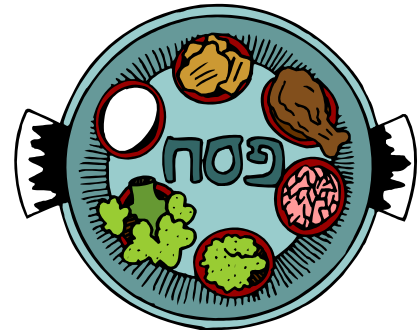


## Passover 5770 - Questions & Answers

### **EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT PASSOVER**

#### **What is Pesach or Passover?**

Pesach is a major Jewish spring festival, commemorating the Exodus from Egypt over 3,000 years ago, whose ritual observance centers around a special home service (the seder), the prohibition of leaven (chametz), and the eating of matzah.



#### **How did Pesach, or Passover, get its name?**

Actually, Pesach has five different names, each of which carries a special significance:

- Chag Ha-Matzot (The Festival of Unleavened Bread).
- Chag Ha-Pesach (The Festival of Paschal Offering).
- Chag Ha-Aviv (The Festival of Spring).
- Zeman Cherutenu (The Season of Our Liberation).
- Pesach (Passover).

#### **For how many days do we celebrate Pesach?**

The Torah commands an observance of seven days (Exodus 12:15; 13:6). Reform Jews, Liberal Conservatives and Reconstructionist Jews, and all Jews in Israel follow this injunction. Traditional Conservative and Orthodox Jews outside the land of Israel, however, celebrate Pesach for eight days. The additional day of observance dates back to 700-600 B.C.E. At that time, people were notified of a holiday by means of an elaborate network of mountaintop bonfires. To guard against the possibility of error, an extra day was added to many of the holidays. By the time a dependable calendar came into existence, around the fourth century C.E., the additional day was so deeply engrained in the observance of Diaspora Jewry that the Talmudic sages made the practice, halachah, law. Whether seven or eight days, Pesach has many beautiful rituals, symbols, songs and stories, which every Jew may learn and enjoy.

#### **What is chametz?**

Chametz is a Hebrew word meaning "leaven." It is also the generic term for a class of foods which are traditionally prohibited during the holiday of Pesach. Rabbinic authorities defined chametz as any leavened product of five grains: wheat, oats, barley, rye and spelt. Ashkenazic Jews later added rice, corn, peas, beans, and peanuts to those foods classified as chametz.

#### **Why is chametz prohibited during Pesach?**

The Torah specifically mentions chametz in three passages in the Book of Exodus. Excommunication was the severe punishment for consuming, carrying, or even owning chametz during Pesach. The disproportionate emphasis given to chametz in the Torah has led some scholars to theorize that this prohibition was originally a primitive, powerful ritual taboo. Later rabbinic

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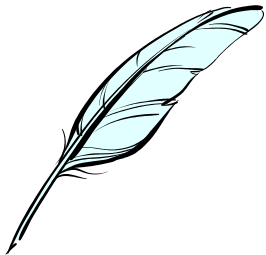
authorities softened the penalties relating to chametz, but there is no doubt that the laws were strictly observed and taken seriously.

As a result, three interesting customs evolved among traditional Jews, all directly tied to the chametz prohibitions:

- **Bedikat chametz:** the search for leaven.
- **Biur chametz:** the burning of leaven.
- **Mechirat chametz:** the sale of leaven.

### What is bedikat chametz?

Jews who strictly observe Pesach undertake a thorough cleaning of their homes just prior to the holiday, removing or setting aside all leaven in the process. On the night before the first seder, the Mishnah ordains a formal search for leaven in the home. A blessing is recited, then the head of the household, usually accompanied by the rest of the family, moves from room to room. The house is darkened. The individual conducting the search carries a candle, a wooden spoon and a feather. As pre-placed pieces of bread (usually ten) are discovered, they are swept into the spoon with the feather. When the search is completed, a special statement of nullification is recited, indicating that the house is now free of chametz.



### What is biur chametz?

On the morning after the bedikat chametz, tradition calls for a simple ceremony wherein the chametz, gathered the previous evening, is burned. The statement of nullification is repeated. In traditional homes, this ceremony takes place before 10:00 a.m., after which no chametz is eaten until the end of Pesach. Most Reform Jews do not observe this ritual.

### What is mechirat chametz?

While the law calls for the physical removal of all personally-owned leaven from the home, the rabbis realized that this practice would impose a financial hardship upon those families who had substantial amounts of chametz products in their households. Therefore, the custom evolved of simply placing all leaven in a secluded part of the home and selling it, on paper, to a non-Jew. As the law did not prohibit the presence of chametz in the home of non-Jews, this practice did not compromise the law. At the conclusion of the holiday, the leaven was then repurchased by the family. At first, each family handled its own sale. Eventually, however, it became common for a single Jew, usually the rabbi, to conduct a single transaction on behalf of the entire community.

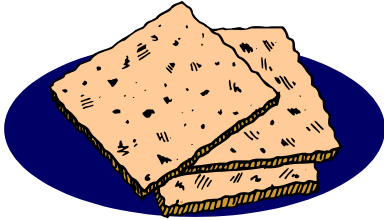
### What is matzah?

Matzah is the Hebrew word for "unleavened bread" and refers to the special wafer-like food eaten by Jews, particularly on Pesach.

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### What is the origin of matzah?

The earliest mention of matzah in the Torah occurs in Exodus 12:15. I Samuel 28:24 also relates a story in which matzah was served to King Saul by the woman at EnDor. In this later instance, it is clear that matzah was a food hastily prepared for unexpected guests, allowing no time for leavening. Hence, the term matzah, or unleavened bread.

### How is matzah made?

Matzah is the unleavened product of one of five grains: wheat, oats, barley, spelt, or rye. Wheat, though, is most commonly used in making matzah. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, matzah was prepared exclusively by hand and baked in special ovens. The first matzah-baking machine was invented in 1857 in Austria. Since that time, matzah has been made by hand or machine, depending on its type.

### What are the various types of matzah?

There are three basic types of matzah:

**Matzah shemurah.** ("watched" or "guarded" matzah). Shemurah matzah is so called because the grain used to prepare it is watched from the time it is harvested until it is actually baked. This "watching" assures that the grain does not come into any contact with any moisture or heat and thus initiate the leavening process. It is usually prepared by hand, and the entire process, from kneading the dough to finished product, must not exceed eighteen minutes. A longer time span is considered to render the dough leavened, thus making it unsuitable for Pesach. This type of matzah are then eaten during the rest of the holiday.

**Regular matzah.** The most common type of matzah is not as stringently supervised as shemurah matzah, being watched only from the time of milling, rather than from the harvest. Regular matzah is usually made by machine, rather than by hand, although the eighteen-minute time limit is also observed by companies using a machine-baking process. Traditional Jews usually eat regular matzah throughout Pesach, except for the two seder, while most Reform Jewish families eat regular matzah during the entire holiday.

**Enriched matzah.** Many matzah companies enrich matzah by adding eggs, fruit, juice, milk and wine so that Jews who need more nutrition than that afforded by regular matzah might not have to violate the prohibition against chametz for reasons of health. Enriched matzah, however, does not fulfill the commandment of eating matzah on Pesach. Consequently, those Jews who do not eat it usually partake of shemurah or regular matzah at the seder.

### When did the seder, as celebrated in modern times, begin to take shape?

Around the year 70 C.E., when the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. With the priestly paschal sacrifice and meal no longer possible, and with the Jewish community in exile and in ritual upheaval, a new religious service, the seder, emerged as a means of preserving historical memory and the symbolism of ancient traditions. The Mishnah (Pesachim 10) de-

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scribes a seder with many of the elements found in our contemporary ritual. The Kiddush, Four Questions, Exodus story, symbolic interpretations, Hallel psalms, and other prayers are all mentioned as part of the seder celebration of 1,900 years ago.

The format for the seder was derived from the Hellenistic talk-feast of the first century C.E. During that period, it was widespread practice to hold great banquets, with philosophic discussions as part of the meal. The rabbis substituted the Haggadah for the philosophic discourse, but retained many other elements of this Greco-Roman custom. The seder ritual continued to grow and expand, but its essential features were established by the end of the first century.

### **What does Haggadah mean?**

The Hebrew word haggadah means “telling” and refers to the special book containing the order of prayers, rituals, readings and songs for the Pesach seder.

### **When did the Haggadah originate?**

Certain sections of the Haggadah date back to the third century B.C.E. Most scholars, however, agree that the Haggadah, as we know it today, originated some time after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. It was then that the seder came into being as well. The Haggadah fulfills the Biblical injunction in Exodus 13:8, “And you shall tell (Vehigadeta) your son on that day, saying, ‘It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt.’” The preservation of historical memory and timeless Jewish values remains the Haggadah’s foremost purpose.

### **Why are special charitable collections, known as maot chittim, made immediately before Passover?**

The words maot chittim means “money for wheat,” wheat needed to bake matzot for Passover. Since on Passover Jews may not eat bread or products that ferment, a special fund is established to assist the poor in purchasing Passover necessities. The custom of donating money to the maot chittim fund is an ancient one, governed by the talmudic rule that “those who have enough give, and those who don’t have enough take.”

### **Why are the first-born required to fast before Passover?**

This custom, of biblical origin, is based in the account presented in Exodus 12:21-28, in which all Egyptian first-born were slain and the first-born of Israel were spared. The word Passover” (Pesach in Hebrew) is from the verb pasach, meaning “to spare, to pass over.” To commemorate and express gratitude for the sparing of the first-born of Israel, the day preceding Passover became a fast day for the first-born male in each family. In time, the requirement changed: the fast was excused if the first-born undertook to study a talmudic tractate and to complete his studies on the day before Passover. In practice (and with exceptions), the studying was and is assumed by the local rabbi, who on the morning before the day of Passover assembles all the first-born of the community. After morning prayers, the group joins the rabbi

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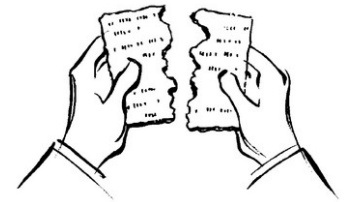
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in studying the last section of the tractate that he has been studying in anticipation of the occasion. This practice is called a Siyum or Siyum Massechta, meaning "completing a tractate (of the Talmud).

### **Why is a piece of matzah, called the afikomon, "stolen" by children and hidden until it is "ransomed"?**

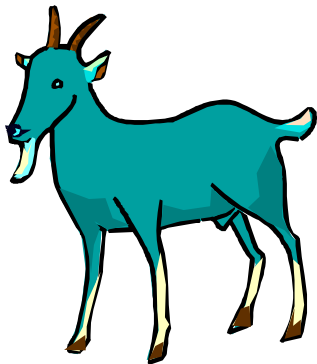
During the early part of the seder service, a piece of middle matzah is placed in a napkin or a bag. This matzah, called the afikomon, is distributed to all seder participants after the meal and is then eaten as a dessert. (Afikomon is a Greek word meaning "dessert.")



The custom of setting aside a piece of matzah was instituted 700 years ago. To make the seder more exciting for children, youngsters were allowed to "steal" and hide the afikomon. Since the seder could not continue until a piece of the afikomon was eaten by everyone, the leader of the seder had to search for it. If he could not find it, he would offer a gift to the children, and they would fetch the afikomon from its hiding place. In some families the leader hides the afikomon, and the children receive a gift if they find it. When the afikomon is finally returned, the leader of the seder breaks it into small pieces, which he shares with everyone at the table. The seder then continues with the recitation of Grace After Meals.

In the Middle Ages, many superstitious people believed that the afikomon had the power to drive off evil spirits. They would, therefore, hang a piece of the leftover afimomon in their rice, flour and salt canisters. The piece of matzah, they believed, would bring them luck and would insure their food containers would not be empty throughout the year.

### **Why is Chad Gadya such a popular seder song?**

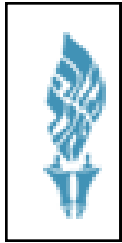


Aside from the beautiful melodies created for this popular song with which the seder concludes, the message it carries is extremely significant. Composed in Aramain in nursery-rhyme style, Chad Gadya was adapted from a popular German ballad and was introduced into the Haggadah by German Jews. In fanciful form and with great simplicity, it tells the story of the Jewish people: a father bought a little goat for two zuzim, two small coins. And then a cat came along and devoured the goat; a dog came along and bit the cat; a stick came along and beat the dog; etc. So it was the Jewish people. One nation after another tried to conquer it, but unsuccessfully. The message is: evil designs may be planned and even carried out, but in the end God conquers all, and justice will prevail.

#### Sources:

1. *The Jewish Home*, by David B. Syme.
2. *The Jewish Book of Why*, by Alfred J. Kolatch.

## The Rabbinical Assembly Pesach Guide 5770



*This guide was prepared for the Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Law and Standards by Rabbi Mayer Rabinowitz.*

The Torah prohibits the ownership of *chametz* (leaven) during Pesach. Therefore, we arrange for the sale of the *chametz* to a non-Jew. The transfer, *mekhirat chametz*, is accomplished by appointing an agent, usually the rabbi, to handle the sale. It is valid and legal transfer of ownership. At the end of the holiday, the agent arranges for the reversion of ownership of the now-permitted *chametz*. If ownership of the *chametz* was not transferred before the holiday, the use of this *chametz* is prohibited after the holiday as well (*chametz she-avar alav ha-Pesach*).

Since the Torah prohibits the eating of *chametz* during Pesach, and since many common foods contain some admixture of *chametz*, guidance is necessary when shopping and preparing for Pesach.

During the eight days of Pesach, *chametz* cannot lose its identity in an admixture. Therefore, the minutest amount of *chametz* renders the whole admixture *chametz* and its use on Pesach is prohibited.

What follows is a general guideline. However, your Rabbi should be consulted when any doubt arises. *Kosher le-Pesach* labels that do not bear the name of a rabbi or one of the recognized symbols of rabbinic supervision, or which are not integral to the package, should not be used without consulting your rabbi.

### Prohibited foods include the following:

- leavened bread,
- crackers,
- wheat,
- spelt,
- all liquids containing ingredients or flavors made from grain alcohol.
- cakes,
- cereal,
- barley,
- rye
- biscuits,
- coffees containing cereal derivatives,
- oats,

Most Ashkenazic authorities have added the following foods (*kitniyot*) to the above list:

- rice,
- legumes (beans and peas; however, string beans are permitted).
- corn,
- millet

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards has ruled unanimously that peanuts and peanut oil are permissible. Some Ashkenazic authorities permit, while others forbid, the use of legumes in a form other than their natural state, for example, corn sweeteners, corn oil and soy oil. Sephardic authorities permit the use of all of the above. Consult your rabbi for guidance in the use of these products.

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### **PERMITTED FOODS:**

The following foods require no kosher le-Pesach label if purchased prior to Pesach: unopened packages or containers of natural coffee without cereal additives. (However, be aware that coffees produced by General Foods are not kosher for Passover unless marked KP); sugar, pure tea (not herbal tea); salt (not iodized); pepper; natural spices; frozen fruit juices with no additives; frozen (uncooked) vegetables (for legumes see above); milk; butter; cottage cheese; cream cheese; ripened cheeses such as cheddar (hard), muenster (semi-soft) and Camembert (soft); frozen (uncooked) fruit (with no additives); baking soda.



The following foods require no kosher le-Pesach label if purchased before or during Pesach. Fresh fruits and vegetables (for legumes see above), eggs, fresh fish and fresh meat.

The following foods require a kosher le-Pesach label if purchased before or during Pesach: All baked products (matzah, cakes, matzah flour, farfel, matzah meal, and any products containing matzah); canned or bottled fruit juices (these juices are often clarified with *kitniyot* which are not listed among the ingredients. However, if one knows there are no such agents, the juice may be purchased prior to Pesach without a *kosher le-Pesach* label); canned tuna (since tuna, even when packed in water, has often been processed in vegetable broth and/or hydrolyzed protein. However, if it is known that the tuna is packed exclusively in water, without any additional ingredients or additives, it may be purchased without a *kosher le-Pesach* label); wine, vinegar; liquor; oils; dried fruits; candy; chocolate-flavored milk; ice cream; yogurt and soda.

The following processed foods (canned, bottled or frozen), require a kosher le-Pesach label if purchased during Pesach: milk, butter, juices, vegetables, fruit, milk products, spices, coffee, tea, fish and all foods listed in Category C.

**DETERGENTS:** If permitted during the year, powdered and liquid detergents do not require a *kosher le-Pesach* label.

**MEDICINE:** Since chametz binders are used in many pills, the following guidelines should be followed: If the medicine is required for life-sustaining therapy, it may be used on Pesach. If it is not for life-sustaining therapy, some authorities, permit, while others prohibit. Consult your rabbi. In all cases, capsules are koshered by rinsing.

**KASHERING OF UTENSILS:** The process of koshering utensils depends on how the utensils are used. According to halakhah, leaven can be purged from a utensil by the same process in which it was absorbed in the utensil (*ke-voleo kakh polet*). Therefore, utensils used in cooking are koshered by boiling, those used in broiling are koshered by fire and heat, and those used only for cold food are koshered by rinsing.

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**EARTHENWARE** (china, pottery, etc.) may not be koshered. However, fine translucent chinaware which has not been used for over a year may be used if scoured and cleaned in hot water.

**METAL** (wholly made of metal) **UTENSILS USED IN FIRE** (spit, broiler) must first be thoroughly scrubbed and cleansed and then made as hot as possible. Those used for cooking or eating (silverware, pots) must be thoroughly scrubbed and cleaned and completely immersed in boiling water. Pots should not be used for a period of at least 24 hours between the cleaning and the immersion in boiling water. Metal baking utensils cannot be koshered.



**OVENS AND RANGES**: Every part that comes in contact with food must be thoroughly scrubbed and cleaned. Then, oven and range should be heated as hot as possible for a half hour. If there is a broil setting, use it. Self-cleaning ovens should be scrubbed and cleaned and then put through the self-cleaning cycle. Continuous cleaning ovens must be koshered in the same manner as regular ovens.

**MICROWAVE OVENS**, which do not cook the food by means of heat, should be cleaned, and then a cup of water should be placed inside. Then the oven should be turned on until the water disappears. A microwave oven that has a browning element cannot be koshered for Pesach.

**GLASSWARE**: Authorities disagree as to the method for koshering drinking utensils. One opinion requires soaking in water for three days, changing the water every 24 hours. The other opinion requires only a thorough scrubbing before Pesach, or putting them through a dishwasher.  
**Glass Cookware**: There is a difference of opinion as to whether it is to be koshered. One opinion is that it must be koshered. After a thorough cleansing, there should be water boiled in them which will overflow the rim. The other opinion is that only a thorough cleansing is required.  
**Glass Bakeware**: Like metal bakeware, may not be koshered.

**DISHWASHER**: After not using the machine for a period of 24 hours, a full cycle with detergent should be run.

**ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES**: If the parts that come into contact with *chametz* are removable, they can be koshered in the appropriate way (if metal, follow the rules for metal utensils). If the parts are not removable, the appliance cannot be koshered. (All exposed parts should be thoroughly cleaned.)

**TABLES, CLOSETS AND COUNTERS**: If used with *chametz*, they should be thoroughly cleaned and covered, and then they may be used.

**KITCHEN SINK**: A metal sink can be koshered by thoroughly cleaning and then pouring boiling water over it. A porcelain sink should be cleaned and a sink rack used. If, however, dishes are to be soaked in a porcelain sink, a dish basin must be used.

**CHAMETZ AND NON-PASSOVER UTENSILS**: Non-Passover dishes, pots and *chametz* whose ownership has been transferred, should be separated, locked up or covered, and marked in order to prevent accidental use.