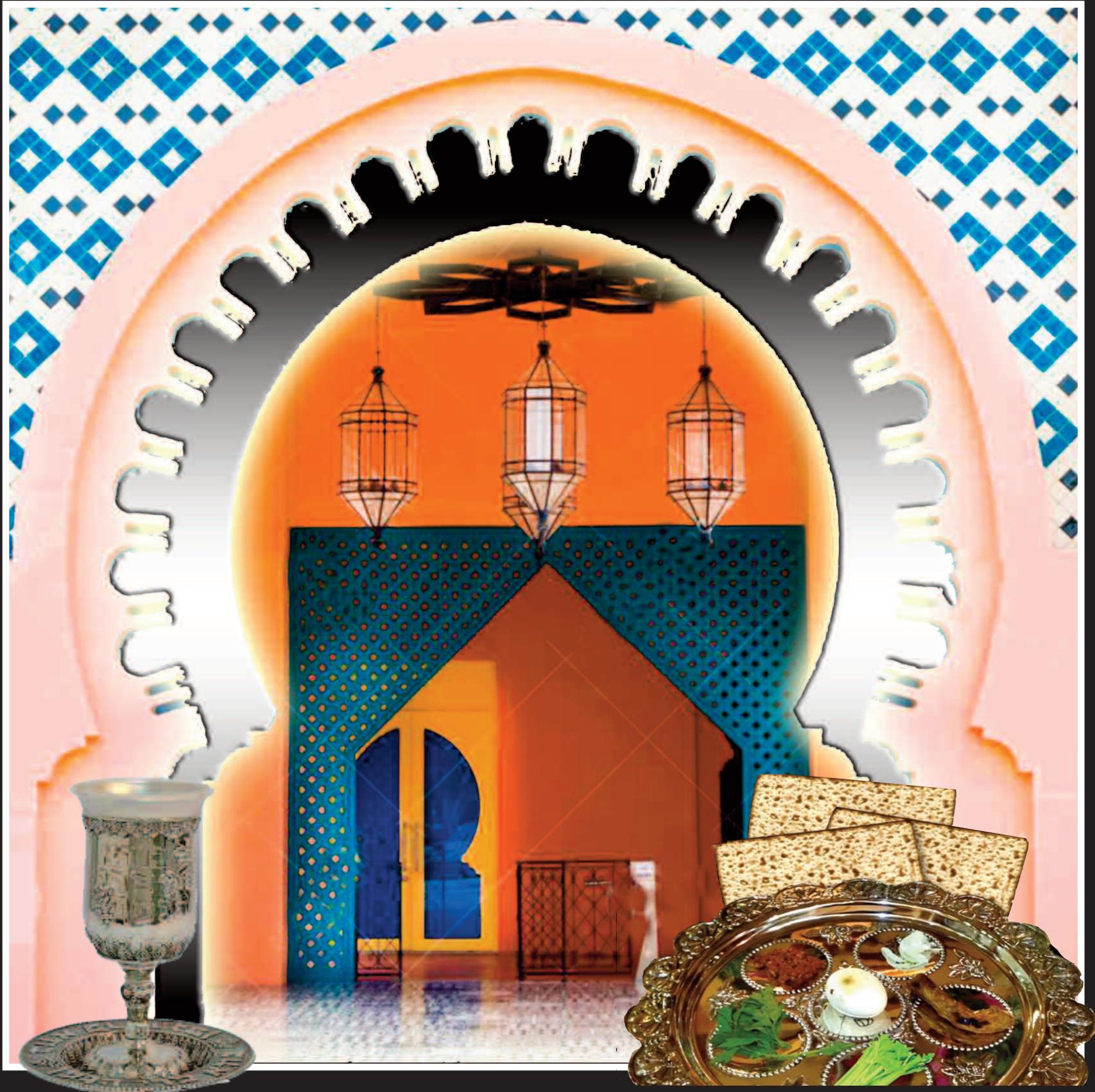




# "ha-Layla hazeh: Sephardic Customs and Readings for the Pesah Seder"

**By the Metivta Rabbis of the Sephardic Educational Center**



Rabbi Daniel Bouskila ♦ הרב דניאל בוסקילה

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Dear Community Members,

Why is this Pesah different than all others we've experienced? While we all may have our own answers to that question, we share in common our current circumstances of anxiety, uncertainty and fear. We are living through a turbulent and historic period in world history, the likes of which is unknown to most people alive today. From where shall we draw wisdom, inspiration and hope?

In 1942, shortly after the first reports of Nazi death camps reached the Jewish community living in Erets Yisrael, Rabbi Ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel, the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel, wrote the following words just a few days before Pesah:

The holiday of Matzah and Maror is soon upon us. But this year, the Maror (bitterness) is more abundant than the Matzah, for we face the gruesome news of the devastation and destruction of our brothers and sisters, as well as those imprisoned in the worst of conditions, thus cut off from the experience of celebrating the Seder. With faith in God we will nonetheless celebrate Pesah with praise and thanks, but in the spirit of these bitter circumstances, our Seder will be modest and minimal. Let us all have strength and prepare ourselves for God's salvation and redemption for the Jewish people, and a true and complete peace for all of humanity. May God bless His people – and His entire world – with peace, Amen.

The circumstances were different, but Rav Uziel's realistic and beautiful words bear a striking resemblance and relevance to our current circumstances. We can certainly all relate to words like abundant bitterness, being cut off from celebrating the Seder, modest and minimal Seders, and prayers for all of humanity. Rav Uziel's words from 1942 are very real to us this year, in 2020.

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I am pleased and honored to present to you this booklet of Sephardic wisdom, written and compiled by my beloved Sephardic Educational Center (SEC) Metivta Rabbinic colleagues, and edited by my dear friend and colleague, Rabbi Ilan Acoca. For the past 5 summers, the SEC has proudly convened the Metivta Rabbinic Seminar at the SEC Campus in the Old City of Jerusalem. This seminar brings Sephardic rabbis from all over the world – LA, NY, NJ, Seattle, Canada, Mexico, Turkey and Jerusalem – to spend 10 days at the SEC studying the halakha and philosophy of our illustrious Sephardic Rabbinic Sages. Our gatherings have not only enhanced our knowledge of Classic Sephardic Rabbinic writings, but has created a bond of friendship that extends throughout the year – via our “Sephardic Hakhamim WhatsApp Chat,” reunions in different cities, and, as is now the global custom these days, via Zoom. We are proud of the bonds of intellectual and spiritual friendship we have developed and cemented over these years, and, in the finest expression of the Sephardic way, we love to laugh together – Torah with a smile!

On behalf of all of my beloved colleagues, and of the SEC, I wish you a meaningful and beautiful Pesah. This is a home-based holiday, so please fulfill the sacred Halakha of preserving life by staying home, staying safe and staying healthy.

Moadim L'Simha and Hag Kasher V'Sameah,

Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

# Dear Friends

כס"ד



Modern Jewish educators frequently use drama as an educational tool to bring a Biblical or Talmudic story to life, as exemplified by much of the Pesah Seder being geared toward children, thus fulfilling the mitzvah (Exodus 13:8) of *v'higadita l'bincha* ("And you shall tell your children"). In this vein, the Talmud instructs us to distribute parched grain and nuts to children at the Seder, so that they may stay awake and ask questions. (Pesachim 109a). This is but one technique used to involve children in the Pesah Seder.

There is a widespread custom among Sephardic and Oriental Jews, where a Seder participant dresses up at some point as if he had just left Egypt. This provokes questions, and "the wandering Jew" explains that he has left bondage for freedom in The Land.

Among Moroccan Jews, the host waves the Seder plate in a circular motion, three times, above the head of each attendee, while reciting from the Moroccan Haggadah *bibhilu yatzaanu mimitzraim ha lachma anya benai chorin* ("it is with haste that we came out of Egypt and this is the bread of affliction that we ate.") This custom represents the clouds of glory that protected the Jewish nation as it journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land.

In our family, the first Seder is focused on the children, and we explain this priority in advance to our guests. We demonstrate what happened during the Exodus in different ways according to the predilections and maturity of each child. We seek to stimulate them throughout the seder with questions and discussion.

Why this emphasis on the children? After all, there are other guests around the Seder table. What about them?

It seems as if the Torah instructs us to recount the story to our children because God knows that, to ensure an enduring and vibrant Jewish heritage, we must educate the next generation-our children.

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*I remember fondly, as a young boy, often with my siblings and cousins, visiting my paternal grandfather, Rabbi Ayad Acoca, who lived in a small apartment in Dora, near Netanya. My grandfather was invariably engaged in Talmud study, which he would sometimes share with his grandchildren.*

*I remember my father once telling me a remarkable story about “Papo” Ayad when he was a young man in Morocco. He was traveling from Azemour to Sale which obliged him to cross a nearby river – probably the River Oued Sala, now known as the River Bouregreg--by raft along with other travelers. At some point, a storm hit the raft, causing it to capsize with all aboard perishing, except for my dear grandfather, who weathered the storm while fiercely clutching a volume of Talmud.*

*My father used to tell me that “Papo” Ayad cherished the possibility of his progeny becoming a rabbi, who would transmit the Jewish heritage as resolutely as he had held on to his Talmud. Years later, my grandfather's wish was fulfilled when I became a rabbi. Moreover, a few years ago, when my dear uncle Elias Acoca ZL passed away, he bequeathed me some volumes of Talmud belonging to my grandfather, thus awarding me the responsibility of continuing his legacy.*

*While the responsibility of propagating one's ancestor's traditions lies with each and everyone of us, I would venture to say that, as Sephardic Jews, we have even more of an obligation to do so, as the Mishna (Ethics of Fathers, 1, 14) quotes “If I am not for myself, who is for me?”.*

*Let us bear in mind that God created each of us with the responsibility to teach and lead by example, therefore encouraging our children – our most precious legacy – by instilling in them the message we received from our ancestors.*

*I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues from the SEC Metivta for their continuous leadership and inspiration and for dispersing the Sephardic heritage and teachings worldwide.*

Hag Sameah,  
Rabbi Ilan Acoca  
Editor

# **Sephardic Readings for The Pesah Seder**

## **Rabbi Ilan Acoca**

**Spiritual Leader of the Congregation Beit Yosef, Fort Lee, NJ  
and  
Rav Beit Hasefer of Ben Porat Yosef Yeshiva, Paramus, NJ**



## **Rabbi Daniel Bouskila**

**International Director of The Sephardic Educational Center**



## **Rabbi Nissim Elnecavé**

**Director of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America**



## **Rabbi Benjamin Hassan**

**Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation**

# Vehigadta Lebincha

Rabbi Ilan Acoca

At Pesach we recall the bondage of Israel in Egypt and the subsequent miraculous exodus. We celebrate our survival and emergence as a people which had grown in number and strength, ready to serve G-d.

The Talmud (Sotah 11b) demonstrates a correlation between the perseverance of our people, notably the women, and our departure from Egypt: "Rav Avira expounded: In the merit of the righteous women who lived in that generation, Israel was delivered from Egypt. When they [the women] went to draw water, the Holy One, Blessed is He, would prepare fish for them in their jugs. And when they would draw them up, they would be half full of water and half full of fish. They would come and place two pots on top of the oven, one full of hot water and one full of the fish which they carried to their husbands in the field, and they would bathe and anoint their husbands, feed and give them drink, and have marital relations with them between the borders of the fields."

Concerned that our people would soon dominate the Egyptians, Pharaoh devised a scheme to ensure that the Egyptian people would retain supremacy over the descendants of Yaakov living in his land. The people were to be enslaved—broken in mind and spirit. Working long hours, a decline in the birth rate—as well as strength and resolve—would be inevitable. The women of Israel, however, had a different plan in mind.

Drawing water, the Iyun Yaakov (1661-1773) notes, was a difficult task traditionally performed by men. The women, however, with the help of G-d, gave, as our gemara recounts, food and water to their husbands through one act. Furthermore, by going out into the fields, the women made it possible to preserve the intimacy—and maintain the numbers—of the Jewish people.

The women, recognizing that their people's existence was in peril, took action to ensure that not only would the nation continue to exist, but that it would thrive. Without the valiant efforts of our women in Egypt, G-d's enterprise—a Jewish nation—would have met an early demise. Our survival depended—and still depends—on strength of both spirit and numbers. Devotion—to G-d, one's people, one's family, one's spouse—is essential for our survival, and there is no finer example of this understanding than the actions of the Jewish women in Egypt.

The Pesach traditions developed in Sephardic countries, be it the songs, the food, the mimouna, are ways by which we express our devotion to Hashem and to our fellow Jews. Our long history supports the idea that these customs are critical to our maintaining our identity. This year, when we sit down at the Pesach Seder, recalling our enslavement and redemption, we would do well to contemplate the actions of our righteous women in Egypt in light of today's challenges.

# Educational Insights for the Seder

By Rabbi Haim David Halevi, the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel-Aviv/Yafo  
1973-1998

(translated from Hebrew by **Rabbi Daniel Bouskila**)

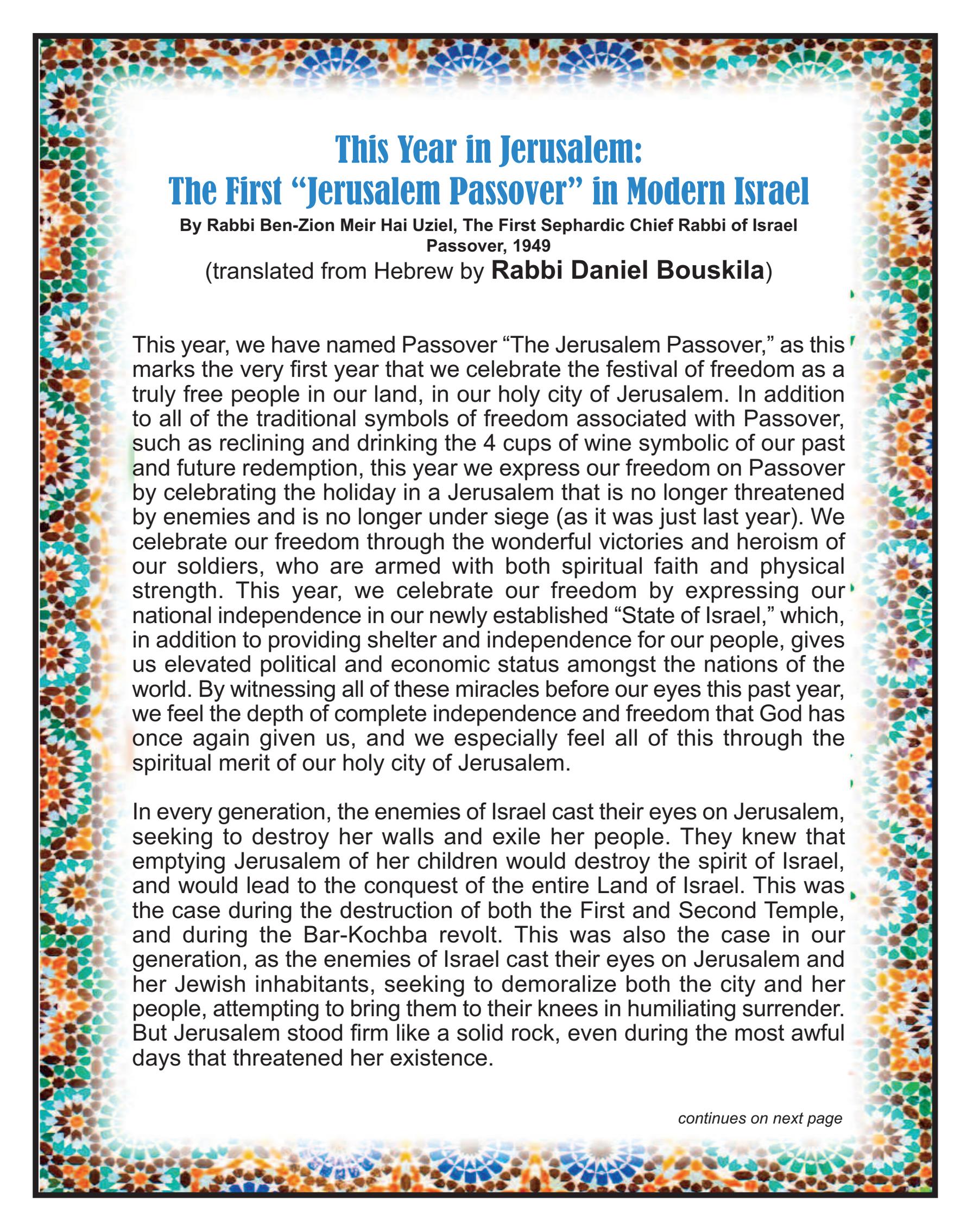
1. On the eve of the 15th of Nisan, it is a mitzvah to recount the miracles and wonders that God performed for our ancestors in Egypt. This mitzvah applies to all Jews, including the most knowledgeable scholars. It is especially a mitzvah to teach all of this to our children, as the Torah says (regarding the exodus from Egypt) "You shall tell it to your children." One must therefore make the evening of Passover unique, different and special, so that the youngsters in our midst will recognize that the evening is different, which will prompt them to ask "Why is this night so different from all other nights?" All of the laws, customs and rituals of the Seder are geared towards the purpose of involving the younger generation.

2. As the evening of the Seder settles in, one should never forget the main focus of the Seder – the children, both the older and younger children. They are the headline of the evening. Therefore, the children should be seated right next to the leader of the Seder and all around him, and everything the Seder leader says and does should primarily be directed towards the children. The Seder leader should make every effort, to the best of his ability and creativity, to impress upon the children the magnitude, depth, and significance of this great historical event called "The Exodus from Egypt."

3. There are many who say that "Karpas" (the green vegetable dipped in salt water or vinegar at the beginning of the Seder) is an appetizer towards the meal that will eventually be served that night. In truth, the Karpas is not an appetizer towards the meal, rather it is meant to arouse the curiosity of the children, who will wonder why we are eating an appetizer and not serving dinner immediately. Karpas is, indeed, an appetizer – an appetizer that leads the children into Maggid, the main portion of the Haggadah that actually tells the story of the Exodus from Egypt. (It is an "educational appetizer"- RDB)

4. Starting from "Ha Lachma Anya" (This is the bread of poverty), it is important to translate and explain the Haggadah to all of the participants of the Seder in a language and style that will be comprehensible to them.

5. It is an expression of great faith to leave one's door open throughout the Seder. This demonstrates our belief in the revelation of "Eliyahu Ha-Navi" (Elijah the Prophet) who will announce to us the complete "Geulah" (redemption) --the coming of Mashiach (The Messiah). After the Haggadah, it is a custom (especially amongst Sephardim) to read "Shir Hashirim" (The Song of Songs). This beautiful love poem is an allegory of the love between God and the Jewish people, a love that was most powerfully expressed when God performed wonders and miracles for us, lifting us from slavery to freedom.



## This Year in Jerusalem: The First “Jerusalem Passover” in Modern Israel

By Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel, The First Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel  
Passover, 1949

(translated from Hebrew by **Rabbi Daniel Bouskila**)

This year, we have named Passover “The Jerusalem Passover,” as this marks the very first year that we celebrate the festival of freedom as a truly free people in our land, in our holy city of Jerusalem. In addition to all of the traditional symbols of freedom associated with Passover, such as reclining and drinking the 4 cups of wine symbolic of our past and future redemption, this year we express our freedom on Passover by celebrating the holiday in a Jerusalem that is no longer threatened by enemies and is no longer under siege (as it was just last year). We celebrate our freedom through the wonderful victories and heroism of our soldiers, who are armed with both spiritual faith and physical strength. This year, we celebrate our freedom by expressing our national independence in our newly established “State of Israel,” which, in addition to providing shelter and independence for our people, gives us elevated political and economic status amongst the nations of the world. By witnessing all of these miracles before our eyes this past year, we feel the depth of complete independence and freedom that God has once again given us, and we especially feel all of this through the spiritual merit of our holy city of Jerusalem.

In every generation, the enemies of Israel cast their eyes on Jerusalem, seeking to destroy her walls and exile her people. They knew that emptying Jerusalem of her children would destroy the spirit of Israel, and would lead to the conquest of the entire Land of Israel. This was the case during the destruction of both the First and Second Temple, and during the Bar-Kochba revolt. This was also the case in our generation, as the enemies of Israel cast their eyes on Jerusalem and her Jewish inhabitants, seeking to demoralize both the city and her people, attempting to bring them to their knees in humiliating surrender. But Jerusalem stood firm like a solid rock, even during the most awful days that threatened her existence.

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Just a year ago on Passover, under extreme conditions, we prepared and celebrated the Seder. By the same merit that our ancestors were redeemed in Egypt, we, the people of Jerusalem, were also redeemed, and our redemption spread out all across the land. So here we are today, one year later, celebrating Passover in Jerusalem, this time with joy and happiness.

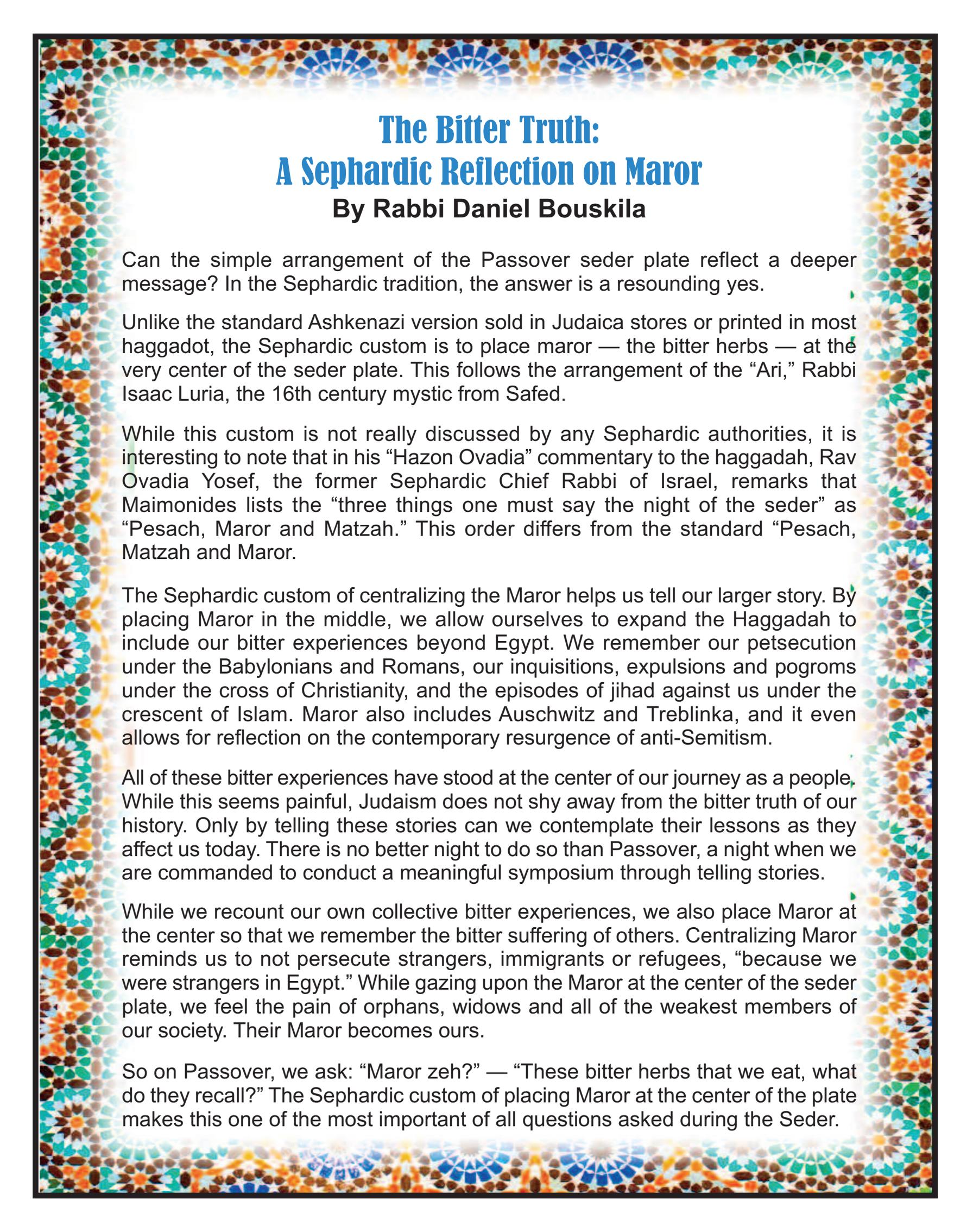
Our joy is tempered by the fact that Jerusalem “within the walls” (The Old City) lies in ruins, emptied of her Jewish people, with the Kotel standing alone. This breaks our hearts, and we will never feel comforted until the day comes that we merit to return to the sacred Old City which will eternally be the capital of the State of Israel.

Despite this, we nevertheless rejoice on the establishment of the “New Jerusalem” which we have now established by the good grace of God, secure from the threat of the enemy.

Let us now rejoice on this Passover, the holiday of freedom, and let us celebrate it with aspirations that peace and justice reign throughout our land. Let us together lift our voices to God and pray:

Lord our God, give strength to our army and spread over them the tabernacle of peace and save them from all enemies. Endow our state and leaders with wisdom, understanding and strength, bring peace in our land and in the world, and establish the Kingdom of David in your holy city of Jerusalem. Bring freedom and redemption to our Jewish brethren in Arab lands, save them from the hands of their oppressors and bring them home to their land together with all Jews dispersed in the diaspora.

As we celebrate Passover this year in our newly liberated City of Jerusalem, next year, and for many years to come, may we merit celebrating Passover in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, with great joy, happiness and songs of praise to God, Amen.



## The Bitter Truth: A Sephardic Reflection on Maror

By Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

Can the simple arrangement of the Passover seder plate reflect a deeper message? In the Sephardic tradition, the answer is a resounding yes.

Unlike the standard Ashkenazi version sold in Judaica stores or printed in most haggadot, the Sephardic custom is to place maror — the bitter herbs — at the very center of the seder plate. This follows the arrangement of the “Ari,” Rabbi Isaac Luria, the 16th century mystic from Safed.

While this custom is not really discussed by any Sephardic authorities, it is interesting to note that in his “Hazon Ovadia” commentary to the haggadah, Rav Ovadia Yosef, the former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, remarks that Maimonides lists the “three things one must say the night of the seder” as “Pesach, Maror and Matzah.” This order differs from the standard “Pesach, Matzah and Maror.

The Sephardic custom of centralizing the Maror helps us tell our larger story. By placing Maror in the middle, we allow ourselves to expand the Haggadah to include our bitter experiences beyond Egypt. We remember our persecution under the Babylonians and Romans, our inquisitions, expulsions and pogroms under the cross of Christianity, and the episodes of jihad against us under the crescent of Islam. Maror also includes Auschwitz and Treblinka, and it even allows for reflection on the contemporary resurgence of anti-Semitism.

All of these bitter experiences have stood at the center of our journey as a people. While this seems painful, Judaism does not shy away from the bitter truth of our history. Only by telling these stories can we contemplate their lessons as they affect us today. There is no better night to do so than Passover, a night when we are commanded to conduct a meaningful symposium through telling stories.

While we recount our own collective bitter experiences, we also place Maror at the center so that we remember the bitter suffering of others. Centralizing Maror reminds us to not persecute strangers, immigrants or refugees, “because we were strangers in Egypt.” While gazing upon the Maror at the center of the seder plate, we feel the pain of orphans, widows and all of the weakest members of our society. Their Maror becomes ours.

So on Passover, we ask: “Maror zeh?” — “These bitter herbs that we eat, what do they recall?” The Sephardic custom of placing Maror at the center of the plate makes this one of the most important of all questions asked during the Seder.

# The Haggadah In Arabic?

By Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

“Our Passover Seder is translated into Arabic,” I used to tell my friends in school. “Arabic?” they responded in bewilderment, “that’s so weird! How could you translate a Seder into Arabic? Isn’t Arabic the language of the enemy?”

Growing up in a French speaking Sephardic-Moroccan home in Los Angeles, my sisters and I were never taught that Arabic was the “language of the enemy.” That is, unless we considered our parents “the enemy,” who spoke it amongst themselves when they didn’t want us to understand what was being said. I have vivid memories of Judeo-Arabic being spoken in my home. It was a “private” language for my parents, as well as a form of cultural communication for my parents and their friends. In fact, there are several jokes for which to this day, I don’t know the punch line, as they started out in French, and just when the suspense was at its peak, the punch line rolled out in Judeo-Arabic. When my sisters and I would beg my father to translate, the answer always was “I could translate, but it won’t be the same.”

I have come to understand my father’s principle of “I could translate, but it won’t be the same” to also mean that there are times when linguistic expression is often more powerful than the actual translation itself. Throughout my upbringing, the first chant at the Passover Seder that really made it feel like Pesach for all of us around the table sounded like this:

Haq'da Qssam L'lah lb'har âla tnass l'treq 'hin khrzeu  
zdoud'na min massar, âla yed sid'na oun'bina moussa ben amram haq'da  
n'khrzeu min had l'galouth amen ken yehi ratson.

My father chanted this during Yahas, as he split the middle masah. It was not a formal part of the Haggadah. It was a text that stood by itself, and although none of us understood a word of what was being said, we all chimed in, and we all had our own images and perceptions of how this moment was speaking to us.

For me, in the truest spirit of Passover, this Judeo-Arabic chant represented a journey through my roots. In a language whose words I did not understand, but whose tone and music evoked deep emotions within me, this chant helped tell me the story of Jewish life in Morocco. On the night where we are mandated to “tell the story,” here came a chant in a language I did not speak, yet told me the story of my Moroccan Jewish heritage more vividly than any history book ever could. It evoked images in my mind of my great-grandfather

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Rabbi Yosef Pinto, sitting at his Seder in Marrakech dressed in a Jalabiya with a scarf on his head, breaking the middle masah and recounting the exodus to his family in the same Judeo-Arabic. It transposed me back to the Moroccan Mellah (Jewish Ghetto), a place I've only been to in my mind, but a place that I nonetheless could hear, feel and even smell, especially at that moment. Haq'da Qssam L'lah even reminded me – because it was in Arabic – that Moroccan Jewry once had positive and cordial relations with their Muslim neighbors, something we've painfully lost today.

As the Seder journeyed on, it was peppered with other Judeo-Arabic chants. Examples include Had taam d'eef kleu zdoud'na fi ardi massar (Ha Lahma Anya – This is the Bread of Poverty) or Fkhrouz Israel mn masar (B'Tset Yisrael Mimitzrayim – When Israel Left Egypt – Psalm 114). These were the sounds at my Seder – raw, unfiltered and deeply authentic. Hearing the Haggadah in Arabic took us away from our first generation American milieu, and transposed us back to a place where Judaism thrived in a deeply spiritual fashion, enriched by a rich cultural world that enjoyed an intimate bond with the cuisine, spices, music and language of North African Arab culture.

With my parents no longer alive, my family continues our Judeo-Arabic chanting at the Seder. These chants continue to tell the story of Pesach – my Moroccan ancestor's Pesach – to my children, in the original language of their ancestors. Pirkei Avot teaches us to “know from whence we come.” This is as important a story on the night of Pesah as is the master story in the Haggadah.

I am proud to raise my children to understand that, despite the ugly extremism of jihadists and fundamentalists, Arabic is still not the “language of the enemy,” and that Jews have a long-standing relationship with Arabic language and culture. It reminds my children that Jewish works of outstanding spiritual and intellectual stature, such as Judah Halevi's Kuzari or Maimonides' Guide to the Perplexed, were written in Arabic, and that nobody accused these great minds of writing in the “language of the enemy.”

After my father's passing a few years ago, I found the translation of the text we read while breaking the middle Masah: This is how the Holy One Blessed be He split the sea into twelve separate paths, when our ancestors left Egypt, through the leadership of our master and prophet, Moses son of Amram, of blessed memory. Just like God redeemed them and saved them from harsh labors and brought them to freedom, so, too, may the Holy One Blessed be He, redeem us for the sake of His great name, and let us say, Amen.

As nice as it is to have the translation, it sounds – and feels -- so much better in the original.

# Passover and Modern-Day Zionism: Three Sephardic Chief Rabbis, Three Opinions

By Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

“This year we are here, next year in the Land of Israel. This year we are still slaves, next year may we be a free people.” This text appears in most Ashkenazi versions of the Passover Haggadah.

In the Sephardic version, the second line is slightly different. It reads, “This year we are still slaves here in exile, next year may we be a free people in the Land of Israel.”

Given the emphasis on “exile vs. Israel” in the Sephardic version, how did Sephardic rabbis in post-1948 Israel understand the Haggadah in light of the newly declared Jewish state?

In a pre-Passover address in April 1949, Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel, who was born in Jerusalem and served as Sephardic Chief Rabbi under Ottoman and British rule, recognized the paradox of saying we are still slaves in exile. Just 11 months earlier, on May 14, 1948, he was in “the room where it happened” when David Ben-Gurion said, “We hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Yisrael, to be known as the State of Israel.”

Now as the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the first Jewish State in close to 2,000 years, Rav Uziel said: “Throughout our lengthy exile, Passover infused us with the hope to be redeemed in our ancestral homeland. By the grace of God and the Israeli military, we are now happy to say: This year we are a free people in the Land of Israel.”

By mimicking the Haggadah’s language to reflect the Jewish people’s new reality, Rav Uziel seemed to infer that the change in the Jewish people’s status warranted a change in the Haggadah’s text.

Rav Uziel’s successor to the Sephardic Chief Rabbinate was Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim.

In 1958, Rav Nissim called Passover “the holiday that most deeply preserved the connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel.” He proclaimed the modern State of Israel as “the beginning of our redemption,” but said that we have “yet to cross the sea into complete freedom.” Different than Rav Uziel’s idealistic Israel of 1949, by 1958, Israel was a deeply divided society, especially along Sephardic-Ashkenazi ethnic lines. Given this reality, Rav Nissim used the metaphor of God “tearing apart” (*kara* in Hebrew) the sea, saying, “we cannot declare ourselves a fully free people on Passover until we ‘tear apart’ all of these divisions in our midst.”

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In 1973, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef replaced Rav Nissim as Israel's new Sephardic Chief Rabbi. By then an internationally renowned scholar of halakha (Jewish law), Rav Ovadia Yosef counted among his many published books a detailed commentary to the Passover Haggadah titled "Hazon Ovadia."

Reflecting upon the stanza in the song "Dayyenu" that states, "Had God given us the Torah but not brought us into the Land of Israel, that would have been enough (Dayyenu)," Rav Ovadia Yosef writes:

"These words are directed against the secular Zionists who think you can build the Land of Israel without the Torah of Israel. The Torah precedes the Land of Israel in importance, because the Land of Israel without Torah is no better than living in the diaspora. Indeed, it is preferable to stay in the diaspora as an observant Jew rather than angering God by living a secular lifestyle in the Land of Israel."

In a radical departure from his Sephardic predecessors, Rav Ovadia Yosef demystifies the existence of the modern State of Israel and posits that the secular orientation of Zionism actually angers God. Rav Ovadia Yosef's creative reading of "Dayyenu" deems it preferable for the Jewish people to have stayed "in exile" as religiously observant Jews rather than being a "free people in the Land of Israel" in a Jewish state with a decidedly secular orientation.

Israel's first three Sephardic Chief Rabbis inspire a new set of "Four Questions":

1. Are those of us living in exile still in "slavery"?
2. Does Jewish independence in Israel automatically mean Jewish emancipation?
3. Is a socially, religiously and politically divided Israel a true expression of freedom?
4. Can secularism and religiosity coexist in a Jewish state?

While all representing different viewpoints, modern-day Israel's first three Sephardic Chief Rabbis share in common a classic Sephardic trait: to make our Jewish texts relevant and meaningful to our contemporary existence.

Make your Seder relevant and meaningful by adding their questions to those already listed in the Haggadah.

# A Time to be Free

**Rabbi Nissim Elnecavé**

The land of Egypt had been afflicted with nine plagues, its population feared and dreaded even greater punishments. As G-d informs Moshe about the last plague to strike Egypt, he also commands him to formulate a calendar unique to the Jewish Nation. The Torah states, "This month should be to you the beginning of months; it should be the first month of the year to you," (Shemot 12:2) The first month of spring marks the beginning of our nationhood. The month of Nissan is the month that commemorates the birth of the Jewish People.

Our Sages in the Midrash ask that since the Torah is a book of law, should it not have began from this very concept, instructing Moshe to formulate a calendar? Rabbi Shelomo Yishaki (RaShi) explains that the Torah begins from the book of Bereshit in order to teach and convey to the world about the existence and omnipotence of G-d through the creation. Our Sages further explain that the Book of Bereshit links and teaches about the origins of the Jewish people, their background and identity.

Rabbenu Moshe ben Maimon explains that even when this precept can only be handled by the Beth Din (High Court) as the representatives of the people, its outcome still includes the entire nation of Israel as a whole. Yet, we still wonder, why is this the first Misvah that G-d command us through Moshe? What is its significance and importance?

The Sforno explains that this commandment symbolizes the beginning of freedom. The Jews, as slaves, did not own their own time. Their days and nights belonged to their masters. Hakham David Elnecave adds, "For the individual or for a nation, life starts at the moment of their emancipation, with their liberty. The state of a slave, of the one who is under slavery, servitude and oppression, is that he lacks days or seasons, days of rest or times of celebration." For the slave time does not follow a regular course, the sun might not rise for him everyday. His existence is full of constant darkness as he suffers and sighs.

Hakham David explains further that it was after the Egyptians had been stricken with a period of darkness, that a radiant twilight saw the birth of the Jewish nation. It was only at the time of the exodus from Egypt that we began to calculate days and dates, our own course of history. It is then that we really became a free people.

Modern scholars point to the fact that time was invented by the Jews. The Torah introduced the concept of a beginning; days, nights and weeks. As the Jews get ready to leave Egypt, the birth of the Jewish people marks a new beginning. We now own our days and nights, our seasons and our times to celebrate. During the Holiday of Pesah, we should meditate about what it means to own our time and our destiny and make it the best of times!

# Various Sephardic Minhagim at the Seder

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan

**Urchatz** – The women of the house wash the men's hands sitting at the table.

**Karpas** – We use parsley dipped into wine vinegar

**Breaking the Middle Matzah** – My father would always say “And Moshe parted the Red Sea and the Jews went through onto dry land”

The Matzah of the Afikomin is placed in a napkin and placed on the shoulders of the children. The children are asked questions about where they are coming from and where they are going and what they have with them

The Matzah for the Afikomin is placed under the table cloth and is not hidden

**Bivhilu** - With the Ke'arah before Magid

**During the Makot** – instead of dipping with the pinky we take a large bowl and pour into it wine representing judgment and water representing mercy. After all the plagues the mother takes the bowl and pours it out so that all the plagues should not be on our family

**Dayenu** – During Dayenu the Persians whip each other with spring onions/leeks

**After Saying Maror Al Shum Mah** – My family throws the maror into the corner of the house. In recent years we even throw it outside of the house.

# Where does the Pesach Story Begin and End?

**Rabbi Benjamin Hassan**

For many this seems like a simple question it starts with slavery and ends with freedom. But that might be just one answer among many. The Talmud tells us we must begin with shame and end with praise. The earliest possible shame for the Jewish people is to know that our ancestors were idolaters. Avraham's father Terach worshipped idols. Another option could be to retell of Sarah's shame when she abused Hagar her Egyptian maidservant. Another possibility could be the selling of Yosef by his brothers. Why was Yosef sold by his brothers because Lavan switched Rachel and Leah. Indeed, we see a hint of Yosef in the Haggadah with Karpas. When we dip the vegetable in salt water. That could well represent the brothers dipping Yosef's special coat (his ketonet Pasim) into blood or it could be that the salt water represents Yosef's tears. Or it could be that we were slaves in Egypt who had abandoned the mitzvot of loving Hashem and circumcision.

When does the story end? With the killing of the Firstborn, or is it the splitting of the Sea. Perhaps the receiving of the Torah or maybe the entry into the land of Israel or perhaps it is the building of the Bet Hamikdash. What is the purpose of freedom? For freedom's sake? To serve Hashem? To have sovereignty over our own land? To serve Hashem in the highest form with the Temple?

## Beginning of the Pesach Story

1. Terach
2. Avraham and Sarah
3. Lavan
4. Yosef
5. Slaves in Egypt

## End of the Pesach Story

1. End of Slavery
2. Leaving Egypt
3. Splitting of the Sea
4. Giving of the Torah
5. Entering the Land of Israel
6. Building of Beit Hamikdash

## Why did we have to be slaves in Egypt?

1. Punishment
  - a) For Avraham
    - i) He had a lack of faith in Hashem
    - ii) Avraham should not have gone down to Egypt
    - iii) He allowed Sarah to mistreat Hagar
  - b) For the Brothers for Selling Yosef
  - c) For Bnei Yisrael for
    - i) Worshipping Idols
    - ii) Not Doing Circumcision
    - iii) For neglecting Torah Study
2. Created a compassionate nation towards slaves, widows, orphans and strangers

# Arami Oved Avi

## Rabbi Benjamin Hassan

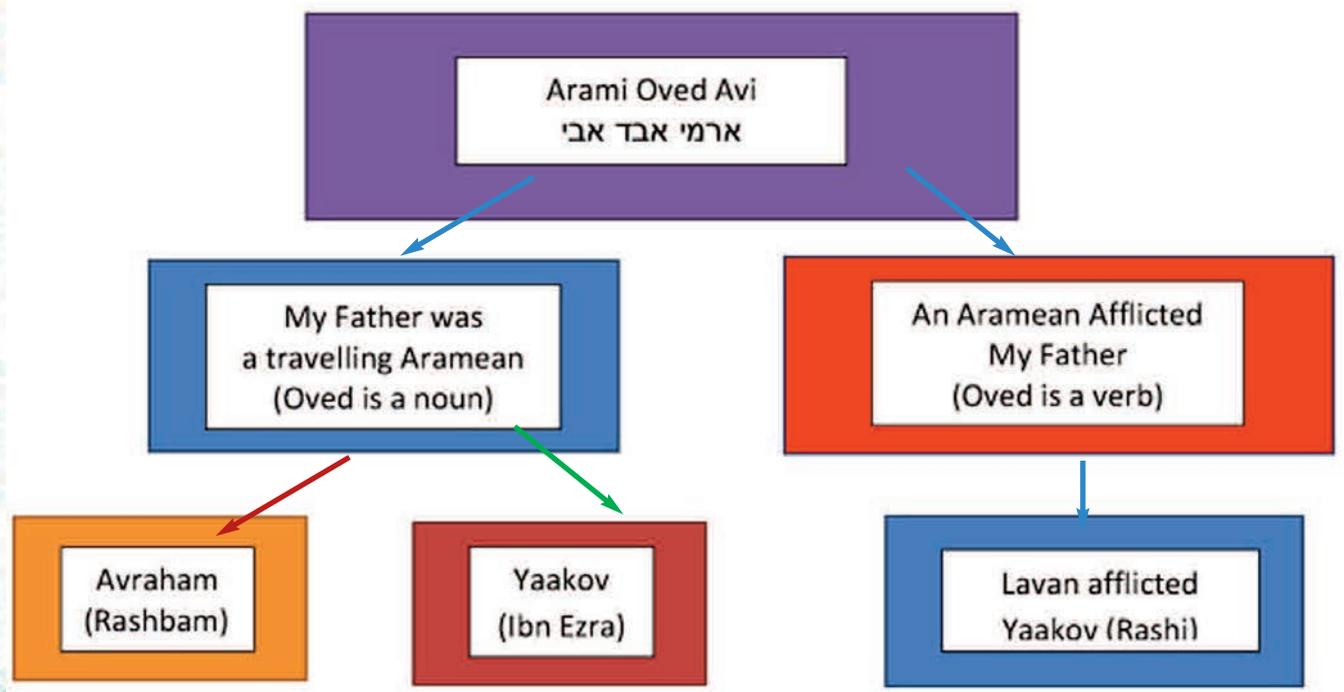
One of the Central Parts of Maggid – the Telling of the Pesah story is to recite the section called Arami Oved Avi. This section is based on the understanding that the Pesah story starts with Lavan afflicting Yaakov. This position is the understanding of the Biblical Commentator Rashi (France, Germany 1040-1105) What does Lavan’s mistreatment of Ya’akov have to do with the 10 plagues?

1. Since Lavan switched Rachel with Leah, Yosef was not the first son. Had Yosef been the first son there would have been no (or less) sibling rivalry and therefore Yosef would never had been sold into slavery. As such we would never have ended up in Egypt in the first place.
2. Lavan represents our enemies who try to destroy us through assimilation whereas Pharaoh tried to destroy us through Antisemitism. Both types have had a huge impact on the Jewish people over the generations.

The Ibn Ezra (1089-1167 mostly Spain) explains that the phrase Arami Oved Avi actually means my father was a wandering Aramean. Based on this answer the story of Pesah begins with Yaakov and his many travels one of which was spending 20 years in Lavan’s house. What does Yaakov have to do with the Events in Egypt?

1. Yaakov brought his whole family to settle in Goshen during the famine. From then it was only a couple of generations before we became slaves to Pharaoh. Finally the Rashbam (1085-1158 France) a grandson of Rashi explains that Arami Oved Avi is referring to Avraham. Avraham is the wandering Aramean travelling from Ur Kasdim to the land of Cana’an. What does Avraham have to do with Egypt?

1. Avraham went down to Egypt when there was a famine in the land.
2. Avraham made a covenant with God called the Brit Bein HaBetarim (The Covenant between the Parts). In this covenant God tells Avraham that his descendants “will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and oppress them, for four hundred years. And also the nation that they will serve will I judge, and afterwards they will go forth with great possessions.” (Bereshit 15:13-14)



# The Deeper Meanings of Had Gadya

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan

## 1. R' Amram Gaon in the name of R' Natronai Gaon

Anyone who reads the Haggadah and skips these songs has not only failed to fulfill his obligation but he should be ostracized from the community because he does not believe in the words of the Rabbis.

## 2. Shu"t Haim Sha'al 1:28 – Hida - R' Haim Yosef David Azoulay

Q. A person was excommunicated for making fun of Had Gadya, was this punishment excessive?

A. This individual has ridiculed what has been the custom of tens of thousands of Jews. Included in these thousands of Jews are world Torah luminaries, of the highest level of holiness, as well as the scholars of every generation. Even today the Jewish people have not been orphaned and there are many Rashei Yeshiva and great scholars, may God continue to sustain them, who all recite the piyut of Had Gadya. This person who ridiculed Had Gadya is a rasha for he mocks a myriad of Jews.

There is no doubt that Had Gadya is not a meaningless poem. We have already been informed that the secrets behind many of these poems/prayers have been passed on from one generation to another and from one rabbi to another.

## 3. Rambam - Introduction to Perek Helek

The third category comprises... so very few that it is almost incorrect to call it a category at all... It consists of those men that have a clear conception of the greatness of the sages and of their surpassing intelligence, so that we find passages among their sayings that penetrate to the most profound truth. Although these men are but few and far between, their writings bear witness to their perfection, and to the fact that they have grasped the truth... They also know that the sages were not making jokes. Thus it becomes obvious truth to them that in their sayings we have to distinguish open and hidden meanings. Any statement or passage of the Rabbis that contains an apparent impossibility can therefore only be an allusion and allegory. This is the practice of great scholars.

## 4. Vilna Gaon - Each verse alludes to events in Jewish history

The kid is the birthright mentioned in Bereshit Chapter 25.

My father is Yaakov who bought the birthright from Esav, who had been born first and thus had the natural right to the birthright.

The two zuzim are the bread and stew Yaakov paid Esav for the birthright.

The cat represents the envy of Yaakov's sons toward their brother Yosef, leading them to sell him into slavery in Egypt.

The dog is Egypt, where Yosef landed, and where eventually the entire clan of Yaakov and the subsequent Israelite nation lived, were enslaved and were redeemed.

The stick is the famous staff of Moshe, used to call forth various plagues and part the waters of the Sea for the Israelites to cross.

The fire represents the thirst for idolatry among Israelites that proved to be a persistent bane for over 800 years, from the year they left Egypt until the destruction of the First Beit HaMikdash.

The water represents the Hachamim who eradicated idolatry.

The ox is Rome (Esav's descendent) who destroyed the 2nd Beit HaMikdash.

The butcher is the "Mashiach Ben-Yosef" who will restore full Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel.

The Angel of Death in this song represents the death of Mashiach Ben-Yosef.

The Holy One arrives with Mashiach Ben-David.

*continues on next page*

## The Deeper Meanings of Had Gadya *(continues from previous page)*

### 5. Rav Yaakov Emden - A Personal Odyssey of Self Development

The Little Goat = The soul is compared to a small goat. The soul is the dimension of the body that our father in heaven has given us.

Two Zuzim = The word Zuzim is not a denomination of money, rather a plural form of Zuz, to move. According to Kabbalah the soul migrates twice before it reaches our body. Once from the heavenly world to the world of galgalim and then to our world and body.

The Cat = The cat is an animal which will eat anything, whether it is good for it or not. Similarly in our infancy, we are undisciplined, we can become involved in habits, accustomed to desires which are damaging to our soul. Tragic is a soul that is trapped in our undisciplined body. One might think that being undisciplined as a child is acceptable for the child will soon grow up and the inappropriate behavior will give way to a more mature attitude.

The Dog = If a child is not trained to embrace transcendental value it will grow up to be like a dog whose desires are never satiated. Our desires will continue to run contrary to the ideals of the soul and will destroy the environment of our soul. Woe is the soul which is housed in an unredeemed body. Perhaps as the child matures into an adult he will remember the covenant between God and the Jewish people causing a mending of the ways.

The Stick = If a child grows up with his desires unchallenged then these behaviors will become ingrained, "beaten in" to his psyche and his attitude will not change. These deviant behaviors will act like a weapon, a stick, beating and destroying the internal spirit of the soul.

The Fire = This behavior will continue and create "burning" passions and desires which will preclude any type of personal redemption. Fantasies and desires will burn a spiritual hole in the inner recesses of our self. Sinful desires will intensify until it will totally destroy the soul. Perhaps when we are senior in our years, our passions and behaviors which deviate from the norms/mores of Torah will automatically reform and allow our tormented soul to rise up from the shackles of impurity.

The Water = The soul will not automatically escape, for a person who has embraced a life style which is contrary to Torah values will have crushed and drowned the soul.

The Ox = One must struggle to redeem oneself. One that does not and believes that it will happen on its own, is condemned to be considered a Shor Mu 'ad. An individual not willing to work on self-redemption will continue to "wallow" in behavior which will destroy the spirit of the soul.

The Slaughterer = Our Rabbis relate that with every sin a destructive force in the world is created. A lifestyle devoid of values, creates a destructive force who will persecute and inflict punishment on those involved in sinful ways. These afflictions will torment the soul.

The Angel of Death = When the Angel of Death will remove the soul the deviant lifestyle will cause it to contain impurities "Woe is such a soul".

The Holy One = When God examines "this soul" in heaven do not think that in God's presence the soul will automatically achieve purification. For perfection of the soul and redemption of self can only be achieved in this world. It is in this world of experience that growth and self-perfection may be achieved. Woe is the soul that has not had the opportunity to struggle for greatness and to achieve perfection!

# **TA'ANIT BECHOROT INTERNATIONAL SIYUMIM**

**Rabbi Ben Hassan:  
Seattle, Washington, USA**

8:30 am

<https://zoom.us/j/6352582492>

**Rabbi Nafi Haleva Turkey  
(Turkey)**

Tefila 08:10 ve siyum 8:55

<https://zoom.us/j/418434984>

<https://www.facebook.com/NaftaliHaleva>

**Rabbi Ilan ACOCA  
Fort Lee, NJ, USA**

<https://zoom.us/j/3235337122>

<https://m.facebook.com/ilan.acoca>

# Sephardic Pesah Guide

(Reprinted with permission from the Sephardic Pesah Guide of Rabbi Ilan Acoca)

## Introduction

With Pesah quickly arriving, it is time to begin with our preparations. The following pages will explain some of the basic concepts and laws of Pesah. This guide is meant to be an overview of Sephardic laws and customs for Pesah. It should be clear to the reader that a competent rabbi is still necessary in deciding specific questions. Please also keep in mind that customs amongst Sephardim vary from community to community.

### What is Hametz?

- The Torah in a number of places prohibits the possession and consumption of *hametz*. (Ex. 12:15, Ex 12:18, Ex. 12:19, Ex. 12:20, Ex. 13:7, Ex 13:8, Deut. 16:3).
- Only the five types of grain can become *hametz*. These grains include wheat, barley, oats, spelt, and rye.
- When mixed with water, if these grains are not baked within 18 minutes they become *hametz* and are forbidden on Pesah.
- There are a number of factors that speed up the fermentation process. These include warm water and dough that is left standing.
- Matzah therefore is made by using special flour (guarded to make sure it has never been in contact with water) that is mixed with cold water. The dough is constantly kneaded until it is placed in the oven and baked. The entire process takes less than 18 minutes.

### Kitniyot (Legumes)

- As mentioned earlier only the five grains can become *hametz*.
- Legumes such as beans, lentils, rice, and quinoa can never become *hametz*.
- During Pesah Sephardim eat these types of foods.
- It should be noted that amongst different Sephardic communities there are different customs in regards to legumes. Each person should check the customs of their communities. For example certain Sephardic communities have the custom not to eat rice and chickpeas (hummus) during Pesah. If one does have the custom of eating rice, he must check it 3 times for *hametz*.
- *Kitniyot* are forbidden to Ashkenazi Jews. They cannot become *hametz*, but since they can be ground into flour a decree was accepted in Ashkenazi communities not to eat *kitniyot*. Another reason is because there is a possibility of finding prohibited cereals mixed with the *kitniyot*.
- Nevertheless, Ashkenazim may eat in the homes of Sephardim during Pesah as long as they do not eat *kitniyot*. They are permitted to eat from the same plates and from the same cooking utensils used by Sephardim as long as there are no *kitniyot* in the food they are eating.

## Searching and Disposing of Hametz

- Before the eve of the 14th of Nissan the home must be cleaned thoroughly so that all *hametz* is removed.
- On the eve of the 14th of Nissan the searching for *hametz* is performed.
- The search should be performed at nightfall.
- The entire house must be searched. This search is not a symbolic one; rather it must be done thoroughly.
- The custom is to place ten pieces of *hametz* wrapped in paper around the house. It should be noted that these ten pieces do not constitute the entire search. As mentioned the entire home must be searched.
- The search is performed with a candle, which is used to check all the various places. If one is unable to find a candle, or if there are concerns about using a candle, then a flashlight is also permitted.
- Before the search begins the appropriate blessing (found at the beginning of most Hagadot) is recited.
- If you have an office or a business, then it too must be cleaned and searched for *hametz*; the same applies for one's car.
- At the conclusion of the search, the prayer to nullify the *hametz* is recited.
- The following day on the eve of Pesah the *hametz* is burned and the prayer of nullification is once again re-cited.

Question: What if I do not intend on being home all of Pesah? Do I still have to search my house for *hametz*?

Answer: If one intends on leaving their home before Pesah and returning after the holiday, then the search is dependent on a number of factors;

If one leaves after the 14th of Adar (within 30 days of Pesah) then the night before leaving, the house must be searched. In this case a blessing is not recited.

If one leaves before the 14th of Adar then a search is not required. If there is *hametz* in the house then it must be sold to a non-Jew.

## Koshering Utensils

The Shulhan Aruch (Orah Hayim 451,4) teaches the concept of "kebolo kach polto", which means that in order to kosher a utensil that we used for *hametz*, we have to use the same method that it became *hametz* to render it *kasher l'pesah*. For example, a pot that was used to boil pasta, has to rest for 24 hours after it was used, then we have to boil hot water in the pot, make sure the water spills on the outer wall of the pot as well and then it could be used for Pesah. Therefore, utensils that are used mainly for cold food (i.e. a spoon that is used to eat cereals) do not need to be koshered. Cleaning them will suffice.

## Preparing the House and Utensils for Pesah

Utensils and appliances that are used during the year for *hametz* cannot be used on Pesah. The reason for this is because during the year they absorb the taste

of *hametz*. This taste is *hametz* and is prohibited on Pesah. Our Rabbis set down a number of rules as to how these utensils can be made kosher and hence their use would be permitted on Pesah. The following is a list of each item and the proper method of how to make it kosher.

## Utensils

- China and earthenware: Since they are considered to be extremely porous, if they were used during the year for hot *hametz* then they cannot be used during Pesah.
- Glass: This includes Pyrex. The Sephardic custom is to regard glass as non-porous. For this reason glass used during the year just has to be cleaned and washed very well. If there is no trace of food on it then it may be used on Pesah. Ashkenazim follow the view of Rabbi Moshe Isserles, (1520-1572), who says that glass is porous. According to this view glass must be cleaned and soaked in water for three 24 hour periods, changing the water every 24 hours.
- Metal cutlery: Cutlery used during the year may be used on Pesah after *hagalat kelim* is performed. The method of *hagalat* is as follows: The cutlery must be cleaned thoroughly so that there is no trace of food on it. It must then not be used for a 24 hour period. At the conclusion of this 24 hour period it is dipped into a pot (the pot must be Kosher) of boiling water (bubbles must appear in the boil). After it is dipped

is should be run under cold water. The cutlery is then permitted on Pesah. Note: If handles can be removed this must be done. If handles cannot be removed a competent Rabbi should be asked.

- Metal pans used for cooking: The same method used on cutlery is done here. This includes all pots used on a stovetop.
- Frying pans: If they are used with oil then they are treated as any other metal pot. If one fries without any oil, then it may not be used on Pesah.
- Baking pans, grates, etc.: Any utensils used in the oven cannot be made kosher by Haga'lah. They must be heated until they become red hot (Libun). This can be done by putting them through a cycle inside a self-cleaning oven. If this cannot be done then new ones should be purchased for Pesah.

## Appliances

- Dishwasher: If it is lined with plastic or metal then it must be cleaned thoroughly. It must then be left to sit idle for 24 hours. After this it should be run through a hot cycle while empty using soap. If the racks cannot be cleaned completely then separate racks should be purchased for Pesah.
- Refrigerator and freezer: They should be emptied and cleaned thoroughly. Some have a custom of lining the shelves as well.

- **Stovetops:** They should be cleaned thoroughly. The grates should be dipped in boiling water. The element should then be turned on high for a few minutes.
- **Shabbat hotplate:** It should be cleaned thoroughly and then left to sit for 24 hours. At the conclusion of the 24 hours boiling water should be poured on it.
- **Microwave ovens:** It should be cleaned thoroughly. A glass of water should then be placed into it. The glass should be brought to a boil so one can see steam in the oven. It is then permitted to use the oven.
- **Sink:** The sink should be cleaned thoroughly and then boiling water should be poured into it covering the entire surface.
- **Countertops:** They should be cleaned thoroughly and then boiling water should be poured on them. As an added precaution they can be covered.
- **Ovens:** The Sephardic custom is to clean the oven very well. It is preferable to use a cleaning agent. The oven is left for 24 hours without being used. The oven is then turned on at its highest heat for one hour. It is then permitted to use it on Pesah. For self-cleaning ovens the only step necessary is to run it through a self-cleaning cycle.

### The Sale of Hametz

As mentioned earlier it is not only forbidden to consume *hametz*, possession

of *hametz* is also forbidden. Understanding that it may be difficult or financially difficult for individuals to dispose of all *hametz*, the rabbis allowed for *hametz* in ones possession to be sold to a non-Jew. It is customary today that any *hametz* that one cannot dispose of be sold. This sale must be done by a competent rabbi before Pesah. With this sale one is allowed to keep the *hametz* in their home. It is important however that the *hametz* be placed in an area that can be sealed so that it is out of sight and reach on Pesah. At the conclusion of Pesah the rabbi purchases back these goods.

A contract for the sale of *hametz* is available on the inside of the back page of this newsletter.

### The Fast of the Firstborn

The last plague to strike the Egyptians was the death of the firstborn. In this plague the first born of the Jewish people were spared. To remember this it became a custom that on the eve of Pesah firstborn males fast. This fast is considered to be a minor fast. Because of the difficulty in fasting on the eve of Pesah (the Seder being that night) it has become the custom for firstborn to attend a *Seudat Mitzvah* (meal of Mitzvah) and thus be exempt from the fast. A *seudat mitzvah* includes a Brit Milah, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Sheva Berachot, or the completion (Siyum) of a Talmudic tractate (in case of need Mishna is accepted). Many synagogues today have a "Siyum" so that firstborn attending can partake of the meal at its conclusion and thus be exempt from fasting.

## Some Miscellaneous Laws for Sephardim

- Sephardim are lenient when it comes to egg matzot. It is widely accepted in Sephardic communities to eat egg matzah even under normal circumstances.
- So too there is absolutely no prohibition to wet matzot on Pesah.

## Purchase of Pesah Products

Any item that it is clear without reasonable doubt that it was made without any *hametz* is permissible on Pesah. Therefore items such as raw meat, honey, olive oil, etc. do not need a hechsher for Pesah. For further details, please look at the Pesah Product List included at the end of this guide.

## Cleaning the House for Pesah

The Torah teaches that we must tidy our homes from *hametz* before Pesah. The sages explain that this refers to *hametz* that is 1oz in weight. For comparison, this is about the size of a half of pita bread. Anything smaller would not need to be removed according to the Torah. However, the sages were concerned that if people left at home pieces of bread or cookies around the house, one may accidentally eat it on Pesah. Therefore they decreed that we do *bedikat hametz* - checking for *hametz* to remove any “nice sized cookies”. They were not concerned that we may eat little crumbs, dust, old or rotten food, lipstick, etc. Therefore we do not need to clean the house from crumbs but only big pieces of *hametz* that one may accidentally eat. There is no need to move the couch or the bed to clean under as no one is going to accidentally bump into a cookie under the couch on Pesah and eat it. The purpose of *bitul hametz* is to nullify any small pieces of *hametz* that may be around the house. The purpose of *bedikat hametz* is to get rid of actual food that may be eaten.

One should check the car carefully for *hametz* in the cup holders, glove compartments, etc. Getting a “Pesah car wash” is not necessary.

## Bedikat Hametz

Bedikat hametz must be performed on the eve of the fourteenth of Nissan (Thursday, April 18, 2019) at nightfall (8:12 PM Fort Lee time).

Once nightfall has arrived, one may no longer engage in any form of work until the bedika is performed.

The beracha of “al biur hametz” is recited before the actual bedika process is begun.

As long as the bedika is not complete, you may recite the appropriate beracha. According to the Ari Zal, ten pieces of small pieces of bread should be placed in different placed in different rooms before the bedika begins and should be found and put aside during the bedika (please make sure to put the bread in paper or foil). At the end of the bedika, we have to nullify the hametz.

## Biur Hametz

On the next day (Friday, April 19), we have to finish eating hametz by the end of the fourth hour of the day (10:40 AM) and finish burning the hametz by the end of the fifth hour of the day (11:46AM). When we burn the hametz, we have to nullify it again. Hechsher for Pesah is needed.

## Disposing of Our Hametz on Erev Pesah

On Erev Pesah, it is not necessary to dispose of the remaining *hametz* by taking it to our garbage can outside the house. Once we annul all *hametz* in our possession, then we no longer have any in our possession according to *halacha*. In addition, we sell the *hametz* that we possess and it does not belong to us. Therefore, there should not be any concern about dumping our *hametz* in our garbage can outside the house.

## Using Inedible Hametz Products on Pesah

The Gemara (Pesachim 45b) states that *hametz* that is “*pasul leachilat keleb*”, inedible for a dog to consume, is not considered *hametz*. Therefore, one may use inedible products that contain *hametz*. This includes non-edible items such as lipsticks (even flavored), shoe polish, paper towels, aluminum foil, soap, dishwashing liquid, toothpastes, etc. We may use these items even if they contain *hametz* and no rabbinic supervision is required.

# The Seder

## WHAT YOU WILL NEED

### A) Wine

- Red wine is preferred over white wine.
- In a case where it is difficult to drink wine then grape juice is permitted.

### B) Matzah

- For the Seder it is preferable that special handmade "Matza Shemurah" be used.
- If one cannot obtain handmade Matzot then there are many who permit machine made Matza Shemurah.
- For the Seder plate there should be three Matzot. Remember the final amount of how many Matzot you will need will depend on the amount of guests you have.
- For the measurements of how much Matza must be eaten, see the section on Matza under "The Seder Step by Step" section.

### C) Karpas

- This is a vegetable that we dip into salt water or vinegar.
- It is preferable to use celery or parsley.

### D) Maror (bitter herbs)

- The code of Jewish law lists five varieties of Maror.

- Only three are known to us today, they include lettuce, endives, and horseradish.

- The most common one used is Romaine Lettuce.

- In many Ashkenazi communities horseradish is used.

- The Maror is eaten twice at the Seder.

### E) Haroset

- Haroset is used to remind us of the mortar the Jews were forced to make in order to make bricks in Egypt.
- There is no standard recipe for Haroset and customs vary.
- Many use a mixture of ground fruits such as apples, and nuts, cinnamon, and wine.
- Some communities use date syrup mixed with walnuts called "Halek".

### F) Egg

- On festivals there was a special sacrifice that was offered in the Temple.
- This sacrifice was known as the "Hagigah".
- Since today we no longer have a Temple to offer the "Hagigah" in its place we place an egg on the Seder plate to remind us of this sacrifice.

## G) Shank Bone

- In Temple times Pesah revolved around the Passover Sacrifice. Each family was commanded to slaughter a lamb and eat it roasted with Matza and Maror. This was known as the "Korban Pesah". Since we no longer can perform the commandment of the Pesah Sacrifice we place a piece of meat on the Seder plate to remind us of the Pesah sacrifice. It is customary to use a shank bone, one of the reasons we use a shank bone is because it is also symbolic of G-d's outstretched hand.

## The Seder Plate

- Egg
- Shank bone
- Maror
- Karpas
- Haroset
- Hazeret (Lettuce for the sandwich)
- Three Matzot

Note: Refer to your Hagadah as to how these items are to be arranged on the Seder plate. In Sephardic communities it is customary to follow the arrangement of the "Ari".

## Reclining

On this night we are to feel complete freedom. Our status is that of nobility feeling as our ancestors felt as they left Egypt. The Seder has a built in way for us

to feel this freedom and sense of nobility, both through the foods we eat and the way we eat them. One such practice is reclining, this was a common method used by people of nobility when eating their meals. Because on this night we are free we recline at specific points in the Hagadah.

- One must recline for the drinking of all four cups of wine.
- When eating the Matzah and Afikoman one must recline
- Reclining is always done on the left side.
- If one did not recline for any of the above then they did not fulfill the obligation and the act must be repeated.
- If one forgot to recline for the first cup of wine then he must drink an additional cup but without reciting the blessing.
- Women are also obligated to recline, but in a case where they forgot they need not repeat the Mitzvah.
- Reclining is not performed when the Maror and Karpas are eaten.
- One who wishes to recline for the entire meal can do so.



## THE SEDER STEP BY STEP

### A) Kiddush

- The Seder begins as all other festivals with "Kiddush".
- The first cup of wine is poured and the Kiddush is recited.
- The blessing of "Shehechyanu" is said at the completion of the Kiddush.
- Remember that when drinking the Kiddush reclining is necessary.
- It is also obligatory to drink a "Reviit" of wine. A Reviit is approximately 86 grams.
- There are various opinions as to the amount in a Reviit. The most lenient is approximately 3.3 fluid ounces.
- It is preferable that the amount be drunk in one time, if this is not possible then it should be drunk within two minutes (there are even authorities that allow up to eight minutes).

- In case where it is difficult to drink a Reviit, then one is permitted to drink the majority of a Reviit (44 grams)
- Note: Although on other festivals and Shabbat one is permitted to recite the Kiddush before nightfall, on Pesah it is customary to wait until nightfall.

### B) Urchatz

- Before the eating of the Karpas all participants wash their hands.
- This washing is done exactly as one would before eating bread. The only exception is that a blessing is not recited.

**Question:** Why do we wash our hands before eating Karpas?

**Answer:** The answer to this question has to do with a law that applies all year round. In Jewish law food can be rendered impure through contact with our hands. It is for this reason we wash our hands to purify them. Liquid is considered to transfer the impurity from our hands to the food. Therefore any food which is wet can receive impurity. The Rabbis therefore decreed that when one is about to eat any fruit or vegetable that is wet then washing of the hands is required. For example if you wash an apple and want to eat it without drying it then you are obligated to wash your hands before eating it. Since at this point in the Seder we are about to eat the Karpas that is dipped in a liquid (vinegar or salt water) then this law of washing hands applies.

### C) Karpas

- A small piece of Karpas is taken.
- It is dipped into vinegar or salt water.
- The blessing is recited and then it is eaten.
- Reclining is not necessary but one who wishes to recline may do so.

### D) Yahatz

- The leader of the Seder takes the three Matzot which are on the plate.
- He then takes the middle Matza and breaks it in half.
- The smaller of the two pieces is returned to the plate placed between the two whole Matzot.
- The larger of the two halves is placed aside to be used as afikoman at the end of the Seder.
- There are those who have a custom to wrap it and place it over their shoulders. They act out the Exodus. The participants ask him "Where have you come from", he replies "From Egypt", they then ask him "Where are you going to", he replies "To the land of Israel", everyone then responds "Next year in Jerusalem".

### E) Magid

- We are now prepared to begin the recitation of the Hagadah.
- The Seder plate is raised and everyone recites "Ha Lahma Anya".

- After "Ha Lahma Anya" a second cup of wine is poured then the "Mah Nishtanah" is recited preferably by a child.
- After "Mah Nishtanah" the entire Hagadah is read. It should be done joyously. The text should be elaborated upon.
- During the recitation of the ten plagues it is customary to pour from one's cup into a vessel. This is done for each of the ten plagues, for the abbreviation of Rabbi Yehudah and for the three mentions of the signs in the wilderness.
- In my home we have a custom that during the recitation of the ten plagues the leader pours some wine into a vessel for each plague, at the same time someone else simultaneously pours some water into the same vessel. This custom is to remind us of how the water turned into blood.
- The Magid section concludes with the drinking of the second cup of wine.
- Note: the Sephardic custom is not to recite a blessing (*boreh feri Hagefen*) over the second cup of wine.

### F) Rahtzah

- After the second cup of wine we wash our hands in preparation of Hamotzi.
- This is the second time in the Seder that the hands are washed. This time a blessing (*al netilat yadayim*) is recited.

- Many have a custom that the water and basin are brought to the table so that participants can wash at the Seder table.

### G) Motzi

- Before the blessing the two whole Matzot on the Seder plate are held, with the broken piece of Matza in between the two whole ones.
- The leader recites the blessing over the Matza (*hamotzi lehem min ha-aretz*).
- The leader then recites the special blessing that is said for the eating of Matza.
- To fulfil the obligation of eating Matza, the amount required to eat is Kazayit
- Ideally one should eat two Kezetim but if it is difficult then the obligation is fulfilled by eating only one.
- A Kazayit is roughly about 29 grams, which is about the size of one machine made Matza.
- Remember on this night it is important to use special Matza Shemura. Since each person must eat a Kazayit you will have to figure out based on the amount of guests you have how much Matza to purchase.
- In case of physical weakness one can rely on opinions that say a *kazayit* is only 20 grams.
- The Matza should be eaten within a span of no more than four minutes.

- Remember when you eat Matza you must recline on your left side.

### H) Maror

- After the eating of Matza we eat Maror (bitter herbs).
- Here too one must eat a *kazayit* of about 29 grams, within four minutes.
- The Maror is dipped into Haroset.
- So as not to overpower the bitterness of the Maror, some of the Haroset is shaken off.
- The special blessing over the Maror is recited. Because the Maror symbolizes the bitterness of Egypt reclining is not performed for the eating of Maror.

### I) Korech

- A sandwich is made using one *kazayit* of Matza and one *kazayit* of Maror.
- For this sandwich the third Matza which was at the bottom of the three on the Seder plate is used.
- The sandwich is dipped into Haroset and eaten while reclining.
- There is no blessing said over it, but a short text appears in the Hagadah which is said before eating the Korech.

### J) Shulhan Orech (Meal)

- The meal is served so sit back relax and enjoy.
- Remember that at the end of the meal the Afikoman must be eaten.

- The requirement of the Afikoman is to not be satiated before eating it, so leave some room for the Afikoman!

### **K) Tzafun**

- The piece of Matza which was set hidden is now taken out to be eaten as the Afikoman.
- Once again each person is obligated to eat a *kazayit* in less than 4 minutes, reclining on the left.
- After the eating of the Afikoman one is not permitted to eat anything else.
- Even drinking (except the two remaining cups of wine) is forbidden, although one is permitted to drink water.

### **L) Barech (Blessing after the Meal)**

- We return to the Hagadah with the recitation of Birkat Hamazon, grace after meal.
- At the completion of Birkat Hamazon the blessing over wine is made and the third cup of wine is drunk.
- Remember you must recline to the left when drinking this cup.

### **M) Hallel**

- The fourth cup of wine is filled and the remainder of the Hagadah is recited starting with the Hallel.
- At the conclusion of the Hagadah after the blessing of Yishtabah, the fourth cup of wine is drunk, remembering to recline on the left side.
- The Sephardic custom is not to recite the blessing over wine on this cup.
- After drinking the wine, the appropriate after-blessing for wine is said.

### **N) Nirtzah**

- May our prayers find favor (Nirtzah) in the eyes of G-d.
- Next year may we all merit to celebrate as a united people in the holy city of Jerusalem.

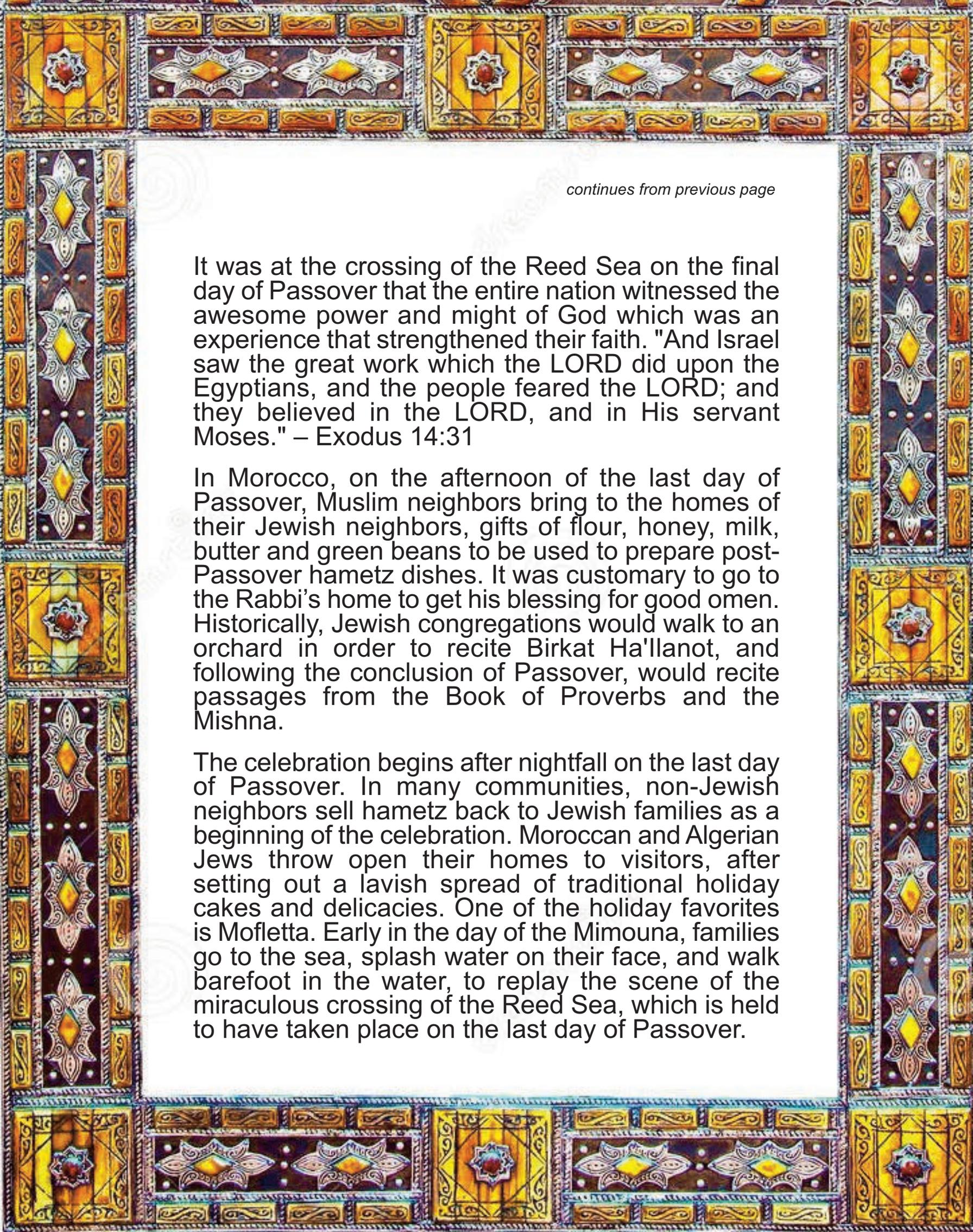
# Mimouna Origins

Mimouna is a North African Jewish celebration related to the ancient Seharane. It is held the day after Passover, marking the return to eating hametz (leavened foods), which are forbidden throughout the week of Passover.

Though the practice only began to be recorded in the middle of the 18th century,[1] its derivation and etymology are ancient. Possible derivations for the name Mimouna are: "Rabbi Maimon ben Yosef" (father of the Rambam Maimonides). Thus, the Mimouna might mark the date of his birth or death. The Hebrew word "emuna", meaning "faith" or "ma'amin"; the Arabic word for "wealth" or "good luck"[ as on this day, according to midrash, the gold and jewelry of the drowned Egyptians washed up on the shore of the Reed Sea and enriched the Israelites. Mimouna is associated with "faith" and "belief" in immediate prosperity, as seen in its customs of matchmaking, and well-wishes for successful childbearing; manna, which was the food God provided following the Exodus, and during the subsequent wandering in the desert.

Mimouna celebrates belief in both the past Jewish redemption from the Egyptians and the future Messianic redemption: "In Nisan (the month in which Passover falls), the Jews were redeemed and in Nisan they will be redeemed in the future. When Passover ends and the Jews are still not redeemed, the Moroccan Jews do not lose their faith; as the Sages said: 'Even if he tarries, I will expect him every day.'"

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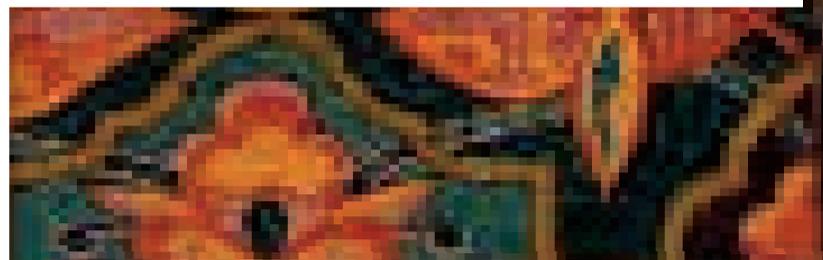
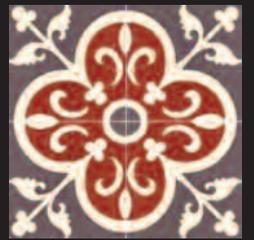
It was at the crossing of the Reed Sea on the final day of Passover that the entire nation witnessed the awesome power and might of God which was an experience that strengthened their faith. "And Israel saw the great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the LORD; and they believed in the LORD, and in His servant Moses." – Exodus 14:31

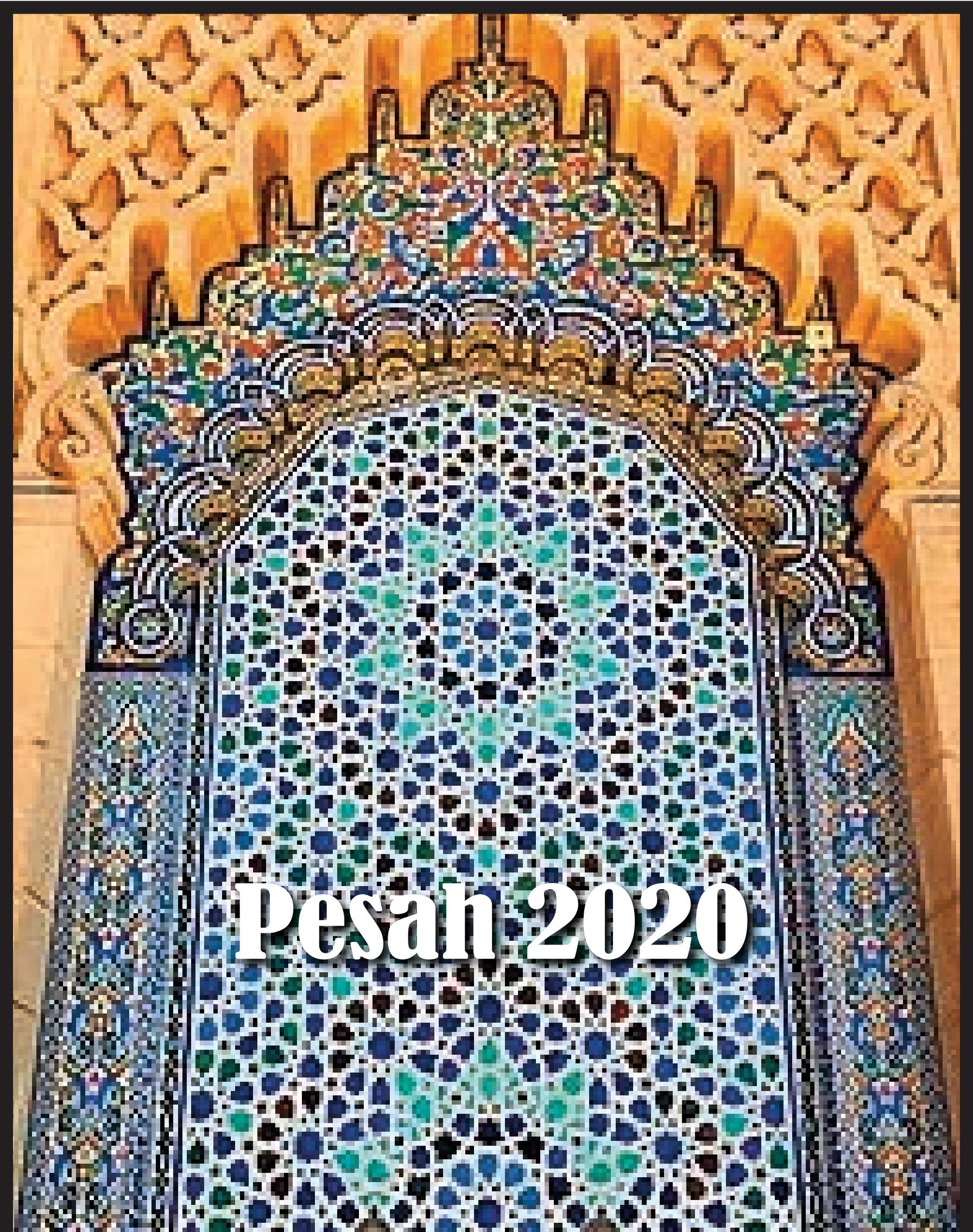
In Morocco, on the afternoon of the last day of Passover, Muslim neighbors bring to the homes of their Jewish neighbors, gifts of flour, honey, milk, butter and green beans to be used to prepare post-Passover hametz dishes. It was customary to go to the Rabbi's home to get his blessing for good omen. Historically, Jewish congregations would walk to an orchard in order to recite Birkat Ha'llanot, and following the conclusion of Passover, would recite passages from the Book of Proverbs and the Mishna.

The celebration begins after nightfall on the last day of Passover. In many communities, non-Jewish neighbors sell hametz back to Jewish families as a beginning of the celebration. Moroccan and Algerian Jews throw open their homes to visitors, after setting out a lavish spread of traditional holiday cakes and delicacies. One of the holiday favorites is Mofletta. Early in the day of the Mimouna, families go to the sea, splash water on their face, and walk barefoot in the water, to replay the scene of the miraculous crossing of the Reed Sea, which is held to have taken place on the last day of Passover.



# Metivta Rabbinic Conference Through the Years





**Pesah 2020**