

# The Seder

## Chapter 8

### *The Seder: Introduction*

The Seder is the ritual meal that takes place in Jewish homes on the first night of Passover. The service, which commemorates the night God delivered the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, involves the recitation of special prayers and the consumption of symbolic foods.

The Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples was a Passover Seder. During the meal, Jesus taught that he is the Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice to the Father, which frees us from the slavery of sin and death. During each Mass, parts of the Last Supper are reenacted; some of the gestures and prayers of the Mass, therefore, come from the Seder service.

### **Materials**

Large serving platter for Seder tray

Matzah—three whole matzahs for under the Seder tray; additional matzahs for table

Horseradish—mild creamed horseradish is easiest to use

Celery—two sticks for each participant

Ground apple—about a tablespoon per person

Ground walnuts—about a tablespoon per person

Cinnamon—mix with apples and walnuts to taste

“Wine”—grape juice, about two ounces per person, plus enough to moisten apple-nut mixture

Shank bone—turkey thigh bone, chicken leg or neck bone, or whatever you can get from the butcher; boil to clean and roast till brown

Hard-boiled eggs—1/4 egg per person, plus one whole egg, roasted till brown, for Seder tray

Large cloth napkin—folded in four and stitched closely along the folded sides to form three pockets for holding the matzah that is placed under the Seder tray

“Wine” glasses—one per person

Bowls for salt-water—paper nut cups will do; one per person

Bowls for fresh-water—short paper cups will do; one per person

Napkins, paper plates, spoons

Two candles, matches

Necktie, yarmulke (skull cap), necklace, shawl

Bibles or photocopies of Psalms to be recited



## ***The Seder: Preparation***

Before class, arrange the tables or desks in a U-shape or rectangle, with the leader's chair at the head, facing the students. Decorate the tables with cloths, plates, and candles of dark blue and white (the colors of the Israeli flag) or white and violet (the color for Lent). A floral arrangement or a ceramic or toy lamb with a ribbon around its neck makes a nice centerpiece. At the head of the table, place a Seder tray, which is a platter with samples of the following symbolic foods:

- **Maror:** Ground horseradish represents the bitter suffering the Hebrew slaves endured at the hands of the Egyptian taskmasters.
- **Karpas:** Cut celery (or another green vegetable) represents spring. It is dipped in salt water, which symbolizes the tears shed by the Hebrews during their slavery.
- **Haroses:** Ground apples and walnuts symbolize the mortar the Hebrews were forced to make for the Pharaoh's buildings.
- **Zeroah:** A lamb shankbone represents the lamb that was sacrificed and eaten on the first Passover. Those who painted their doorways with its blood were "passed over" by the tenth plague, which killed the firstborn of the Egyptians. Zeroah means "arm," for it was the mighty arm of God that compelled Pharaoh to free the Hebrew slaves.
- **Baytzah:** A hard-boiled egg symbolizes the animal sacrifices that the Israelites brought to the Temple in Jerusalem during holidays such as Passover. The eggs are dipped into salt water, signifying the mourning of the Jews over the destruction of the Temple.
- **Matzah:** Unleavened bread represents the bread the Hebrews made in haste before their departure.

Underneath the Seder tray are placed three matzahs (unleavened bread) in a matzah holder or wrapped in layers in a cloth napkin. More matzah is on the table.

Set each place with a glass of grape juice, a napkin, a dish of salt water, a spoon, a dish of fresh water, and a plate. On each plate, place two pieces of celery, a spoonful each of horseradish and apple-nut mixture, and a slice of hard-boiled egg.

The Seder is a family meal. Choose a boy to be the father and give him a necktie and yarmulke (skull cap) to wear. Choose a girl to be the mother, wearing a necklace and shawl. Choose a third student to act the part of the youngest child.



# ***The Seder: Ceremony***

## **Candle-Lighting Ceremony**

*Usually, the mother of the family leads the candle-lighting ceremony, using two tapers or special Passover candelabra. She lights the candles and says:*

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who sanctified us with His Commandments and commanded us to kindle the festival lights.

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Kind of the universe, Who gave us life and sustained us, and brought us to this joyful season.

## **Opening**

*The father usually leads the rest of the Seder. He sits at the head of the table and begins the service:*

We have gathered to observe the Passover, the night God delivered Israel from bondage and brought them out of Egypt. Let us proclaim the power, the goodness, and the faithfulness of God.

## **The First Cup**

*The father leads the blessing. All raise their cups and say:*

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has created the fruit of the vine.

*All take a sip.*

## **The First Washing**

*All participants wash their hands with the water provided. In ancient times, a household servant washed the dusty feet of the dinner guests. At the Last Supper, Jesus Himself performed this service and washed the disciples' feet. In modern Jewish households, each person has his own water and towel, or a bowl and towel are carried from person to person by the mistress of the house.*

## **Appetizer: Karpas**

*The father asks everyone to take some celery, dip it in the salt water, and say:*

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has created the fruit of the earth.

*All eat the celery. At the Last Supper, Judas' betrayal was revealed by Jesus during the dipping.*

## **Yahatz: Breaking the Middle Matzah**

*The father takes the middle piece of matzah and breaks it into two parts. One part is wrapped up and saved for the end of the meal. The teacher might select some students to "steal" this piece and hide it, a tradition in many Jewish families today. The remaining part is lifted by the father, who says:*

## ***The Seder: Ceremony (continued)***

This is the bread of affliction, which God's people ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat.

*He then places the matzah on top of the others.*

### **The Four Questions and the Hagadah**

*The youngest child asks four questions about why this night is different from all the others:*

Why do we eat only unleavened bread?  
Why do we eat bitter herbs?  
Why do we dip the herbs twice?  
Why do we dine with special ceremony?

*The father answers the questions by telling the Hagadah, the story of the Hebrew people from Abraham to Moses. The father, the teacher, or another student reads this narrative:*

In the beginning, our people worshiped idols, but God revealed Himself to them and made a covenant with our father Abraham, in which He promised to make him a great nation. Abraham and Sarah had a son, Isaac, in their old age. Isaac's younger son, Jacob, inherited his father's promise. Jacob became the father of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. Joseph became great in Pharaoh's service by saving Egypt from famine. His own family came to him for food and settled in Egypt. Many years later, another Pharaoh enslaved the Hebrews. But the people of Israel cried out to God, Who heard their cry and sent Moses to lead them to freedom. Moses asked Pharaoh to let his people go. When he refused, God sent ten plagues that compelled Pharaoh to free the Hebrew slaves.

### **The Showing of the Foods**

*To make the connection between the story and the foods, the teacher points to each item on the Seder tray and explains its significance (see p. B-4).*

### **The First Part of the Hallel**

*To show thanks for the mighty works of God, the Hallel, or Psalms, are recited. The Hallel includes Psalms 112, 113, and 114. The teacher chooses one to be recited by the class.*

### **The Second Cup**

*The father leads in taking a second sip of the grape juice. All say:*

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has created the fruit of the vine.

### **The Second Washing**

*All wash their hands again.*



# ***The Seder: Ceremony (continued)***

## **Eating the Matzah, Maror, and Haroses**

*The father breaks the original top matzah and the broken half of the middle matzah into enough pieces for all and distributes them. This is the point at which Jesus said, "This is My Body." Each person holds a piece of matzah while the father says:*

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth.

*All eat the matzah. Each person takes another piece of matzah from the table, dips it into the maror and the haroses, and eats it. (A spoon may be used for dipping and spreading.) Each person takes a piece of hard-boiled egg, dips it into salt water, and eats it. At this point in the Seder, the table is cleared of the symbolic foods, and the rest of the meal is served.*

## **Grace after Meals**

*After the meal is finished, Psalm 126 is recited. The father then looks for the hidden matzah or asks the children who hid it to bring it back. He divides it among all the participants, and all eat.*

## **The Third Cup**

*The father asks the others to raise their cups and say:*

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has created the fruit of the vine.

*This is the point at which Jesus said, "This is My Blood."*

*All sip from their glasses, which are refilled if necessary.*

## **The Second Part of the Hallel**

*More Psalms are then recited, including Psalm 115 and 135. The teacher chooses one for the class to recite.*

## **The Fourth Cup**

*The father concludes by asking all to raise their cups one last time and say:*

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has created the fruit of the vine.

*All drink. The father says:*

Our Seder has ended. Let us go in joy.

### **Sources**

Kolatch, Alfred J., *The Concise Family Seder* (New York: Jonathan David Publisher, Inc., 1989).

Rosen, Ceil and Moishe, *Christ in the Passover: Why Is This Night Different?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).