

PESACH

While many holiday observances have waned in modern times, most Jews still gather together at Passover for some kind of celebration of the exodus from Egypt. Passover is rich in ritual and rich in memory. Its meaning is multi-layered, with both historical and agricultural meanings.

When Passover, the first of the three pilgrimage festivals, was first commanded in Exodus 12, two separate events were prescribed: *korban Pesach* (the sacrifice commemorating the re-enactment of the night of the exodus) and *chag hamatzot* (the seven-day feast of unleavened bread). They eventually were fused into one celebration of seven days (eight outside of Israel) known as Pesach, with the prohibition of eating or owning chametz as its principal regulation.

The cornerstone of Pesach is the seder, a meal with a formalized ritual of symbolic foods, four cups of wine, and reading the haggadah, the narrative text of the exodus story. Like most forms of Jewish ritual, the Passover seder was primarily male focused. Women's roles focused on cleaning the house and preparing the seder meal.

In recent times, the rise of Jewish feminism and the demand for more child-friendly observances have produced new rituals that are more inclusive and that enhance and enrich the celebrations. In particular, the women's seder and the placement of a *kos Miryam* on the seder table have grown in popularity. You can find activities and strategies to make the seder more accessible to children in any number of the new haggadot published over the past decade.

Each innovation invites *hiddur mitzvah*. Interestingly, the rabbis cite an example of an enhancement that might not necessarily come to mind when thinking about *hiddur mitzvah*. In the Talmud they pose the question: *why are we prohibited from eating matzah before the seder?* The answer: *so that we heighten our enjoyment of eating it at the prescribed time.* The mitzvah is eating the matzah. Heightening our enjoyment by anticipation, that is *hiddur mitzvah*.

Why particularly the eve of Passover? Are the eves of Sabbaths and festivals even [subject to this law]? For it was taught: A man must not eat on the eves of Sabbaths and festivals from minhah and onward, **so that he may enter the Sabbath with an appetite** [for food]: [these are] the words of R. Judah. R. Jose said: He may go on eating until nightfall. . . Said R. Huna: This [mishnah] is necessary only on the view of R. Jose, who said: He may go on eating until nightfall: that is only on the eves of Sabbaths and [other] festivals; but with respect to the eve of Passover he agrees [with R. Judah], because of the duty of eating unleavened bread. . .



JEWISH HOME BASICS

Feather and wooden spoon (to collect chametz)

Seder plate

Kiddush cups

Matzah cover

Matzah plate or box

Afikomen bag

Omer calendar

Words of Hiddur Mitzvah

Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Ph.D.

The original meaning of hiddur mitzvah, making one's observance of a mitzvah beautiful, is important in its own right. It bespeaks Judaism's appreciation of the aesthetic in life. We can all tell the difference between a ritual object, like a sukkah, that has been put together with minimal effort and one that results from considerable time, work, and skill. The latter, much more than the former, honors not only the mitzvah itself but also those who make it, those who use it, and God.

For me, though, hiddur mitzvah means more. In addition to concern about the physical ways in which we express our commitment to the mitzvah, it betokens for me the emotional, cognitive, and intellectual aspects of our fulfilling the mitzvah. That is, a really beautiful fulfillment of a mitzvah – including one that does not ask us to produce a ritual object like a sukkah – is one that fully involves one's heart, will, and mind. It was, in fact, when Rabbi David Mogilner, z"l, taught me at age 15 through a series of discussions at Camp Ramah that Jews need not turn off their minds to be seriously Jewish, that, on the contrary, that the Jewish tradition asks us to question everything so that our faith can truly be "with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might," that I became seriously Jewish.

As a philosopher and rabbi, I much appreciate the life of the mind, but life is clearly not restricted to that. Judaism is very wise, then, in engaging not only our mind, but also our body, will, and emotions. Singing the liturgy and other Jewish songs with gusto, dancing Jewish dances with joy and energy, and creating Jewish art with attention to expression and detail, are all part of what it means to be Jewish. Moreover, the Jewish tradition emphasizes, much more than Western liberalism does, that we do not live alone, that we thrive best in community. So a beautiful mitzvah is, for me, one done with conviction, a conviction born of the active use of our body, mind, emotions, and will, and one done with one's family and community.

Enhancements for Your Seder

KARPAS

Expanding the *karpas* (greens) course at the beginning of the seder can stifle some of the hunger pangs, and permits a leisurely telling of the Passover story. Once the *berakhah* has been recited over the parsley (or your green of choice) and salt water, put out plates of crudité's and dips. You can continue to nosh on vegetables and dips while the *haggadah* is read.

Recommended: parsley, celery, carrots, broccoli, cauliflower, radishes, cucumbers, fresh zucchini, jicama, and even pickles and olives (all kosher for Passover).

Now we dip twice. . .

A variety of kosher for Passover bottled dressings and salsas are available in most stores with Passover food sections. Even better, try one of these, or a combination of any or all.

Make your own mayonnaise. It's simple with a food processor. Add roasted garlic, dill, tarragon, etc. Most cookbooks have a recipe for homemade mayonnaise that is far superior in taste to ready-made.