

PREPARING FOR THE SEDER

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Preparing for the Seder

As noted in **Seder Highlights**,* the Seder may not begin before nightfall (8:24 PM for 2024 in the Chicago area). For the first Seder night, the table should be set and prepared in advance so that the Seder can start as soon as possible. For the second Seder, however, one may not prepare on the first day of Yom Tov for the second day, and no distinct preparations may begin before nightfall (8:24 PM for 2024 in the Chicago area). (Activities that are not clearly being done for another day, such as straightening up the house, are always permitted.)

The Seder Plate

The Seder plate is a designated plate that contains the symbolic foods necessary for a Seder. A fancy, decorated one is nice but not necessary.

The zeroah and egg are symbolic of the two korbanos that we will bring on this night when the Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt. While the egg is customarily eaten at the start of Shulchan Orech, the zeroah is not eaten during the Seder night, but rather some other time during Pesach. If a leg or wing is unavailable for the zeroah, any bone with some meat on it may be used.

1. Kadesh

Shehechyanu is recited at the conclusion of Kiddush. This bracha applies to all the annual mitzvos of the Seder (matzah, marror, drinking four cups of wine, and Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim). As the bracha is recited, one should bear this reference in mind. Note that women who have the custom to recite Shehechyanu when lighting

candles do not repeat it at the Seder. They should listen to it as it is recited by someone else, and have in mind the annual Seder mitzvos.

The wine is consumed while reclining. There is a required minimum volume of wine/grape juice that each person must consume. (See **Seder Highlights*** for more details.)

2. Urchatz

Hands are washed in the same manner as before eating bread but without reciting a bracha. Unnecessary speech or activity is forbidden until the Karpas is eaten.

3. Karpas

A small vegetable piece, less than the volume of a fluid ounce, is dipped into salt water, the standard ha'adamah bracha is recited, and the vegetable is eaten.

When reciting the ha'adamah, one must have in mind that it should also apply to the marror. There are different opinions whether to recline while eating Karpas, and the common practice is not to.

Regarding which type of vegetable to use, customs vary between using a potato, celery, parsley, or radish. If one does not have a particular custom, green vegetables are the preferred choice.

4. Yachatz

The middle matzah is removed and broken into two pieces. The

***NOTE:** Additional details for preparing for the *Seder* may be found in the *Seder Highlights* article, immediately following this article.

larger piece is referred to as the *afikomen*. It is wrapped in a bag or a cloth and saved for *Tzafun* (**Seder Step 11**). The smaller piece is returned to its place between the remaining two *matzos*. Simply, the purpose of this step is to prepare for the recounting of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, which is said over a piece of broken *matzah*.

There is an age-old custom to hide the *afikomen*. In some homes, children “snatch” it and then hide it; in others the parents hide it, and the children try to find it. If no children are at the *Seder*, the leader should merely “hide” the *afikomen* by placing it inside or under something else.

5. *Maggid*

As elaborated on in **Seder Highlights**,* this step is the fulfillment of the *mitzvah Midioraisa* of *Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim*. The texts are read while in an upright position, with a full cup of wine in front of each participant.

Look for the cues in the *haggadah*: At the beginning, the entire *Seder* plate is removed, at some points, all in attendance raise their cups of wine, and at others, the *matzos* are lifted or covered.

Near the beginning of *Maggid* are the Four Questions. These are asked by a child. If no child is present, they are asked by an adult. The Ten Plagues are also mentioned in *Maggid*. When each one is recited, a small bit of wine is removed from the wine cup. Some have the custom to do this with the index finger, and others pour a little from the cup. After they are completed, the cups are refilled with fresh wine before continuing.

Maggid concludes with a long *bracha* followed by the usual

bracha over wine. The second of the Four Cups is then consumed while reclining.

6. *Rachtzah*

All wash their hands as before eating bread. The usual *bracha* “*al netilas yadayim*” is recited.

7. *Motzi Matzah*

The *matzah* is eaten. A minimum volume must be eaten in order to fulfill the *mitzvah*. (See **Seder Highlights*** for more details.)

The leader makes two *brachos* on behalf of everyone present. The first one, “*hamotzi lechem min ha’aretz*”, is recited while holding all three *matzos* (the two whole ones with the broken one in between them). The bottom *matzah* is released, and the second *bracha*, “*al achilas matzah*”, is recited over the remaining two.

A small piece from each of the two *matzos* is given to every participant. The leader should retain the required amount from these *matzos* for him/herself - eating about half of the required amount from each one. (All other participants usually need to supplement their small pieces with additional *matzah* in order to have the required amount.)



At the *Seder*, *matzah* is not dipped in salt, and it is eaten while reclining. Once the *brachos* over *matzah* have been recited, unnecessary interruption should be avoided until after **Korech (Seder Step 9)**.

8. *Marror*

The *marror* is eaten at this step. A minimum volume must be eaten by every participant to fulfill the obligation. (See **Seder Highlights*** for more details.)

The *marror* is first dipped into *charoses*, and a specific *bracha* is recited. It is eaten while seated in an upright position.

9. *Korech*

A statement in the *haggadah* is recited, and *matzah* and *marror* are eaten in the same mouthful. According to one opinion in the *Mishnah*, this was - and will be - the manner of eating the *Korban Pesach*.

The single, remaining *matzah* the leader has is used for *Korech*. Pieces of it are broken off and distributed to all participants. There are different opinions as to whether it is dipped into *charoses*, and it is eaten while reclining. Note that since each person must have the required amount of *matzah* and *marror* (See **Seder Highlights***), it is likely that the pieces received from the leader will need to be supplemented.

10. *Shulchan Orech*

The main meal is eaten – ideally while reclining. A common custom is to begin the meal with eating the egg from the *Seder* plate.

It is important not to overeat, as the *afikomen* (**Seder Step 11**) must be eaten with some appetite.

11. *Tzafun*

The *afikomen* that had been hidden since *Yachatz* (**Seder Step 4**) is retrieved at this step. It is eaten for “dessert” to commemorate the *Korban Pesach* that was also eaten at the end of the meal. (See **Seder Highlights*** for details pertaining to the *matzah*.) If the *afikomen matzah* from *Yachatz* is unavailable or insufficient, any *matzah* may be used.

The *afikomen* is eaten while reclining. Since the *afikomen* is eaten in remembrance of the *Korban Pesach*, the following laws pertaining to the sacrifice are applied to it as well:

- a. For the duration of the *Seder* night, the *afikomen* taste is to remain in one’s mouth, and no solid food may be eaten after it.

If food was eaten, and the next step has not yet begun, it can be rectified by eating a small amount of *matzah*. As far as drinks are concerned, only mild beverages such as water or tea are permitted. (Of course, the last two cups of wine are permitted as well.)

- b. While eating the *afikomen*, one may not switch seats to sit at a different table.

12. *Barech*

Birchas Hamazon is recited over a full cup of wine, and the cups are rinsed out and refilled in anticipation. If there is a *mezuman*, it is customary for the homeowner to lead it. Following *Birchas Hamazon*, the *bracha* over wine is recited, and the third of the Four Cups is drunk while reclining.

At the conclusion of *Birchas Hamazon*, a cup is poured in honor of *Eliyahu Hanavi*, the front door is opened, and a specific paragraph from the *haggadah* is recited. The door is then closed, and the *Seder* resumes with the next step.

13. *Hallel*

Specific psalms of thanksgiving to *Hashem* are recited to acknowledge all that He has done and continues to do for us. While *Hallel* is recited, every participant must have a full cup of wine in front of him or her. It is best to have at least three people - including women and children - recite the *Hallel* together. When reciting “*hodu lashem ki tov...*” and “*ana Hashem...*” one person leads, and the others respond, as it is done at *shul*.

Note that Ashkenaz and Sephard versions of the *haggadah* conclude this *Seder* step differently, so be sure to use a *haggadah* that follows your custom! At its conclusion, the *bracha* over wine is recited and the fourth cup is drunk while reclining.

14. *Nirtzah*

The *Seder* concludes with the hope that we have done our obligation properly and that next year we will observe *Pesach* in *Yerushalayim*.

After the *Seder*

After the *Seder*, one continues to discuss *Yetziyas Mitzrayim* until going to sleep. Many people also have the custom to recite the Book of *Shir Hashirim* (Song of Songs).



Note: Sources for this article can be found online at <https://consumer.crc kosher.org/publications/preparing-for-the-seder-pesach-2024/>