



PASSOVER!

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With rhyming text, the Passover celebration is explored – complete with family, food, facts, and fun!

THE PASSOVER EXPERIENCE

Picture this. You live in tumbledown quarters that could be taken from you at any moment, leaving your family out on the street. Your religion and your work are dictated to you. The labor is backbreaking. You learn to speak in whispers. The future is bleak. This is the story of the Jewish people who, like numerous peoples throughout history, have experienced the horrors of slavery. The Jews were held captive in Egypt for generations, liberated at the first Passover. Jewish tradition teaches that all Jews are to approach Passover as if held captive and then set free. Among the most compelling words used during Passover are these: “All people, in every generation, should see themselves as having experienced the Exodus from Egypt.” If we can envision ourselves as slaves, we can also imagine the sheer joy of finding ourselves in a place where our children sleep peacefully and our lives are our own. And because of this, could we help but muster great empathy for all those who find themselves “strangers in a strange land”?

PASSOVER’S HISTORY AND OBSERVANCE

Called *Pesach* in Hebrew, Passover begins on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of *Nissan* (generally in late March or April). Israeli Jews and some in the Diaspora (the lands of Jews outside Israel) celebrate this springtime holiday for seven days, while for others it is an eight-day observance. The *seder* -- the “talking feast” which is the key event of Passover -- is commonly held to be the most widely-

observed Jewish practice. The haggadah, made up of text and commentary, provides participants with the ritual’s script and order (“order” being the literal meaning of the word *seder*).

PASSOVER’S HISTORY AND OBSERVANCE

Some of the best-known symbols of Passover can be found on the *seder* table, where the *seder* plate holds a place of honor. Customarily included are a shank bone, to symbolize the “strong hand and outstretched arm” of the liberating God; a roasted egg, reminiscent of fruitfulness and continuity; a bitter herb, usually horseradish, as a reminder of the bitterness of slavery; a green-leafed vegetable, often parsley, a symbol of springtime and rebirth; and *charoset*, a mixture commonly made of apples, nuts, cinnamon, etc., to recall the mortar used by the slaves to lay bricks. Also prominent on the table is *matzah*, “the bread of affliction,” unleavened bread eaten as a reminder of the Israelites’ hasty retreat from *Mitzraim* (Egypt), when there was no time for bread to rise. And no *seder* table would be complete without Elijah’s Cup, a goblet of wine which symbolically invites the prophet’s return to Earth, which in Jewish tradition signals the coming of the Messiah and a peaceful world.

Many Passover practices are meant to engage and delight children, and can be explored through reading and discussion. And if you haven’t done so, consider attending a *seder*, for we all, children and adults alike, learn by experience.