

A Teacher's Guide to Judaism

Passover

Pesach (Passover) starts on the 15th Nissan, corresponding to March or April, and lasts eight days. It commemorates the Jewish people's escape from Egypt in biblical times following the ten plagues and the parting of the Red Sea. It is one of the main Jewish festivals and families often gather for a Seder, a celebratory meal held on the first and second nights of Passover.

Meaning:

Pesach means 'passing over', referring to the Angel of Death who passed over the Jewish houses but killed the first born boy in each Egyptian house.

Traditional activities:

- Clean the house to remove all traces of leavened food
- Participate in a Seder - a ceremonial meal that includes reading and discussing a book explaining the Passover story called a "Haggadah," drinking four cups of wine or grape juice, eating special foods, singing and other Passover traditions.
- Seder plate - a plate on which different symbolic foods are placed at the Seder meal
- Eat matzah - unleavened bread, a bit like crackers
- Do not eat any food made by rising or swelling including any pasta, rice, bread and any foods containing oats, wheat, barley, rye, spelt

Torah reading:

First day of Pesach - Exodus 12: 21-51 (the Passover offering, the 10th plague)

Last day of Pesach – Exodus 13: 17-26 (the parting of the Red Sea, the Song of the Sea)

Biblical source:

Pesach commemorates the Jewish people being slaves in Egypt in biblical times and Moses' journey to become the leader of the Jewish people, rescuing them from slavery and taking them to the Land of Israel. At each of the ten plagues, Pharaoh said that the Jewish people could leave, and when the plague ended he changed his mind and wouldn't let them leave. After the tenth plague he took longer to change his mind so the Jewish people were able to leave – but then Pharaoh and his army pursued them to the Red Sea. The Jewish people didn't even have time to let their bread rise, so it turned into Matzah – unleavened bread, which is what Jewish people now eat during Pesach to remind us of this time.

“And on the fifteenth day of that month is the Festival of Unleavened Bread for the Lord; you shall eat unleavened bread for a seven day period” (Leviticus 23: 5)



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These resources describe practices that are common in the UK, but there is a wide range of Jewish traditions and observance, and different Jewish people have different levels of observance. When interacting with Jewish pupils and their parents, teachers should be aware that it is always best to ask about their own preferences.

Greeting: The traditional greeting at Pesach “Chag kasher ve’sameach” – a kosher and happy festival.

DEFINITIONS AND GLOSSARY

Leavened food

Food containing a substance, as in yeast or baking powder that causes fermentation and expansion of dough or batter.

Seder plate

The Seder plate is the focal point of the proceedings on the first nights of Passover. Whether it is an ornate silver dish or a humble napkin, it bears the ceremonial foods around which the Seder is based:

Beitzah – a roasted egg, symbolizing the festival sacrifice that was offered at the Temple in Jerusalem, which is then eaten as part of the meal on Seder night

Karpas - a vegetable (often onion, parsley or potato) representing hope and renewal, which is dipped into salt water and eaten at the beginning of the Seder

Maror - Bitter herbs (horseradish) symbolizing the bitterness and harshness of the slavery that the Jewish people endured in Egypt.

Chazeret - an additional bitter herb

Zeroah – Roasted chicken neck or shankbone; symbolizing the Paschal Lamb (Passover sacrifice), which was a lamb that was offered in the Temple in Jerusalem, then roasted and eaten as part of the meal on Seder night. The only element of meat on the Seder Plate.

Charoset – A sweet, brown mixture representing the mortar and brick used by the Jewish slaves to build the storehouses or pyramids of Egypt. Traditionally made from chopped nuts, grated apples, cinnamon, and sweet red wine



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Matzo

Unleavened bread



Torah – the five book of Moses from the Jewish Old Testament Bible



Jewish months (lunar calendar)

Nisan (March-April)

Iyyar (April-May)

Sivan (May-June)

Tammuz (June-July)

Av (July-August)

Elul (August-September)

Tishrei (September-October)

Cheshvan (October-November)

Kislev (November-December)

Tevet (December-January)

Shevat (January-February)

Adar (February-March)

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