

Guidelines for a Halachic Seder

Preparing for the Seder

Because the Seder cannot begin before *tzais hakochavim*, it's very important to have everything ready ahead of time in order to start immediately after returning from shul.

- Open the bottles of wine, and prepare a bowl of salt water. (If necessary, a small amount of salt water can be prepared on Seder night—even on Shabbos—but only if it's right before the meal, and by using a *shinuiy*.)
- Prepare *charain* for *Marror* (in remembrance of the affliction we suffered in Egypt). It should be sharp—but it's enough just to have a bitter taste, according to Rav Moshe Feinstein. Keep it in a jar to retain its sharpness.

Romaine lettuce is commonly used as well.

- Prepare the *Charoses* (in remembrance of the mud bricks)—a thick mixture of figs, apples, nuts and pomegranates, sweet red wine and spices (strands of cinnamon and ginger—which remind us of the straw). There are various recipes.

Also, apples remind us of the Jewish women in Egypt, who gave birth in the apple orchards—without midwives. Almonds—*shkaydim* in Hebrew—symbolize Hashem's hastening (“*shokeid*”) of the *Geula*.

When Pesach falls on Shabbos, one should not mix wine or vinegar into the *Charoses*—instead, add the *Charoses* to the wine, and stir with a finger rather than a spoon.

- Prepare a broiled chicken bone (in remembrance of the *korban* Pesach). This is not eaten (by Ashkenazim) on Seder night.
- Prepare the boiled egg (a symbol of mourning in remembrance of the *korban Chagigah*), and arrange the Seder plates.
- Prepare long Yom Tov candles that will last throughout the entire meal.
- Place the *matzah* on the table.

The Seder Plate

- The items on the Seder plate are placed in a very specific order
- Starting from the bottom, and going clockwise, the order is: *Chazeres* (lettuce), *Karpas* (vegetable), *Beitzah* (roasted egg), *Zero'ah* (roasted bone), *Charoses*—and in the center is *Marror* (bitter herbs).

- The bowl of salt water should be placed on the table, near the Seder plate.
- Three *matzos* should be placed on the table – either under or in front of the Seder plate. For the Seder, the *minhag* is to use round, handmade *shmurah* matzah. This type of matzah has been carefully guarded against any contact with water from the time of reaping, grinding, kneading and baking.

The Seder

- The 15 steps of our Seder were composed in the 11th century by either Rashi or Tosfos. The 15 steps correspond to the *gematria* of Hashem's Name; the number of steps leading into the Beis Hamikdash; and the days of the moon's cycle (representing the 15 generations from Avraham ascending to Shlomo HaMelech—and the 15 generations from Shlomo HaMelech descending to King Tzidkiyahu, when the First Temple was destroyed and the Babylonian exile began.)
- There are seven mitzvos that we perform at the Seder. Two are *mid'oreisa*:

❖ *telling the story of Yetzias*
Mitzrayim ❖ *eating matzah*

- The other mitzvos are *mid'rabbanan*:

❖ *eating Marror (bitter herbs)* ❖ *eating the Afikomen (as a reminder of the Pesach offering)* ❖ *saying Hallel* ❖ *drinking the four cups of wine* ❖ *demonstrating acts of freedom and aristocracy – eg. sitting with a pillow, leaning while we eat and drink, and beginning the meal “with a dip.”*

- There is a *minhag* for married men—or at least the leader—to wear a kittel, although some don't during *shana rishona*.

Kiddush

- The Haggadah should begin on time, so the children will be awake to ask questions. Answering these questions is a mitzvah *d'oreisa*.
- In some households, the *ba'al habayis* makes Kiddush for everyone at the table. But many follow the *minhag* of having everyone make their own Kiddush, while others all say it together out loud.
- Have in mind to fulfill two mitzvos: the mitzvah of Kiddush that we say on every Shabbos and Yom Tov,

plus the special mitzvah to drink four cups of wine at the Seder.

- When saying *She'hechyanu*, have in mind all the various mitzvos of the Seder night: *matzah*, *Marror*, and reading through the Haggadah.
- Women do not say *She'hechyanu*, if they already said it when lighting the candles. But she should answer "Amein".

The Four Cups of Wine

- At the Seder, everyone should drink four cups of wine corresponding to the four expressions of *chairus* – freedom – mentioned in the Torah (*Shemos* 6:6-7).
- The first cup represents our physical removal from the geographical boundaries of Egypt. The second cup represents our delivery from Egyptian slavery. The third cup represents our creation as an inherently free people, immune to any future possibility of enslavement. And the fourth cup represents our election as G-d's chosen people at Sinai.
- Nobody should pour his own wine, but rather each person should pour for another – as if we are royalty.
- It is best to use red wine, as this alludes to the blood spilled by Paro, the blood of the Ten Plagues, and the blood the Jews put on their doorposts. Low-alcohol (7%) wine is fine to use.
- Everyone should have his own wine cup that holds a *revi'is*—ie. a minimum of 3.3 oz. (86cc). According to Rav Moshe Feinstein, the *shiur* is 4.42 oz., and that is what is held by in America.
- It is better to drink the smaller *shiur* of wine than the larger amount of grape juice. Someone who has difficulty drinking wine may use a half wine, half grape juice combination; or even one-third wine mixed with grape juice. If necessary, one may use 100% grape juice, but should at least add a bit of wine so that the taste of alcohol is detectable.
- It is preferable to drink the entire cup of wine. Otherwise, you should at least drink *rov kos*. And if not that, then at least a *revi'is*. Or use a cup from which you can drink *rov kos* and *rov revi'is* together at once.
- Halacha defines an act of "drinking" as two swallows without pausing. This is the preferable way to consume the Four Cups. Otherwise, you should at least consume the wine within four minutes.

Leaning

- As an expression of freedom, one should lean to the left while drinking each of the Four Cups—and while eating the *matzah*. It should be enough of a lean that if the object on which you are leaning were to be pulled away, you would fall over.
- Even left-handed people should lean to the left (to avoid food going down the

windpipe.)

- Don't lean onto your own arm or your body. Lean most of your body—not just your head—onto a chair, wall or another person.
- No leaning is done during the reading of the Haggadah, while eating the meal or *bentching*.

Urchatz

- Everyone at the Seder now washes his hands in the manner of washing for bread – pouring water from a cup, twice on each hand – but without a *bracha*.

We do this because any detached food dipped into one of the seven fluids (water, wine, blood, dew, milk, olive oil, and date honey) makes the food susceptible to *tumah*. If the food will be eaten with the hands, washing is required.

Karpas

- *Karpas* must be a vegetable whose *bracha* is “*borei pri ha-adamah*” when eaten raw, but is not useable for *Marror*. Options include celery, radish or potato.
- During preparation, it is important to check the vegetable carefully, as leafy vegetables in particular can contain tiny insects.
- Take the *Karpas* vegetable and dip it in salt water. Have in mind that the *bracha* will also cover the *Marror*—thus linking the *Karpas* to the meal, and fulfilling the obligation of a *bracha achrona* with the *bentching*.
- One should eat less than a *kezayis* (15 grams) to avoid having to say a *bracha achrona*.

Yachatz

- The leader of the Seder breaks the middle *matzah* in two. The smaller piece is put back in between the other two *matzos*, to be eaten later at *Hamotzi*. The larger piece is wrapped up and becomes the Afikomen.
- According to the gemara, children should try to “steal” the Afikomen to encourage them to remain awake during the Seder.
- Two mitzvos of eating *matzah* at the Seder are fulfilled with the same piece.

Maggid

- As we begin the main part of the Seder – the telling of the story of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* – it is important to have a good translation of the Haggadah to understand what is being said. The first paragraph of the Haggadah is written not in Hebrew, but in Aramaic—which was the common language of the time.
- Many have the *minhag* to say aloud, “*I am hereby about to fulfill the mitzvah of telling the story of the Exodus.*”
- We uncover the *matzos*, then keep the broken *matzah* raised for all to see—until the start of the Four Questions.
- There shouldn’t be any talking about other matters while the Haggadah is being read. Everyone can take part by reading a section.

The Four Questions

- Remove the Seder plate from the table until it is time to eat. We do this in order to prompt questions, and also to show that we’re not going to eat until we’ve told the story.
- At this time, we also pour the second cup of wine.
- The *minhag* is for the youngest person at the Seder to recite the Four Questions. If there are no children present at a family Seder, the wife should ask them.
- The children must understand the answers to the Four Questions.

“Avadim Hayeenu”

- The three *matzos* should be left uncovered for the duration of the reading of the Haggadah.
- According to the Mishnah Brura, the declaration, “We were slaves in Egypt” is the essential answer to the Four Questions—and after this point it is permitted for young children to go to sleep.

Vi'Hee

She'Amda

- In an expression of joy, the *matzos* are covered and the wine glasses are raised while reciting this paragraph.

The Ten Plagues

- Every time one of the plagues is mentioned, we dip our finger in the wine and spill a drop. This reminds us that our cup of joy is not complete because people had to die for our salvation. Thus it is considered insensitive – after completing the drops – to lick one's finger.
- Use the pointer finger (“*etzba*” in Hebrew), which corresponds to the declaration in the Torah that the plagues were “*Etzba Elokim*” – “the finger of God” (*Shemos* 8:15).
- You should spill a total of 16 drops – three for “blood, fire and pillars of smoke,” 10 more for the plagues, and another three for Rebbe Yehudah's abbreviation.
- After all the drops have been spilled, the cup should be refilled.

Second Cup

- When you drink the wine, don't forget to lean. So important is this expression of freedom, that if one forgets to lean while drinking the second cup, he must drink it again.
- If we already made the *bracha* over wine on the first cup, why do we make a new *bracha* here again? Because of the significant *hefsek* between the two cups.

Rach'Tzah

- The hands are washed in the normal manner for bread, with the *bracha*, “*al netilas yadaiyim*”.
- From this point on, be careful not to talk until you've eaten the *matzah*. Better yet, talking should be avoided until after you've finished eating the *Marror* and the *Korech* sandwich. This way, the *brachas* of “*Hamotzi, matzah* and *Marror*” will all carry over to the sandwich.

HaMotzi

- It is a mitzvah *d'oreisa* to eat *matzah* on the Seder night.
- Unlike when we make “Hamotzi” on Shabbos, on Pesach we do not dip the *matzah* in salt. It is a special mitzvah to taste the *matzah* itself.
- There is a *minhag* to kiss the *matzah* before eating it, in accordance with the *pasuk*, “Serve Hashem with joy” (*Tehillim* 100:2).
- Before the leader recites the *bracha*, everyone should have in front of him enough *matzah* to fulfill the mitzvah properly.

Eating the Matzah

- The leader lifts all three *matzos*—covered or uncovered—says “Hamotzi”, then drops the bottom *matzah*. He now makes the special *bracha*—“*al achilas matzah*”.
Then he breaks both *matzahs* together, so there is minimal interruption between the *brachas* and the eating.
- He must eat at least one *kezayis* from the top *matzah*, and one *kezayis* from the second (middle) *matzah*. A *kezayis* is approximately 45-50cc, which is roughly two-thirds of a square *matzah* – or one half of the hand-made round *matzah*. (According to the Chazon Ish, the amount is about 25 percent bigger.)
- The best way to do this is to put both *kezaysim* in your mouth and:
 - chew and eat it all in one shot, according to the Mishna Brura.
 - chew and eat it as quickly as possible, according to the Chazon Ish.
 - chew and eat it within two minutes—or four minutes, maximum.
- Halacha defines an act of “eating” as swallowing a *kezayis* within two to four minutes (*kiday achilas prat*). Others say six minutes. At the very least, the *matzah* must be consumed within nine minutes.

If this is difficult, one may sip some water while eating. According to Rav Moshe Feinstein, the time begins with the first swallow. One can gain some extra time by chewing the *matzah* before taking the first swallow.

- If each person at the table is making his own “Hamotzi” with three *matzos* in front of him, then he should do the same. If the *ba'al habayis* is being *motzi* everyone else, then each person should eat at least a small piece of both of his *matzos*—supplementing it with other *matzos* from the table.
- According to the Vilna Gaon, a Jew fulfills a mitzvah every time he eats a *kezayis* of *matzah* during the week

of Pesach.

- Don't forget to lean to the left while eating the *matzah*.

Marror

- Take an amount of *Marror* equivalent to the size of a *kezayis*. Even though many have the *minhag* of using horseradish, nevertheless the *gemara* includes *chassa*—lettuce—as a vegetable that may be used as *Marror*. (Its stalk becomes bitter if left in the ground for a long time.)

Also, *chassa* is a derivative of the word *chus*, which means pity.

- If Romaine lettuce is used, the leaves should total 8x10 inches—or about 25-29cc. Extreme care should be taken to check the lettuce, because often there are small bugs in the leaves.
- If horseradish is used, it should be compacted into 1.1 fluid ounces – an amount equivalent to half of a typical egg. It should be ground up before Yom Tov begins and kept in a jar. If you must grind it up on Yom Tov, do it with a *shinuiy*—like holding the grater upside down.
- Horseradish in jars bought from the store should not be used, because sweeteners are added to make them less bitter. Particularly problematic is red horseradish, which is actually a mixture of beets and horseradish.
- Before making the *bracha*, the *Marror* should be dipped into the *Charoses*, and then shaken off. According to the *gemara*, the *Charoses* serves as an “antiseptic” to dilute the harsh effects of the *Marror*. When reciting the *bracha*, have in mind that the *Marror* will be eaten in the “*Korech* sandwich” as well.
- You shouldn't lean while eating the *Marror*, but it must be consumed within two to four minutes of the first swallow.

Korech

- Take the bottom *matzah* (remaining from the original three) and make a sandwich with the *Marror*.
- For this mitzvah, it is okay to use smaller amounts. The amount of *matzah* should be approximately 23-25cc—roughly one-third of a square *matzah*, or one-fourth of a round *matzah*. (According to the Chazon Ish, the amount is about 25 percent bigger.)
- The amount of *Marror* needed is 3.6 by 2.7 inches of Romaine lettuce, or 0.7 compacted fluid ounce of horseradish.

- Dip the sandwich into the *Charoses*, and then shake it off.
- Say the paragraph of “Remembrance of the Temple.” There is no *bracha*.
- Eat the sandwich while leaning to the left.
- It must be consumed within two to four minutes of the first swallow.

Shulchan Orech

- The festive meal is eaten. It is traditional to begin the meal with an egg, which symbolizes the *Chagigah* offering. This way, everyone starts the Seder meal with the same thing – as in the times of the Beis Hamikdosh when everyone ate the *Chagigah* offering.
- The meal should preferably end before *chatzos*, in order to eat the Afikomen by that time. It is important not to eat so much that you will be too full to eat the Afikomen.
- According to Ashkenazim, the meal should not include any roasted meat, in order to distinguish our meal from that during the times of the Beis HaMikdosh, when the *korban Pesach* was eaten roasted. (Dry-pan roasting is also a problem, because the juices produced are not sufficient for it to be considered “cooking” and not roasting.)
- The meal is actually an extension of the Hallel praises, so one should continue to speak about *Yetzias Mitzrayim* throughout the meal. One need not—some say *should* not—lean while eating.

Afikomen

- The Afikomen should preferably be eaten before *chatzos* – but if eating it by that time will mean rushing through the Seder, then it may be eaten later.
- The Afikomen should be eaten while you are “full”, yet with some room still left in your stomach. If you are full to the point of being “stuffed”, eating the Afikomen might not halachically be considered an act of “eating”.
- Everyone should eat a *kezayis* of *matzah* for the Afikomen. This is approximately 45-50cc, which is roughly two-thirds of a square *matzah*, or one-half of the hand-made round *matzos*. (According to the Chazon Ish, the amount is about 25 percent bigger.) If eating this amount is too difficult, one may eat half that amount.
- Everyone should eat at least one small piece of the actual Afikomen, and then make up the remaining volume from other *matzos*.

- After the Afikomen, nothing else should be eaten for the remainder of the night – with the exception of water, tea and the remaining two cups of wine.
- Eat the Afikomen while leaning to the left.
- It must be consumed within two to four minutes of the first swallow.

Barech

- Fill it for the Third Cup of wine, which will be drunk after *bentching*.
- The *minhag* on Seder night is for the head of the household to lead the *bentching*.
- On Seder night, *everyone* at the table holds up a cup of wine during *bentching*.

Third Cup

- Once again, it is preferable to drink the entire cup of wine. Otherwise, at least drink *rov kos*. And if not that, then at least a *revi'is*.
- It is preferable to drink the cup in two swallows without pausing. Otherwise, at least consume the wine within four minutes.
- Don't forget to lean to the left while drinking.

Eliyahu HaNavi

- Pour the Fourth Cup, as well as the extra cup for Eliyahu HaNavi.
- Open the door.
- The *minhag* is to use the "leftovers" from Eliyahu's cup for Kiddush the next day.

Fourth Cup

- Again, it is preferable to drink the entire cup of wine. Otherwise, at least drink *rov kos*. And if not that, then at least a *revi'is*.
- It is preferable to drink the cup in two swallows without pausing. Otherwise, at least consume the wine within four minutes.
- Don't forget to lean to the left while drinking.
- A *bracha achrona* should be recited afterward.

Hallel

Recite Hallel with joy!

Nirtza

Sing these songs

