

# Answers to Common Questions about Passover<sup>1</sup>

1. **WHAT IS PASSOVER?** Passover is an eight day Jewish holiday, of Biblical origin, marking the birth of the Jews as a people and their emergence as a unique nation in history, devoted to G-d's will. It celebrates the liberation of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt over 3000 years ago, under the leadership of Moses.

2. **WHEN DOES PASSOVER BEGIN?** According to Biblical law, Passover is determined by the Jewish lunar calendar, and begins on the eve of the nineteenth day of the month of Nisan. The English date varies from year to year, falling in March or in April.

3. **WHAT DOES KOSHER FOR PASSOVER MEAN?** During Passover, Jewish law forbids the consumption or possession by Jews of all edible fermented grain products (Chometz) or related foods. Therefore, even foods and household products which meet the strict, year-round dietary regulations, and are considered Kosher, are nevertheless, often unacceptable, or require special preparation for Passover use in the Jewish home in order to be Kosher for Passover.

4. **HOW CAN ONE TELL IF A PRODUCT IS "KOSHER FOR PASSOVER"?** Most processed foods and beverages require special rabbinical supervision for Passover use. They must also be Kosher for year-round use, and prepared in accordance with all of the regular Jewish dietary laws. Jewish consumers are urged to look for the (U) P or the (U) Kosher for Passover designations as an integral part of the product label, and to be familiar with the rabbi or organization giving the Passover endorsement. The mere mention of Kosher For Passover on the label is not a sufficient guarantee of the product's acceptability for Passover use. The largest and most widely respected Kashruth supervisory agency is the Kashruth Division of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. Its registered service mark, (U) P. on thousands of consumer and industrial food products, is a guarantee of the highest standards of Kashruth for Passover. Processed foods not carrying any rabbinical supervision should be cleared with a rabbi before Passover use, as should any medicines and vegetables.

5. **WHAT IS "MATZOH"?** Matzoh is a crisp, flat, unleavened bread, made of flour and water, which must be baked before the dough has had time to rise. It is the only type of "bread" which Jews may eat during Passover, and it must be made specifically for Passover use, under rabbinical supervision. Eating Matzoh on Passover commemorates the unleavened bread eaten by the Jews when they left Egypt in such haste that there was no time for the dough to rise. There are many mystical concepts tied to the unique relationship between Matzoh and Chometz on Passover. One interpretation equates Matzoh with God's commandments (Mitzvos), and Chometz with sin (Chayt). The rigorous laws of Passover, in this interpretation, represent the great care that must be taken to follow the Godly path.

6. **WHAT SPECIAL PREPARATIONS MUST BE MADE IN THE JEWISH HOME FOR PASSOVER?** The home must be thoroughly cleaned of all Chometz before Passover. Any Chometz not removed from a Jew's premises before Passover should be sold. Jewish law forbids the use of any Chometz which remains in a Jew's possession during Passover, even after the holiday is over. All cooking and eating utensils must be either set aside exclusively for Passover use, or, in some cases, "made Kosher" in consultation with a rabbi, according to the procedures of Jewish law. All of these preparations must be completed by the morning before Passover. See the following section, Preparing the Home for Passover, for more specific details.

7. **WHAT ARE THE RITUALS FOR THE PERIOD BEFORE PASSOVER BEGINS?** A ritual search for Chometz is conducted Sunday evening, April 20th, and the Chometz that is found is burned the next morning.

8. **WHAT IS THE PASSOVER SEDER ?** The Seder is a ritual banquet which reenacts the Exodus, conducted on both the first and second evenings of Passover. Its major feature is the reading of the Haggadah, which relates, in detail, the events of the Exodus of the Jewish people from ancient Egypt, complete with symbolic reenactments using Kosher wine, specially prepared Matzoh, and bitter herbs. The specially prepared Shmurah Matzoh is made specifically for use at the Seder, with specially supervised flour according to particularly stringent Jewish traditions and laws. The bitter herbs (Maror) consisting of either romaine lettuce or horseradish, commemorate the harsh conditions of slavery in ancient Egypt. Four cups of wine are consumed during the course of the Seder to commemorate the redemption of the Jewish people, the sanctity of the holiday and events related in the Haggadah. The Seder is a traditional occasion for Jewish homilies to gather together to reinforce their ties to Judaism.

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9. **WHEN DO PASSOVER DIETARY LAWS END?** All Passover Dietary Laws remain in effect until nightfall of the eighth day of Passover. Chometz which was in the possession or jurisdiction of a Jew during Passover, in violation of Jewish law, is forbidden for consumption by any Jew even after Passover.

10. **WHAT OTHER RESTRICTIONS ARE APPLICABLE ON PASSOVER?** Sabbath-like restrictions on work and creative activity with the exceptions of carrying and the use of fire (with respect to cooking and the preparation of food), apply to all Jews on the first two and last two days of Passover. Full Sabbath rules remain in effect on Friday evenings and Saturdays during Passover. With the exception of Sabbath, during the intermediate four days of Passover Chol Hamoed, and only nonessential work activities and crafts, as defined by Jewish law, are prohibited.

## **PREPARING FOR PASSOVER**

For more detailed instructions and guidance, a competent Halachic authority should be consulted.

### **1. REMOVING CHOMETZ**

A. Prior to Passover, every Jew is required to remove all Chometz from his home, property, and all premises under his or her jurisdiction (i.e. desk, office, locker, car). Even if one will not be on the premises during Passover, as long as one is there within 30 days of Passover, the obligation to remove all Chometz before Passover applies. In such cases, one should consult a competent Halachic authority and make the necessary arrangements.

B. To facilitate the removal of Chometz, each Jew is obligated to conduct a diligent search in all places where Chometz may have been kept or consumed any time during the preceding year. The specified time for this search is of 13 Nisan/Aviv at nightfall, traditionally using a feather and the light of a single candle. However, Passover cleaning in Jewish homes must be started much earlier. The premises should be clean by the time the search begins (approximately 45 minutes after sunset). The blessing is recited before the search begins, and a public disclaimer of ownership of Chometz (Bitul) is recited afterward. These texts can be found in most traditional Haggadahs.

C. It is permissible to sell Chometz to a non-Jew before the restrictions on Chometz go into effect on the day before Passover. To comply with the stringent requirements of Jewish law, the sale is conducted by contract through an Orthodox rabbi, who is empowered to act as an agent. The sold Chometz is the non Jew's property until after Passover ends and must be treated accordingly. The Chometz should be locked away until after Passover when the Rabbi repurchases it for the community.

D. Restrictions on the eating, then use, and finally, possession of Chometz normally begin on the morning before Passover. Just before these restrictions begin, the remaining Chometz must be destroyed (usually burned) and a public disclaimer of Chometz ownership (Bitul) recited. The exact times depend on your geographic location. Consult your local Orthodox rabbi for the times when these restrictions go into effect.

E. Chometz which remains in a Jew's possession during Passover may not be used by him or any other Jew at any time, and it may not be purchased after Passover. If Chometz is discovered during Passover, it should be disposed of, in accordance with Jewish law, as soon as possible. Consult an Orthodox rabbi immediately for the appropriate procedures.

### **2. UTENSILS FOR USE ON PASSOVER**

A. Jewish law requires special dishes, cooking utensils, glassware, and silverware for Passover use, with separate meat and dairy sets. They can be made of any material, including plastic or paper. Once these are used for Chometz, they may not be used again on Passover.

B. If it is not possible to maintain a complete set of separate utensils for Passover it may be possible to use some year-round utensils for Passover after a special kashering procedure. "Kashering" should only be done under the guidance of an Orthodox rabbi. Metal and wooden utensils, if they can be thoroughly cleaned, may be "kashered", but earthenware utensils may not be "kashered". Procedures for kashering depend on how the utensil was used during the year. Consult with your local Orthodox rabbi for details.

C. Shelves, countertops and eating surfaces used year round should be cleaned and covered for Passover use, and special dish racks, sink racks and wash basins should be used. Cooking surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned and covered. Ovens should be thoroughly cleaned, and either kashered by being burnt out (consult your rabbi for details) or used with a special insert liner.

### **3. FOODS WHICH MAY NOT BE USED ON PASSOVER**

A. Any food or food product containing fermented grain products (Chometz) may not be used or remain in a Jew's possession on Passover. Even foods with minute amounts of Chometz ingredients, or foods processed on utensils which are used for other Chometz containing foods, are not permissible for Passover use.

B. Ashkenazic Jews, (Jews of Eastern European descent) also do not eat many legumes (Kitniot) - beans, corn, peas, rice, etc. and products containing them as ingredients throughout Passover, while Sephardic, Yemenite and Oriental Jewish custom varies from one community to another.

C. Because of the large number of food products which contain Chometz or Kitniot ingredients, only food products manufactured under reliable rabbinical supervision should be purchased for Passover use. That includes beverages, condiments, spices, and all processed foods such as fruits and vegetables, fish, meat and dairy products, and especially, baked goods.

D. Grain alcohol is a fermentation product, and is therefore Chometz. Any edible items which normally contain grain alcohol, including whiskey, liquor, and liquid medications (however, see paragraph F for further information on medications), and even those which are not usually taken internally (such as perfumes, cologne, toilet water, hair spray, hair tonic, shaving lotion, mouthwash, liquid and roll-on deodorants) should be treated as Chometz unless specifically approved for Passover use.

E. Totally inedible non-food products which contain grain alcohol such as polish, ink, paint and floor wax, are permissible for Passover use.

F. Any person with a medical condition must consult his or her physician and rabbi to ascertain the medicines that should be taken during the holiday, and any special procedures that should be followed.

G. There are many families which maintain the tradition of additional restrictions to their Passover diet. Some do not eat any food products made of Matzoh or matzoh meal mixed with water (Gebrochts) during the first seven days of Passover.

Condensed Ritual Guide to Passover Seder

### 1. **SEDER PLATE**

A special Seder Plate is displayed during the Seder, containing the key elements of Passover. The plate is carefully prepared and placed before the head of the household, or the one conducting the Seder, who dispenses the Seder foods to each of the participants. The following items appear on the Seder Plate:

- 1) **Three whole Matzos** - unleavened bread (either on the plate or next to it)
- 2) **Maror** - bitter herbs, usually horseradish or romaine lettuce
- 3) **Charoses** - special mixture of apples, nuts, wine and cinnamon symbolizing mortar
- 4) **Karpas** - a vegetable, preferably parsley or celery

S) **Zeroah** - a piece of roasted or boiled meat or poultry, preferably a shankbone, recalling the Paschal sacrifice of the original Exodus. Before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple the Paschal sacrifice was the central feature of the Seder.

6) **Baytzah** - a roasted or boiled egg, commemorating the festival sacrifice that was brought at the Jerusalem Temple. An egg is used because it is a traditional food for mourners, reminding us of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

7) There are other items that can be placed on Seder plates depending on the customs followed by the family.

### 2. **BASIC OBLIGATIONS**

There are five basic obligations (mitvos) performed by each Jew, in the course of the Seder conducted according to the traditional Haggadah:

- 1) Eating Matzohs
- 2) Drinking four cups of wine (Arbah Kosos)
- 3) Eating bitter herbs (Maror)
- 4) Reading the story of the Exodus (Haggadah or Magid)
- 5) Reciting Psalms of Praise (Hallel)

### 3. **MATZOH**

A. There are three times during the course of the Seder when Matzoh must be eaten - at the beginning of the Seder meal, when the special blessing over Matzoh is made, for the Korech (Hillel Sandwich) together with the Maror, and at the end of the meal for the Afikomen.

B. For the appropriate minimum quantities of Matzoh, and the time period in which it must be consumed, please refer to the following section on Shiurim.

C. Three unbroken Matzohs are required for the Seder plate for each Seder. Each individual must consume the minimum specified quantity of Matzoh during the course of the Seder. If the Matzohs on the Seder plate are insufficient, they should be supplemented by additional Matzohs.

D. The Matzoh is eaten while reclining on the left side as a symbol of freedom. The piece of Matzoh called Afikomen should be eaten before midnight, and no solid food should be eaten thereafter.

E. To fulfill the mitzvos of the Seder, one must use Shmurah Matzohs, which are produced under a special standard of supervision, beginning with the harvest of the grain (rather than with its milling into flour, as with regular Matzohs for Passover).

F. Matzoh made with fruit juice or eggs, including Egg Matzoh, Whole Wheat Matzoh, and Chocolate Covered Egg Matzoh, Egg Barley, are permissible on Passover only for the elderly, sick, or young children who cannot digest regular Matzoh. Under no circumstances should they be eaten by others at any time during Passover, nor can they be eaten to fulfill the mitzvos of the Seder.

#### **4. FOUR CUPS OF WINE**

A. Each Jew is obligated to drink four cups of wine at these specific times during each Seder: the first at the start of the Seder, following Kiddush; the second before the meal, after reciting the Haggadah story; the third following the Grace After the Meal; and the last after completing Psalms of Praise (Hallel).

B. Please consult the following section on Shiurim for minimum volumes necessary to be consumed and time limits for each of the four cups.

C. Red wine is the preferred beverage for use during the Seder. If a person has difficulty drinking wine, it may be diluted with kosher grape juice. If one wishes to dilute the wine with water, an Orthodox rabbi should be consulted to determine the minimum acceptable proportions. If someone cannot drink even diluted wine, he may drink kosher grape juice instead. If an individual cannot drink any grape product, then a rabbi should be consulted on the proper beverage to substitute in order to fulfill the mitzvah of drinking the four cups.

D. One should drink the wine reclining on the left side, in order to symbolize freedom.

#### **5. BUTER HERBS (MAROR)**

A. All persons are obligated to eat bitter herbs twice at each Seder. According to most authorities, the bitter herbs may consist either of romaine lettuce, horseradish or endives.

B. When using the romaine lettuce, one may use the stalks or leaves for Maror. When horseradish is used for the Maror, it should be chopped, ground or grated to reduce its strength, but it must be covered so as not to be weakened too much. Cooked or preserved vegetables are not suitable for Maror; therefore commercially prepared grated horseradish, which is packed in vinegar, may not be used for the mitzvah.

C. The Maror is dipped in Charoses, a specially prepared mixture of wine, nuts, cinnamon, and apples, symbolizing the bricks and mortar of ancient Egypt.

D. Immediately thereafter, a second, smaller volume of Maror is eaten with Matzoh in the Korech (Hillel Sandwich).

E. When lettuce is used, it must be cleaned and inspected very carefully to remove the small insects which often are present in its leaves. One recommended way to clean lettuce of insects is to soak it for not more than half an hour in salt water, and rinse it in fresh water before inspection.

F. Consult the following section on Shiurim for the minimum volume of Maror to be consumed each time and the time limits.

#### **5. RELATING THE STORY OF THE EXODUS & HALLEL**

A. Most of the unique Seder practices are designed to stimulate interest and arouse curiosity in the Exodus story. The central theme for the Haggadah is the discussion of the Exodus, a timeless event which has forged countless generations of Jews into an unbroken chain through history, with each year's Seder another link of that chain.

B. The Seder is a symbolic reenactment of the Exodus, with a compelling message for young and old alike. Seder participants are encouraged to discuss the various aspects of the Exodus in detail, beyond the text of the Haggadah.

C. Young children are encouraged to participate in the Seder to the extent of their ability. In addition to the Four Questions at the start of the Seder, they are encouraged to drink the Four Cups, eat the Moor and Matzoh, and ask as many questions as they wish.

D. In addition to relating the story of the Exodus, each Jew at the Seder is obligated to discuss three central elements of the Seder ritual - the Paschal sacrifice, the Matzoh and the Maror, as explained in the haggadah. The Seder is a miniature recreation of the Exodus, and participants should imagine themselves as leaving Egypt.

E. The formal part of the Seder closes with special Psalms known as Hallel, which praise the Almighty and His special relationship with the people of Israel.

F. The Seder traditionally concludes with the singing of several lively songs celebrating the relationship between G-d and the Jewish People.

## **Shiurim: Measures & Minimums**

In order to fulfill the Mitzvos of the Passover Seder, it is necessary to consume a minimum quantity (Shiur) of the Four Cups of wine, Matzos and Maror, in a minimum period of time. For wine, the volume of most of a Revi is should be consumed. For Matzoh and Maror, a K'zais is the minimum volume. The time limit is K'day Achilas Pras.

Rabbinic authorities have historically disagreed as to the exact quantities that each of these represent in modern measures. We quote here, for the information of the public, the modern equivalent values for the minimum acceptable quantities. (B'dieved) for each of these Mitzvos, according to the listings published by the Otzar Haposkim of Jerusalem. We also include some practical suggestions for estimating these amounts.

We urge the reader to consult with a competent halachic authority for the ideal quantities that should be consumed in each case to perform the mitzvah optimally (L'chatchila).

**MINIMUM VOLUME FOR WINE: 86 c.c. (3.0 fluid ounces):** This should be the minimum size of wine cups used during the Passover Seder for drinking the Four Cups. Each Seder participant must drink more than half this volume for each of the Four Cups to fulfill the mitzvah.

**MINIMUM QUANTITY OF MATZOH:** The minimum quantity of matzoh is approximately at least one-third of an average, machine made matzoh. Please note, however, that machine made matzohs vary in size. Optimally (L'chatchila) one should consume substantially higher minimum quantities both for the initial mitzvah of "Achilat Matzoh" and for the "Afikomen".

**MINIMUM VOLUME OF MAROR (Bitter Herbs):** 19 grams (0.7 fluid ounces).

In the case of ground horseradish, this volume can be easily estimated by putting it in a small cup or glass.

In the case of lettuce, this volume can be estimated as follows:

Leaves: enough to cover an area of 80 square inches (8 by 10 )

Stalks: enough to cover an area of 15 square inches (3 by 5 )

**TIME LIMITS:** The eating of the Matzoh and Maror, and the drinking of each of the Four Cups of wine should be done, if possible, in one or two swallows. In any event, the drinking of each cup of wine and the eating of the Matzoh and Maror should be completed within 4 minutes. In the event this is not possible, a competent Halachic authority should be consulted.

## **Glossary of Common Passover Terms**

1. **CHOMETZ** - fermented or leavened wheat, rye, oats, spelt and barley. When these grains come in contact with water, they leaven within 18 minutes. In the case of hot or salted water, leavening takes place instantly. Chometz may not be consumed either by eating or drinking, and may not be held in one's possession, nor may any benefit be derived from chometz. Grain flour is commonly produced from grains that have been washed and tempered. Tempering is the process by which grains are softened by soaking in water, and this flour and all products made with it are, therefore, chometz.

2. **KITNIOT** - leguminous vegetables such as beans, peas, corn and rice. The consumption of these foods is restricted by European Rabbinic tradition, though these foods are not chometz. Unlike chometz, benefit from, and possession of Kitniot during Passover are permitted. Yeminite, Sephardic and Oriental Jews are not bound to this custom by their traditions. The tradition of the Kitniot restriction has been steadfastly maintained by all Jews of European origin for centuries. This includes the Jews of France, England, Germany, Russia, Poland, Hungary, Austria and the Low Countries.

3. **MATZOH** - unleavened bread prepared from the flour of grains that have not been washed or tempered, and have been milled under supervision, completely protected from any contact with water. Matzoh may be prepared only with water that has been stored overnight. It is kneaded into dough either by hand or machine, but only in a cool room, since heat may cause instant leavening. The dough may not be left idle for a period longer than 18 minutes. It is rolled into thin sheets and then baked. All equipment used in the preparation of Matzoh must be constantly cleaned of dough crumbs, and the oven in which Matzoh is baked must be set at the proper baking temperature. Insufficiently heated ovens cause leavening to occur. Once Matzoh has been baked properly, leavening can no longer occur, and the product can no longer become Chometz. Therefore, Matzoh products such as ground matzoh meal, flour and farfel may be cooked in hot water, baked or blended with any variety of Passover ingredients.

4. **SHMURAH MATZOH OR MITZVAH** - matzoh used for the Seder on Passover eve. All Jews must fulfill the mitzvah of Achilat Matzoh - eating of Matzoh. This Matzoh is eaten at the Seder before the Seder meal, at which time the blessings of Hamotzi and Al Achilat Matzoh are pronounced. Such Matzoh must be prepared with the express purpose of the mitzvah of matzoh Le'shem Matzath Mitzvah. It is traditional that the flour from which this matzoh is prepared should be specially supervised from the time the wheat is cut Shmurah Mishaath Ketzirah. When this special supervision has been instituted only from the time of milling - Techinah - matzoh prepared from such flour may be used for Matzath Mitzvah only when the traditional Shmurah Mishaath Ketzirah Matzoh is not available.

5. "**MATZOH ASHIRAH**" - egg matzoh made from flour kneaded with fruit juice or eggs. This matzoh may not be used for the mitzvah regardless of which flour is used. This type of matzoh is commonly referred to as egg matzoh, since it is usually prepared with eggs. Water may not be used in the baking of egg matzoh since adding water to the dough would create instant leavenings. According to European Halachic tradition, such Matzoh may be consumed on Pesach only by the elderly, sick or young children who cannot digest regular matzoh. Under normal circumstances, egg matzoh should not be used; both because it is feared that some water may have accidentally been blended into the dough, and in deference to the opinion which maintains that the mixture of flour with any liquid other than water causes immediate chometz.

6. **BEDIKATH CHOMETZ** - the search for Chometz. On the night of the thirteenth of Nisan, Sunday, April 20, 1997, a search for Chometz is to be conducted in the home, wherever Chometz may have been brought during the year. The search is conducted in the evening, by candlelight. Chometz found during the search is set aside for burning the next day.

7. **BITUL CHOMETZ** - the nullification of Chometz. Since Chometz may not be held in one's possession during Passover, one may rid oneself of the Chometz by declaring all types of Chometz in one's possession to be dust and ashes, abandoned property. The Bitul is pronounced immediately after the search, to nullify the Chometz that may have been overlooked, and again after the burning in the morning, to include any additional Chometz that may have come into one's possession in the interim.

B. **BIUR CHOMETZ** - the destruction of Chometz. All chometz in one's possession must be destroyed before Passover, by noon on the fourteenth day of Nisan, Monday, April 21, 1997. The daylight hours of each day are divided into twelve parts; each twelfth is then reckoned as a portion hour of that day. Chometz may be eaten only during the first portion hours (see the time listing for your area); it may be used or sold during the fifth portion hour. During the sixth portion hour, all Chometz must be destroyed.

However, it is customary to destroy the Chometz in the fifth portion hour to allow for the pronouncement of the Bitul for any Chometz that has been overlooked. It is not permitted to rely solely on the utterance of the Bitul to fulfill the mitzvah of Biur Chometz. Though any method of complete disposal is permitted, i.e., flushing into sewers or throwing into the sea, it is traditional to destroy Chometz by fire during the fifth portion hour of the day, after which the Bitul is pronounced to nullify any Chometz that may have been overlooked. The Bitul cannot be pronounced during the sixth portion hour of the day, since at that time, the use of Chometz is restricted and one can no longer rid oneself of its possession.

9. **MECHIRATH CHOMETZ** - sale of Chometz to a non-Jew. The requirement of Biur Chometz is limited to foods under Jewish ownership and possession. Chometz that has been transferred to a non-Jew need not be destroyed. Such transfer of Chometz, by legal and binding sale with properly executed contract (Shtar Mechirah) gives the non-Jew full title to all Chometz foods. This transfer is traditionally carried out by engaging the Rabbi to act as an agent, with power of attorney to sell the Chometz to a non-Jew by means of Kaoblath Kinyan and contract - Shtar Hashoah. The Rabbi, acting as an agent for the owners of the Chometz, then enters into an agreement with a non-Jew for the sale of Chometz. When the sale is carried out, a limited amount of Chometz is not sold and set aside to be destroyed on the following day, in order to fulfill the Mitzvos of Bedikah, Biur and Bitul. Chometz that has been sold must be put in a completely sealed-off place, inaccessible during Passover.

10. **CHOMETZ SHE'AVAR ALAV HA'PESACH** - any Chometz held over Passover under Jewish ownership. This Chometz may not be used or sold after Passover, as a penalty for failure to perform the mitzvahs of Bedikah and Biur properly. Selling the Chometz before Passover to a non-Jew avoids Jewish ownership during Passover. The mitzvah of Bedikah and Biur have therefore not been violated, and the injunction of Chometz She'Avar Alav ha'Pesach is avoided.