

The Passover Seder

The text of the Passover seder is written in a book called the *Haggadah*. The content of the seder can be summed up by the following Hebrew rhyme:

**Kaddesh, Urechatz,
Karpas, Yachatz,
Maggid, Rachtzah,**

**Motzi Matzah,
Maror, Korech,
Shulchan Orech,**

**Tzafun, Barech,
Hallel, Nirtzah**

Now, what does that mean?

1. **Kaddesh**: Sanctification. The word is derived from the Hebrew root Qof-Dalet-Shin, meaning holy. This is a blessing over wine in honor of the holiday. The wine is drunk, and a second cup is poured.

2. **Urechatz**: Washing. A washing of the hands without a blessing, in preparation for eating the Karpas.

3. **Karpas**: Vegetable. A vegetable (usually parsley) is dipped in salt water and eaten. The vegetable symbolizes the lowly origins of the Jewish people; the salt water symbolizes the tears shed as a result of our slavery. Parsley is a good vegetable to use for this purpose, because when you shake off the salt water, it looks like tears.

4. **Yachatz**: Breaking the matzah. One of the three matzahs on the table is broken. Part is returned to the pile, the other part is set aside for the *afikomen* (see below).

5. **Maggid**: The Story. A retelling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt and the first Passover. This begins with the youngest person asking The Four Questions, a set of questions about the proceedings designed to encourage participation in the seder. The Four Questions are also known as *Mah Nishtanah* (Why is it different?), which are the first words of the Four Questions.

The *maggid* is designed to satisfy the needs of four different types of people: the wise son, who wants to know the technical details; the wicked son, who excludes himself (and learns the penalty for doing so); the simple son, who needs to know the basics; and the son who is unable to ask, the one who doesn't even know enough to know what he needs to know. At the end of the *maggid*, a blessing is recited over the second cup of wine and it is drunk.

6. **Rachtzah**: Washing. A second washing of the hands, this time with a blessing, in preparation for eating the matzah.

7. **Motzi**: Blessing over Grain Products. The *ha-motzi* blessing, a generic blessing for bread or grain products used as a meal, is recited over the matzah.

8. **Matzah**: Blessing over Matzah. A blessing specific to matzah is recited, and a bit of matzah is eaten.

9. **Maror**: Bitter Herbs. A blessing is recited over a bitter vegetable (usually raw horseradish; sometimes romaine lettuce), and it is eaten. This symbolizes the bitterness of slavery. The maror is eaten with charoses, a mixture of apples, nuts, cinnamon and wine, which symbolizes the mortar used by the Jews in building during their slavery.

10. **Korech**: The Sandwich. Rabbi Hillel was of the opinion that the *maror* should be eaten together with matzah and the paschal offering in a sandwich. In his honor, we eat some maror on a piece of matzah, with some charoses (we don't do animal sacrifice anymore, so there is no paschal offering).

11. **Shulchan Orech**: Dinner. A festive meal is eaten. There is no particular requirement regarding what to eat at this meal (except, of course, that chametz cannot be eaten). Among Ashkenazic Jews, gefilte fish and matzah ball soup are traditionally eaten at the beginning of the meal.

12. **Tzafun**: The Afikomen. The piece of matzah set aside earlier is eaten as "desert," the last food of the meal. Different families have different traditions relating to the *afikomen*. Some have the children hide it, while the parents have to either find it or ransom it back. Others have the parents hide it. The idea is to keep the children awake and attentive throughout the pre-meal proceedings, waiting for this part.

13. **Barech**: Grace after Meals. The third cup of wine is poured, and grace after meals is recited. This is similar to the grace that would be said on any Sabbath. At the end, a blessing is said over the third cup and it is drunk. The fourth cup is poured, including a cup set aside for the prophet Elijah, who is supposed to herald the Messiah, and is supposed to come on Passover to do this. The door is opened for a while at this point (supposedly for Elijah, but historically because Jews were accused of nonsense like putting the blood of Christian babies in matzah, and we wanted to show our Christian neighbors that we weren't doing anything unseemly).

14. **Hallel**: Praises. Several psalms are recited. A blessing is recited over the last cup of wine and it is drunk.

15. **Nirtzah**: Closing. A simple statement that the seder has been completed, with a wish that next year, we may celebrate Passover in Jerusalem (i.e., that the Messiah will come within the next year). This is followed by various hymns and stories.

List of Dates

Passover will begin on the following days on the American calendar:

- April 17, 2003 (Jewish Year 5763)
- April 6, 2004 (Jewish Year 5764)
- April 24, 2005 (Jewish Year 5765)
- April 13, 2006 (Jewish Year 5766)
- April 3, 2007 (Jewish Year 5767)
- April 20, 2008 (Jewish Year 5768)