

The HINDA Institute

Helping Individuals Ascend

Monthly Newsletter

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What is a Seder?

The Seder is a marathon feast that includes reading, drinking wine, telling stories, eating special foods and singing.

It is held after nightfall on the first 2 nights of Passover, the anniversary of our nation's miraculous exodus from Egyptian slavery more than 3,000 years ago. This year's Seders will be on April 10 and 11, 2017.

During the course of the evening you will have:

-four cups of wine.

-veggies dipped in saltwater.

-flat, dry cracker-like bread called matzah

-bitter herbs, often horseradish (without additives) and romaine lettuce, dipped into charoset (a paste of nuts, apples, pears and wine).

-a festive meal that may contain time-honored favorites, like chicken soup and gefilte fish.

Each item has its place in a 15-step choreographed combination of tastes, sounds, sensations and smells that have been with the Jewish people for millennia.

Ceremonial foods are all arranged on a platter, called a ka'arah or Seder plate. There may be one ka'arah for the entire Seder, or several.

The procedure is all laid out in a book called a Haggadah. Although the text is in Hebrew (with a sprinkling of Aramaic), it is perfectly acceptable to read the Haggadah in translation if you don't understand Hebrew.

At the Seder, every person should feel as if he or she were going out of Egypt. We begin with the story of our patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and recount the Jewish people's descent into Egypt, recalling their suffering and persecution. We are with them as G-d sends the ten plagues to punish Pharaoh and his nation, and follow along as they leave Egypt and cross the Sea of Reeds. We witness the miraculous hand of G-d as the waters part, allowing the Israelites to pass, then return to inundate the Egyptian legions.

As we eat bitter foods of affliction and poverty, the Exodus becomes a reality—as real as the festive meal and celebratory toasts that follow.

Here are the 15 steps of the Seder, with a bit of explanation:

1. *Kadesh—the Benediction*

The Seder service begins with the recitation of kiddush, proclaiming the holiness of the holiday. This is said while holding a cup of wine,

the first of the four cups we will drink (while reclining) throughout the Seder.

Why four cups? The Torah uses four expressions of freedom or deliverance in connection with our liberation from Egypt. Some link them to the four great merits the children of Israel had in exile: (1) They did not change their Hebrew names; (2) they continued to speak their own language, Hebrew; (3) They remained highly moral; (4) They remained loyal to one another.

When drinking the four cups and eating the matzah, we lean on our left side to accentuate the fact that we are free people. In ancient times only free people had the luxury of reclining while eating.

2. *Urchatz—Washing*

We wash our hands in the usual, ritually prescribed manner, as is done before a meal, but without the customary blessing.

The next step in the Seder, Karpas, requires dipping food into water. Jewish law specifies that certain wet foods be eaten with a utensil or that one's hands be purified first by washing. On the eve of the Seder, we choose the less common (but more ideal) observance to arouse our children's curiosity.

3. *Karpas—the "Appetizer"*

A small piece of vegetable (an onion or boiled potato in Chabad tradition) is dipped into salt water and eaten (after reciting the blessing over vegetables).

Dipping the karpas in salt water (after having washed our hands) is part of a series of acts intended arouses the child's curiosity.

The Hebrew word karpas (parsley), when read backwards, alludes to the backbreaking labor performed by the 600,000 Jews in Egypt. (The last letter, samech, has the numerical equivalent of 60, representing 60 times 10,000, while the remaining three Hebrew letters spell perech, "hard work.")

4. *Yachatz—Breaking the Matzah*

The middle matzah on the Seder plate is broken in two. The smaller part of the middle matzah is returned to the Seder plate. This broken middle matzah, the "bread of poverty," remains visible as we tell the story of Exodus (see step 5) and will be eaten shortly thereafter. The larger piece is put aside for later use as the afikoman (see step 12). This unusual action of breaking the matzah not only attracts the child's attention once again, but also recalls G-d's splitting of the Sea of Reeds to allow the children of Israel to cross on dry land.

5. *Maggid—the Haggadah*

At this point, the poor are invited to join the Seder. The Seder tray is moved aside, a second cup of wine is poured, and the child, who

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Jewish Story

By Rabbi Tuva Boltun

It was well past midnight on the first night of Passover, and the great Chassidic master Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev had just concluded enacting the Passover Seder in the presence of his disciples. They had recited the Haggadah, recounting the story of the Exodus and discussing the deeper meanings implicit in each of its passages; they drank the four cups of wine, dipped the karpas in the salt water and the bitter herbs in charoset, ate the matzah, the korech and the afikoman, sang the psalms of praise and gratitude ~ all in accordance with the letter of the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) and the esoteric principles found in the awesome mystical works of the saintly "Ari".

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's disciples had participated in many of their Rebbe's seders in the past, but this one surpassed them all. The Rebbe and all those present felt transported into a different world, as though they had risen above their bodily limitations and into a world of pure G-dliness.

Suddenly the room filled with the sound of a deep rumbling like thunder, and from within the thunder an awesome voice announced: "Levi Yitzchak's seder was pleasing to G-d, but there is a Jew in Berdichev called Shmerl the Tailor whose seder reached even higher!"

The Rebbe looked around him. It was obvious that only he had heard the heavenly announcement.

"Has anyone heard of a tzaddik (righteous person) called Shmerl the Tailor?" he asked his Chassidim. No one had.

After several minutes of silence one of the elderly Chassidim offered: "There is one Shmerl here in Berdichev that I know of, and he used to be a tailor about thirty years ago, but he's certainly no tzaddik. In fact he's pretty far from that. They call him now 'Shmerl the Shikker' (drunkard) and he lives with his wife in a old large shipping on the edge of town."

But Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was thinking to himself, "Ahah! this must be one of the hidden tzaddikim. And he lives right here, in Berdichev, while I knew nothing about him!"

It was two o'clock in the morning when the Rebbe stood at the door of old Shmerl's hovel.

An old Jewish woman answered his soft knock. "Good Yom Tov!" said Rabbi Levi Yitzchak quietly. "Please excuse me for the late hour. Is your husband Shmerl at home?" "Good Yom Tov," She answered. "Just wait one minute please, Rebbe, wait right here."

She disappeared into the house, and the unmistakable sound of a bucket being filled with water was heard from inside. Then a minute or two of silence and suddenly... SPLASH! She threw the bucket of water on her sleeping husband.

"Aaahh! Oyyy! Where am I? Ooiy vai!" he screamed, and then his wife was heard shouting, "Get up you drunk! The Rebbe has come to punish you! Wake up, you good-for-nothing!"

Poor Shmerl staggered, sopping wet, to the door. When he saw that it really was the Rebbe standing there at his door in the middle of the night, he fell at Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's feet and began

weeping, "Please, Rebbe don't punish me. It's not my fault... I didn't know any better... Please, have mercy..."

The Rebbe of Berdichev was completely astounded at this bizarre scene. Could it be that this man's seder was loftier than his own?

He bent down, lifted poor Shmerl to his feet and said, "Listen, Shmerl, I didn't come to punish you. In fact I don't even know what you are talking about. Please let me in, let's sit down and talk. I only want to ask you something. Go put on a dry shirt and we'll talk."

Minutes later they sat facing each other over Shmerl's small table. The Rebbe looked at him kindly and said: "Shmerl, listen. I want you to tell me how you conducted your seder last night. Don't worry, I promise that I'm not going to punish you, I promise."

"Oy!" moaned Shmerl and began weeping again. "My seder! But Rebbe, I really didn't know any better... Oooy!"

Gradually he calmed down and began speaking. "Early this morning, that is... yesterday morning, I'm walking in the street and suddenly I notice that people are rushing about. This one has a broom over his shoulder, that one is carrying a box, the other one something else, everyone is scurrying about ~ except me.

"So I stopped someone I recognized and asked him, 'What is everyone rushing for? Where are they all going?'"

"So he answers me, 'Oy Shmerl, are you so drunk that you forgot that tonight is Pesach? Tonight is Pesach! Do you remember what Pesach is?'"

"I tried thinking but my mind wouldn't work. Pesach, Pesach, I... I can't remember. It sounds very important though; I remember something about Matzos... and Egypt. 'Please,' I begged the man, 'do me a favor and tell me what it is again.'"

"The man looked at me in a strange way, and answered 'Listen, Shmerl, tonight you have to make a seder. You know, recite the Haggadah, eat three matzos, bitter herbs, four cups of wine. You'll enjoy the wine Shmerl,' he said with a sad smile, 'though I guess you won't enjoy abstaining from your foul vodka for eight days...'"

"Eight days!" I cried. "Why? Why can't I drink for eight days?" I was trembling and beginning to remember a little.

"'Because that's the law!' he answered. 'For eight days, if you're a Jew, no chametz (leaven) passes your lips. Vodka is chametz. If you can't hold out for eight days, maybe go to Israel,' he laughed, 'there chametz is only forbidden seven days...'"

"I was stunned. No vodka for eight days! I rushed home, took all the money I had, bought a big bottle of vodka, poured myself eight large cups one after the other, and drank them down... hoping that that would help me make it through the holiday.

"The next thing I remember is that I'm sleeping soundly in my bed when suddenly my wife throws a bucket of water on me ~ you saw how she does it ~ and starts screaming, 'Shmerl, you bum! You drunk! You good-for-nothing! All Jews all over the world are making the seder tonight, and you are lying there like a drunken ox. Wake up and make a seder!'"

"So I staggered to my feet, put on some dry clothes and sat down at the beautifully set table.

"The candles were shining brightly and making the plates and

silverware sparkle so nicely. Everything was new, clean. I felt so different, almost holy. The wine and the matzos were on the table, the Haggadah was open in front of me. My wife had even set up the seder plate with all its things like she remembered from her father. She herself was sitting in her place opposite me like a queen, and was even smiling. Everything was so beautiful.

"But then ~ I looked around me and didn't know what to do. The vodka was still swirling in my head, but, to be honest, Rebbe, even sober I don't know how to make a seder.

"So I took a large bowl, and put everything in there. The three matzos, the bitter herbs, the dish of charoset, all those little items my wife had set up on the seder plate, I poured in the four cups of

wine, and swirled it all together.

"Then I lifted up my seder bowl and started talking to G-d. Just like I'm talking to you now. I started talking to G-d and I said, 'G-d, listen... I don't know You, but You know me. You know that after my father got killed I had to work all the time and I never had a chance to learn, right? So I don't know how to read this book, in fact I can't read anything! And I don't know what I'm supposed to do with all this stuff either. But one thing I do know... I know that a long time ago You sent Moses to take us out of Egypt, and I'm sure that you will send Moshiach to take us out of all our troubles now!'"

"And then I gulped down the whole thing."

Counting the Omer

When the Jews left Egypt, they were filled with excitement. In 49 days, they were going to receive the Torah from G-d at Mt Sinai.

They began to count the days. One day, two days... till they had counted seven full weeks.

Then it happened. G-d gave them the Torah.

Today, we still count the days between Pesach and Shavuot, as we prepare to receive the Torah again on the Festival of Shavuot. This is called "Counting the Days of the Omer," or "Sefiras Ha'Omer."

Here's how to do it.

Starting April 11, every night, after dark, say the following blessing, and then count the proper day:

Baruch Atah Ado-nai Elo-hai-nu Melech Ha-olam, Asher Kid'shanu B'Mitzvotav V'tzi-vanu Al Sefirat Ha-Omer.

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has made us holy with His Commandments, and commanded us concerning the counting of the Omer.

Then we count the day saying:

"Today is one day (or two days, or three days, etc. today is seven days, which are one week to the Omer and so on, till today is forty-nine days, which are seven weeks) of the Omer."

We begin counting the Omer on the second night of Pesach.

What If You Forget To Count?

If you forget to count at night, you can count throughout the next day (without saying the blessing). The following evening you can count again with the blessing.

If you forget to count for a whole day, you should still keep on counting the days until Shavuot, but you do not say the blessing any more.

The Kabbalists explain that the 49 days that connect Passover with Shavuot correspond to the 49 drives and traits of the human heart. Each day saw the refinement of one of these sefirot, bringing the people of Israel one step closer to their election as G-d's chosen people and their receiving of His communication to humanity.

Jewish Joke

Maurice, Sam and Benny always met once a week to discuss the world's situation. On one occasion, they tried to solve the problem of life.

"What is the problem of life?" asked Benny.

The more they talked about it, the more they thought they knew the answer. The problem of life is that everyone has worries. "If people didn't have any worries," said Sam, "then life would be easy."

But now that they knew, another question remained, how can we three end our worries?

They thought for a while and then Maurice said, "Why don't we hire somebody to do all the worrying for us so that we can then have it easy?"

Sam said, "Great idea. It wouldn't be easy, I know, but between us, we could pay him well to make up for the difficulty of the role."

So they all agreed to chip in to pay someone \$600 a month to do all their worrying for them.

They were very happy with this decision until Sam pointed out the flaw.

"Tell me," he said, "If the man is making \$600 each month, what has he got to worry about?"

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Continued from front page by now is bursting with curiosity, asks the time-honored question:

“Mah nishtanah ha-lailah hazeh mikol ha-leilot? Why is this night different from all other nights?” Why only matzah? Why the dipping? Why the bitter herbs? Why are we relaxing and reclining as if we were kings?

The child’s questioning triggers one of the most significant elements of Passover, which is the highlight of the Seder ceremony: reading the Haggadah, which tells the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The answer includes a brief review of history, a brief narrative of how Abraham rejected idolatry and entered a pact with G-d, a description of the suffering imposed upon the Israelites, a listing of the plagues visited on the Egyptians, and an enumeration of the miracles performed by the Almighty to redeem His people. We conclude by thanking G-d for the having set us free from Egypt and a prayer for the Final Redemption.

6. Rachtzah—Washing Before the Meal

After concluding the first part of the Haggadah by drinking the second cup of wine (while reclining), the hands are washed again, this time with the customary blessings, as is usually done before eating bread.

7-8. Motzi Matzah—We Eat the Matzah

Taking hold of the three matzahs (with the broken one between the two whole ones), recite the customary blessing before bread. Then, letting the bottom matzah drop back onto the plate, and holding the top whole matzah with the broken middle one, recite the special blessing “al achilat matzah.” Then break a bit of the upper matzah and at least one ounce from the middle matzah (ideally an ounce from each), and eat the two pieces together while reclining.

9. Maror—the Bitter Herbs

Take at least one ounce of the bitter herbs. Dip it in the charoset, then shake the latter off and make the blessing “al achilat maror.” Eat without reclining.

10. Korech—the Hillel Sandwich

In keeping with the practice of Hillel, the great Talmudic sage, a sandwich of matzah and maror is eaten. Break two pieces off the bottom matzah,

which should be at least one ounce together. Again, take at least one ounce of bitter herbs and dip them in the charoset, which is shaken off. Place this between the two pieces of matzah, say “kein asah Hillel...,” and eat the sandwich while reclining.

11. Shulchan Orech—the Feast

The holiday meal is now served. We begin the meal by eating the hard-boiled egg dipped into salt water. Traditionally associated with mourning, the egg reminding us that our meal lacks the sacrificial lamb.

Note: The zeroa (the leg of lamb or chicken leg or neck on the Seder plate), is not eaten at the Seder.

12. Tzafun—Out of Hiding

After the meal, the half-matzah that had been “hidden” and set aside for the afikoman (“dessert”) is taken out and eaten. It symbolizes the Paschal lamb, which our ancestors ate at the end of their Passover Seders.

Everyone should eat at least 1½ ounces of matzah, reclining, before midnight. After eating the afikoman, we do not eat or drink anything except for the two remaining cups of wine.

13. Berach—Blessings After the Meal

A third cup of wine is filled and Grace After Meals is recited. After the Grace, we recite the blessing over wine and drink the third cup while reclining.

Now we fill the cup of Elijah and our own cups with wine. We open the door and recite the passage inviting the Prophet Elijah, the harbinger of the coming of Moshiach, our righteous Messiah.

14. Hallel—Songs of Praise

At this point, having recognized the Almighty and His unique guidance of the Jewish people, we go still further and sing His praises as Lord of the entire universe.

After reciting the Hallel, we again recite the blessing over wine and drink the fourth cup, reclining.

15. Nirtzah—Acceptance

Having carried out the Seder service properly, we are sure that it has been well received by the Almighty. We then say “Leshanah haba’ah b’Yerushalayim—Next year in Jerusalem.”