

## ATTENDING YOUR FIRST SEDER THIS PASSOVER?

*Here's what you need to know*

### 1. WHAT IS PESAḤ?

Passover, or “Pesaḥ” in Hebrew, is one of the most important holidays in the Jewish calendar. Every year in the spring, Jewish people around the world celebrate the eight days of Passover, retelling the story of the Exodus from slavery in Egypt, and the redemption of the Israelites in the Torah. During Passover, it is customary to host or attend a seder, a ritual meal where the Exodus story is retold. In addition, many Jews observe dietary restrictions for the eight days of the holiday.

### 2. WHAT IS MATZAH? WHERE'S THE BREAD?

According to the Torah, the Israelites did not have much time to gather provisions during their flight from Egypt. Instead of making bread with yeast, which takes hours to rise, the Children of Israel made matzah, unleavened bread, to take with them on their journey to freedom. Today, those observing Passover eat matzah at the seder and throughout the subsequent week of holiday celebration and avoid leavened grains, even symbolically cleaning their homes of all bread and grains before the seder. In the Sephardic community, people eat rice, beans, and some seeds in addition to grains, called “kitniyot,” while for some Ashkenazi communities, it is customary to also avoid kitniyot.

### 3. IS “KOSHER FOR PASSOVER” THE SAME AS REGULAR KOSHER?

Traditional Jewish dietary laws are known as kashrut, or “keeping kosher.” These include not eating pork and shellfish, not mixing milk and meat products in the same meal, and not consuming any animal blood. During Pesaḥ, many observe additional restrictions around grain products. In order to be “kosher for Passover,” foods must be prepared in observance of year-round dietary laws, as well as free of grain products or leavening. Most packaged food items will carry stamps or stickers near their ingredients lists with the words “KLP” or “Kosher for Passover.” While it may sound like a lot, remember that items such as meat, cheese, fruit, and vegetables are kosher for Passover, as well as most chocolate!

### 4. WHAT IS THE DEEPER MEANING OF CHANGING WHAT WE CONSUME FOR EIGHT DAYS?

Matzah is a symbol for simplicity, while ḥametz is puffed up and processed. Pesaḥ is an opportunity to focus on unprocessed and natural fruits, vegetables, meats, and fish. During the eight days of Pesaḥ, this pared-back diet might also create an opening to think about the basics, offering a framework for simplifying your day-to-day life and finding your spiritual center.

### 5. WHAT DO I BRING?

Invited to a seder, but not sure what to bring your host? You have plenty of options. A bottle of kosher for Passover wine or a small dessert will likely be appreciated. If you're worried about dietary restrictions, flowers or a thank you card are always welcome and thoughtful gifts.

### 6. WHAT DO I WEAR?

While many people wear something a little nicer to their seder in honor of the holiday, dress codes vary between families and region. While “business casual” is a good default, it never hurts to ask your host.

### 7. WHAT IS THE HAGGADAH?

The haggadah is the road map for the seder through a collection of readings that retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt, as well as listing the order and requirements for each step of the seder. There are many haggadot available, each with its own twist on the seder ritual. A haggadah will let you know when to sit or stand, what words to sing, what prayers to recite, and most importantly—when to eat!

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## **8. WHY ARE WE SINGING?**

While most Jewish prayer is chanted rather than recited, the seder can also involve additional songs. Some of the most popular tunes you may hear at the seder relate important information about the ritual or the story, from “Kadeish Urhatz,” which lists the steps of the ritual meal in order, to “Avadim Hayyinu” (“We Were Slaves”) and “Dayenu,” which celebrate the miracles of the Exodus narrative. Other traditional songs are also included, such as “Had Gadyah” (“One Little Goat”), and the psalms of Hallel.

## **9. WHEN DO WE EAT?**

When you sit down for a Pesah seder, remember that it may take a while to get to the actual meal! Because each step of the seder tells a different part of the Passover story, there are many ritual steps, stories, songs, and small tastings of food or wine ahead of the actual festive meal. Also important to keep in mind is that the seder doesn’t end with dessert! After eating the afikomen (the “dessert” matzah that concludes the meal), the seder continues with birkat hamazon (grace after meals), thanking God for the meal and the holiday, as well as additional songs.