

Passover (Pesach in Hebrew) is one of the most important festivals in the Jewish year.

At this time Jewish people remember how the children of Israel left slavery behind them when they were led out of Egypt by **Moses** over 3000 years ago.

The story can be found in the Book of Exodus, Chapter 12 in the Hebrew Bible (the Torah).

The story of the Passover

Moses went to see Pharaoh many times. Each time Pharaoh refused to release the Israelites. Moses warned Pharaoh that God would send terrible plagues on Egypt if Pharaoh did not let them go. The ten plagues were: blood, frogs, gnats, flies, blight of the livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness and the death of the first born

The final plague was the death of the first born. God told Moses that the Israelites should mark their doorposts with lamb's blood so that God could 'pass over' their houses and spare them from this plague. This is why the festival is called Passover.

Eventually Pharaoh gave in and told Moses and the Israelites to go at once. They left in such a rush that their bread did not have time to rise. This is why, during Passover, Jewish people eat unleavened bread called **Matzah**. It looks a bit like crisp bread.

How Passover is celebrated today

The celebrations last for seven or eight days, depending on where you live.

Some families clean their houses thoroughly to remove all crumbs of chametz (leaven). This remembers the Jews leaving Egypt who did not have time to let their bread rise. In many Jewish homes children enjoy taking part in a ritual search for any specks of leaven left behind

On the evening before the Passover begins, a special service called a Seder ('Order') takes place over a meal with family and friends in the home.

The Seder plate on the table consists of:

- A lamb bone
- A roasted egg
- A green vegetable to dip in salt water
- Bitter herbs made from horseradish
- Charoset (a paste of chopped apples, walnuts and wine)

On the table, there are three Matzot (unleavened bread) on top of each other. At the start of the Seder, the middle Matzah is broken and the largest piece is hidden. During the Seder the children hunt for it. The one who finds it receives a small prize.

Four small glasses of wine are drunk to represent the four expressions of freedom which refer to the Israelites being brought out of slavery. The wine symbolises joy and happiness.

An extra cup of wine is placed on the table and the door is left open for Elijah. Jews believe that the prophet Elijah will reappear to announce the coming of the Messiah and will do so at Pesach.

During the evening the story of how the Israelites fled from Egypt is retold from a book called the **Haggadah** ('Narration').

Everyone at the Seder each has a cushion to lean on. This is to remind them that they are now free people, no longer slaves.

Everybody takes part in reading the Haggadah, some in Hebrew and some in English, many songs are sung and four questions are asked by the youngest child. The father answers