing to be eaten at the meal. There are two traditions that involve hiding the afikomen. Either the children steal the afikomen and hide it to hold for ransom or the adults hide pieces of the afikomen (often one piece for every child is hidden before the guests arrive). Since the seder cannot be completed without the afikomen, gifts are given to those who return it.



We are simply told to tell the story of Passover. Which additions, new customs, contemporary critiques or traditions are included are up to you! Look through Haggadot, online or borrowed from a library, for other optional ritual objects to include in your seder. And for more Passover resources, including suggestions for integrating family and friends who are not Jewish, visit WWW.INTERFAITHFAMILY.COM/PASSOVER.





18Doors mission is to empower people in interfaith relationships— individuals, couples, families and their children— to make Jewish choices, and to encourage Jewish communities to welcome them.

18Doors offers consultation and resources for synagogues, agencies and schools of all affiliations to assist them in their welcome and engagement of interfaith families and all those who are interested in exploring Judaism.

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