



HALACHA FOR TODAY PRESENTS

The Seder at a Glance; a Halachic Primer

(Updated 5786/2026)



The Pesach Seder is comprised of the following "fifteen" steps:

KADESH, URCHATZ, KARPAS, YACHATZ, MAGID, RACHTZAH, MOTZI, MATZAH, MAROR, KORECH, SHULCHAN ORECH, TZAFUN, BAREICH, HALEL AND NIRTZAH.

The number "15" is significant in that it correlates to the "15" "Shir Hama'alos" psalms which were composed to correspond to the "Fifteen" steps in the Bais Hamikdash. (See Talmud Sukkah 53a. Additionally, Hashem created the world with the letters "Yud" and "Hay"; Olam Hazei with the "Hay" and Olam haba with the "Yud". Put these two letters together and you get the name of Hashem, "Kah" which numerically add up to "15".)

What does the Bais Hamikdash have to do with Pesach? Everything!

The first night of Pesach each year always falls out on the same day of the week that Tisha b'av falls out; the two days are connected. (See Shulchan Aruch Siman 428:3)

The Jewish people are currently in galus, exile, and do not have a Bais Hamikdash and until Mashiach's arrival (very soon hopefully) we bemoan this sad reality on Tisha B'av, the day of its destruction.

Pesach, the celebration of geulah, redemption, is a day when we commemorate our physical and spiritual redemption from Egypt, and prepare ourselves for the final redemption which Chazal tell us will take place in this time period. Thus as we sit down to the Pesach Seder it is important to keep in mind that the aura of the evening should be kept solemn, sanctified and holy as we have the power in our hands to unleash the final geulah via our conduct at this table; we can facilitate the necessary zechuyos to ensure that Tisha b'av this year will be a day of dancing and jubilation and no longer be a day of sadness, disappointment and tears.

Our "15" steps of the Seder can facilitate the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash with its "15" steps and thus return the world which was created with the letters that add up to "15" to its intended purpose: the glorification of our "Kah" Hashem.



STEP #1: KADESH

Kiddush, and the first of the four cups of wine

Every Jewish adult male and female is obligated to drink four cups of wine over which the order of the Hagadah was recited.(Shulchan Aruch Siman 472:8 and 14)

Minor boys and girls who have reached the age of chinuch (around five or six years of age, depending on each individual child's level of maturity and comprehension) **should be given 4 cups of wine as well.** (Shulchan Aruch Siman 472:15)

The prevalent custom is to place a glass of wine (or grape juice) in front of all the children, even those that are not yet of chinuch age.

There is a debate among the Poskim as to the exact amount of fluid that makes up a "revi'is".

For Mitzvos D'oraysa (biblical commandments) the Poskim are stringent and require the larger amount of approximately 4.5 ounces, while for Mitzvos D'rabanan (rabbinic ordinances) the smaller shiur of 3.3 ounces (according to Rav Moshe Feinstein Zatzal's opinion; some say he later revised this to 2.9 ounces) suffices.

The 4 cups of wine at the Pesach Seder are a mitzvah D'rabanan and thus would only require 3.3 ounces for each of the four cups.(if the first night of Pesach falls out on Friday night, then the first cup, which is also the cup of Kiddush, a biblical commandment (See Mishna Berura Siman 271 S"K 2 at length), will require the larger amount.)

If one is able, of course, it is best to try and drink the 4.5 ounces even for Mitzvos D'rabanan. But if one has a hard time drinking that many cups of wine, the smaller shiur may be relied upon.

It is a mitzvah to use red wine for the Arba Kosos, the four cups at the Pesach Seder. (Shulchan Aruch Siman 472:11)

It is ideal [for men] not to use grape juice for the Arba Kosos.

If someone cannot drink wine, it is best for some wine to be mixed into the grape juice to the point that the wine can be tasted.

Of course, if due to health or other reasons, one is unable to drink even a little bit of wine , then grape juice should be used, and the obligation of the Arba Kosos will be fulfilled L'chatchila. (See Shu"t Teshuvos V'hanhagos vol. 2 Siman 243 where he writes that the Chazon Ish, Brisker Rav, Techibiner Rav Zichronam L'vracha and other Gedolim used grape juice at the end of their lives when they were unable to drink wine.)

Women and children can use grape juice L'chatchilah. See Hilchos Chag B'Chag page 415, footnote 25. This can also be inferred from Rav Sternbuch's Teshuva ibid.)

2) If one has white wine that is a better quality wine than the red, it's better to use that white wine. (Rama Siman 472:11)

One of the reasons for opting for red wine is to commemorate the "Jewish blood" that was spilled by Pharaoh in Mitzrayim. (Mishna Berura Siman 472:38)

Thus, what many people who want to drink white wine do, is to add some red wine to it to turn the mixture red.

However, adding red wine or grape juice to white wine for the express purpose of coloring the white wine is problematic, as even though the prohibition of "coloring" on Shabbos and Yom Tov usually does not apply to food, where the sole purpose of the mixing is to "color" the drink, it may indeed be a prohibition of *tzvia*, coloring. (See Halichos Shlomo, Pesach, Perek 9:5 and footnote Dvar Halacha 11)

The better option when doing this is on Yom Tov is to pour in the red wine first and then add the white wine into the red. (based on Sha'ar Hatziyun Siman 318:65, where he writes that when done this way, according to all opinions, it isn't considered coloring.)

It is ideal to drink the majority of the cup of each cup of the Arba Kosos. (Shulchan Aruch Siman 472:9 and Mishna Berura S"K 30 and 33)

Those who find it difficult to drink wine should use a smaller glass that holds a little more than a revi'is and finish most of the cup rather than using a much larger cup and then not be able to finish all or most of it.

Children [who are of age for chinuch] need only drink a cheek-full of wine. (See Mishna Berura siman 472:47)

The Arba Kosos must be drunk b'heseiba, while leaning to the left side. (Shulchan Aruch Siman 472:3)

Even left handed people lean to the left side.

There are two reasons for not leaning to the right side. One reason is that doing so will prevent the person from eating comfortably with his right hand. (Mishna Berura Siman 472 S"K 10)

According to this first reason alone, we may think that a left handed person would need to lean to the right side. However, there is another [and more important] reason for leaning to the left, because a person's food pipe (esophagus) is slightly to the right and the wind pipe (trachea) is slightly to the left, and when leaning to the right there is a chance that the cover of the wind pipe will open and the food may get lodged in the wrong pipe and cause choking chas v'shalom. (Mishna Berura ibid.)

If a left handed person leaned to the right, b'dieved he has satisfied his obligation. (Mishna Berura ibid.)

If a right handed person leans to the right, according to some Poskim it is acceptable b'dieved, and according to others even b'dieved he has not satisfied his obligation. (Mishna Berura ibid. See also Kaf Hachaim Siman 472:23 and 48 and Shu"t His'orerus Teshuva vol. 2 Siman 49)

When doing heseiba, the proper time for leaning begins after the bracha has been recited on the wine (or the matzah), but during the recital of the bracha one should not lean, as it isn't respectful to recite a bracha while leaning. (See Halichos Shlomo, Pesach, Perek 9:20 and footnote 44)

Women are not obligated to lean, though many have the custom to do so. (See Rama Siman 472:4)

Although women need not lean, they should be seated when drinking the arba kosos (as well as when eating the matzah or any other foods that require heseiba for men) as if they are standing there is a possibility that they have not satisfied their obligation.

Additionally, even women that do not lean should try to have a comfortable chair as their expression of "freedom". (See Halichos Shlomo, Pesach, Perek 9:19 and Moadim u'Zmanim vol. 3 Siman 257)



STEP #2: URCHATZ

Washing of the hands, without reciting a bracha

The reason for this washing is due to a halacha which for some reason has been forsaken by most people throughout the year, known as "*Tibul B'mashkeh*". (See Taz Siman 473:6)

"*Tibul B'mashkeh*" is literally translated as "dipped in a liquid", and refers to the halachic requirement to wash ones hands before eating any food that is wet with one of the following seven liquids: wine, bee's honey, olive oil, milk, dew, blood, or water. (See Shulchan Aruch Siman 158:3. The acronym for these seven liquids is yad (yayin, d'vash) shachat(shemen, chalav, tal) dam (dam, mayim). Of course, blood is forbidden to eat, but the Mishna Berura points out that in cases of medical necessity or other Pikuach Nefesh it would be allowed, and in that case it would require washing, thus it is listed as one of the 7 liquids)

Thus, being that we are about to eat karpas, a vegetable dipped in [salt] water, we must first wash our hands.

There are various explanations given to explain why many otherwise G-d fearing Jews are not stringent with this halacha nowadays, which we will not get into at this time, but on the night of the Pesach Seder when we all endeavor to do everything properly and be on a loftier level than usual, all people are careful with this washing.

Rav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach Zatzal explains that the reason this washing is referred to as a command, "urchatz, and you shall wash" rather than the simpler "rachtzah, washing" is due to the fact that this Halacha is overlooked the rest of the year by many people, so we need to "command" everyone to do it on this exalted night.

For the washing of "Urchatz" it isn't necessary for those who wear rings to remove their rings (as is generally recommended when washing for bread, see Mishna Berura Siman 161:19) as by "Tibul B'mashkeh" since many people do not practice it year round, we do not impose extra stringencies on this night. (See Halichos Shlomo, Pesach, Dvar Halacha footnote 53)

If one mistakenly recited the bracha of "Al netilas yadyim" on the washing of "Urchatz", it is possible that he may not require a new washing when it comes to "rachtzah" later on in the Seder.

Thus, the best thing to do is to use the restroom or otherwise touch a covered part of the body or scratch the scalp [before rachtzah] in order to necessitate a new washing with a bracha for the matzah. (See Halichos Shlomo, Pesach, Perek 9:26. This may be a wise thing to do, according to many poskim, in any case before washing for rachtzah even if no bracha was recited on urchatz)



STEP #3: KARPAS

The dipping of a vegetable

A vegetable (celery, potato, scallion, or other "ha'adama" vegetable, depending on each family's minhag) is dipped in saltwater and eaten.

When reciting the bracha of "borei pri haadama" on the karpas one should specifically have in mind that this bracha should exempt the maror that will be eaten later on. (See Mishna Berura Siman 473:55)

If one did not specifically have this in mind, the bracha still works to exempt the maror and no new "borei pri haadama" is recited when eating the maror.

The prevalent custom is to eat less than a kzayis of karpas. (Shulchan Aruch Siman 473:6 and Mishna Berura S"K 56.)

The Gaon of Vilna ruled like the Rambam that a kzayis is indeed required, and those who follow the Gra's minhagim do take a kzayis.

However, even if a kzayis is eaten no bracha achrona is recited, as the birchas hamazon later on will exempt this eating as well. (as quoted in Ma'aseh Rav. This was also the minhag of the Chazon Ish and the Brisker Rav zichronam l'vracha)

The prevalent custom is to eat the karpas without heseiba, leaning.



STEP #4: YACHATZ

The breaking of the middle Matzah

The middle of the three matzos is broken in half; the bigger half is put away and will be eaten later on for afikoman.

One reason for this broken matzah is to signify "lechem oni, poor man's bread", as matzah is referred to in the Posuk (Devarim 16:3), which is usually a broken piece rather than a whole loaf, to commemorate the Jews' slavery in Mitzrayim. (Mishna Berura Siman 473:57 based on Talmud Pesachim 115b)

Another reason cited for this "splitting" of the middle matzah is to commemorate the "splitting" of the Yam Suf (known as the red sea, which is probably an inaccurate translation, as it should properly be translated as "the reed sea" or "the sea of reeds"; See Rashi to Shmos 13:18) and the Yarden which took place on Pesach. (See Da'as Zekeinim M'ba'alei Tosefos Shmos 12:8)

Some people have the custom to take the half of the matzah that was broken off for afikoman and place it on their shoulders or on their backs [and walk around the table] to commemorate the Bnei Yisroel leaving Mitzrayim carrying [what turned into] matzah, [as well as other packages] on their backs. (Shulchan Aruch Harav Siman 473:35 says "their backs" and Mishna Berura Siman 473:59 says "their shoulders". Regarding the Matzah baking on their backs, see Targum Yonasan to Shemos 12:39)



STEP #5: MAGID

The recitation of the Haggadah

The recitation of the haggadah is a fulfillment of the biblical commandment of "*Sipur Yetzias Mitzrayim*", the retelling of the story of Hashem's taking the Bnei Yisroel out of the bondage of Egypt.

Additionally, it is the retelling of how Hashem made us into a holy nation, His children, as stated in the Posuk (Devarim 14:1) *Banim Atem L'Hashem Elokeichem, you [the Jewish people] are children to Hashem, your G-d.*

One who relates the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim with joy and delight is sure to delight with the Shechina in Olam Haba. At the time that Hashem hears His children retelling the story, He gathers all the heavenly bodies and he tells them "go and listen to My children praising Me and delighting in the story of how I redeemed them!" (Zohar Hakadosh Parshas Bo)

Women are obligated in the mitzvah of "Sipur Yetziyas Mitzrayim" as they too were part of the miracle of the redemption. (Shulchan Aruch Siman 472:14)

If a woman cannot recite the entire haggadah (due to being otherwise occupied with the children or other valid reasons) she should at a minimum recite the following parts: Kiddush, Avadim Hayinu, "Pesach, Matzah and Maror" until Go'al Yisroel and the recital of the ten makos, plagues. (Mishna Berura Siman 473:64. See also Siddur Ya'avetz.)

Of course, the children should participate to the best of their ability in the recital of the haggadah, and the adults should gear the "flow" of the evening to the level of the children, as the Torah specifically commanded (Shemos 13:8) "*V'higadta L'vincha Bayom Hahu, and you shall relate [the story of Hashem's redeeming us from Egypt] to your child on that day [Pesach]*".

It is a mitzvah to give out sweets and treats to the children in order to keep them awake and active during the Seder so they will ask about all the interesting things that are going on during the Seder.

The proper way of retelling the story of Yetziyas Mitzrayim is via "question[from the children] and answer [from the parents], thus it is not proper to put the children to bed immediately after "Mah Nishtana" before their questions are answered and they get a grasp of the miracles that Hashem performed for our ancestors on this night. (Shulchan Aruch Siman 472:16 and Mishna Berura S"K 50)

The Hagadah is not recited b'heseiba, while leaning, rather it is said with reverence and awe while sitting properly. (Shla Hakadosh quoted in Mishna Berura Siman 473:71)



STEP #6: RACHTZAH

The hands are washed again

The hands are washed and the bracha of "*al netilas yadayim*" is recited in preparation to eat the matzah.

Even though the hands were already washed earlier by Urchatz, we wash again in case we may have touched an unclean area between then and now. (See Shulchan Aruch Harav siman 475:2 that in any case the first washing will not work for the matzah)

Some Poskim say that it is proper to deliberately touch a covered area before this washing to ensure that the washing is necessary and a bracha is permitted to be recited. (See Biur Halacha Siman 475:1. See also Halichos Shlomo Perek 9:38)



STEPS #7 & 8: MOTZI - MATZAH

The Matzah is eaten

The matzah is eaten; a fulfillment of the biblical commandment to do so on this night.

It is proper to specifically have in mind, and to tell everyone in the household as well to have in mind, before eating the matzah that what we are about to do is a fulfillment of the positive commandment to eat matzah. (The reason for this is that mitzvos tzrichos kavanah, actions alone without having in mind what we are doing do not work when it comes to biblical commandments; See Shulchan Aruch Siman 60:4)

If this "thought" was not had, according to many Poskim b'dieved it is acceptable and no additional matzah needs to be eaten, especially if the bracha was recited with kavanah and the matzah was eaten b'heseibah; other Poskim require another kzayis to be eaten without a bracha. (See Mishna Berura Siman 475:34 and Biur Halacha dibur hamaschil aval for more about this.)

The procedure is as follows:

Motzi:

The 2 whole Matzos (which serve as Lechem Mishneh), as well as the broken middle Matzah are all held, and the bracha of "Hamotzi Lechem min Ha'aretz", which is required any time before eating bread/Matzah, is recited.

Matzah:

The bottom Matzah is then put down, and while still holding the top Matzah and the broken middle Matzah (which represents Lechem Oni, poor man's bread), the special bracha of "*Baruch Ata Hashem...Al Achilas Matzah*" is recited over the special Mitzvah to eat Matzah on this night. (See Shulchan Aruch Siman 475: 1 and Mishna Berura S"K 2. See also Shulchan Aruch HaRav Siman 475: 4 and 5)

Following the recital of both Brachos, a kzayis from the top Matzah as well as a Kzayis from the middle Matzah is eaten.

Both these Kzeisim should ideally be eaten simultaneously. If that is not feasible, the piece from the top Matzah should be eaten first. (Shulchan Aruch ibid. See also Mishna Berura S"K 9 and Shulchan Aruch HaRav Siman 475:6 and 7)

If there is not enough of these 2 Matzos to give everyone in the family a Kzayis from them, a small piece from each Matzah should be given to all at the table, and then a Kzayis of other Matzah from the box should be eaten to satisfy the Mitzvah (Some people are machmir that everyone eat 2 Kzeisim, even though most likely the requirement to eat 2 kzeisim is only for the head of the household who recited the brachos and exempted everyone else in the family. See Halichos Shlomo, Pesach, Perek 9: 40)

The Matzah should be eaten while doing heseibah, leaning. (Shulchan Aruch Siman 475: 1)



STEP #9: MAROR

The bitter herbs are eaten

The "bitter herbs" are eaten to commemorate the bitterness that our ancestors endured at the hands of the Egyptians.

The proper vegetable to use for maror is a subject of debate among the Poskim, as nowadays we aren't knowledgeable in the many species of plants that the Talmud discusses. (See Chayei Adam klal 130:3)

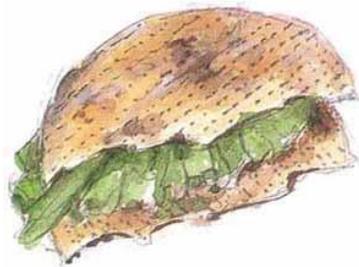
The prevalent custom is to use romaine lettuce (which has been sufficiently washed and checked to ensure it is insect-free) **and/or horseradish** (which when grated is extremely "bitter").

Some Poskim say it's good to mix the grated horseradish with the romaine lettuce, while some Poskim say it is better to avoid mixing the two and better to eat them independently. (See Halichos Shlomo Perek 9:48)

The Maror is dipped into Charoses (and then shaken off) before eating. (Shulchan Aruch Siman 475:1)

The bracha of "Al Achilas Maror" is recited before eating the Maror. (bid)

Maror is eaten without heseiba, leaning. (Shulchan Aruch ibid. See also Mishna Berura S"K 14 that if he wants to lean, he may)



STEP #10: KORECH

Matzah is eaten together with Maror

This “sandwich”, of a Kzayis of Matzah and a Kzayis of Maror eaten together, is a fulfillment of the sage Hillel's understanding of the Posuk (Shmos 12:8) *"U'matzos Al Merorim Yochluhu"*. (See Mishna Berura Siman 475:16)

Some people dip the Maror of Korech into charoses while others have the custom not to; each person should follow their own custom. (Mishna Berura Siman 475:19)

Before eating this “sandwich” we say “Zecher L'Mikdash K'Hillel...this is a remembrance of what was done in the Bais Hamikdash, according to Hillel...”. The entirety of the text is printed in all Hagados. (Shulchan Aruch Siman 475:1)

From the recital of the bracha of “ Al Achilas Matzah” until after the consumption of the Korech sandwich, no interruptions should be made (except something that is necessary to say for the purposes of the meal), as the bracha on the Matzah and the Bracha on the Maror also go on the Korech sandwich. (Shulchan Aruch ibid.)



STEP #11: SHULCHAN ORECH

The festive Yom Tov Seudah is eaten

Some people have the custom to eat the entire seudah b'heseiba, while leaning, especially when eating matzah. (as the Rama Siman 472:6 rules that l'chatchila this should be done.)

However, nowadays, the prevalent minhag is not to lean while eating the seudah. This was the minhag of the Chazon Ish, the Steipler, Rav Chaim Kanievsky Zichronam L'vracha and many other Gedolim.

It is customary to eat a hard-boiled egg [especially the egg from the ke'arah, the seder plate] at the beginning of this seudah, to commemorate the korban chagigah that was brought on Pesach, and also as a subtle sign of mourning that we don't have the Bais Hamikdash in which to bring the Korban Pesach. (and thus Pesach and Tisha B'av always fall out on the same day of the week. See Rama Siman 476:2 and Mishna Berura S"K 11)

It is important not to overeat at this seudah, in order to still have an appetite for the eating of the afikomen. (Rama Siman 476:1)



STEP #12: TZAFUN

The Afikomen is eaten

After the meal is eaten, the half of the middle matzah that was put away after "yachatz" is taken out and eaten for "afikoman" (literal translation of the word afikoman, is "dessert" in ancient Greek) (Shulchan Aruch Siman 477:1)

A minimum of a kzayis of matzah must be eaten for afikoman. L'chatchilah, many people are careful to eat an additional kzayis of matzah, one kzayis commemorating the korban Pesach and the other kzayis commemorating the matzah that was eaten along with the korban Pesach. (See Mishna Berura Siman 477:1)

Women are obligated to eat afikoman just as men are. (See Mishna Berura Siman 477:2)

If there isn't enough from the broken middle matzah to give a kzayis to everyone at the table , other matzah from the box may be used as necessary, as the mitzvah is to eat matzah, not necessarily from that particular matzah.

L'chatchilah, afikoman must be eaten b'heseibah, while leaning.(Shulchan Aruch Siman 477:1)

After the afikoman is eaten no other eating or drinking is allowed, besides for water [or similar watered down drinks], as the taste of matzah is required to remain in the mouth. (See Mishna Berura Siman 478:2)



STEP #13: BARECH Birchas Hamazon is recited

The third cup is poured, and birchas hamazon is recited. (Shulchan Aruch Siman 479:1)

After birchas hamazon, the bracha of borei pri hagafen is recited followed by the drinking of the cup of wine, b'heseibah, while leaning.(ibid.)

No bracha achrona is recited on this cup of wine, as the bracha achrona that will be recited after the fourth cup will cover this one as well. (See Mishna Berura Siman 479 S"K 4)



STEP #14: HALEL

Hallel is recited

The fourth cup of wine is poured, and Hallel is recited, preferably while holding the cup of wine. (Shulchan Aruch Siman 480:1 and Mishna Berura Siman 473 S"K 77)

An additional cup of wine, referred to as "*Kos Shel Eliyahu, Elijah the prophet's cup*" is also filled before the Hallel is recited. This is to signify our belief that just as Hashem redeemed us from Egypt so too will He soon send Eliyahu Hanavi to inform us of the imminent redemption from this, final, bitter exile. (Mishna Berura Siman 480 S"K 10)

Hallel at the Seder is recited while sitting down, unlike other times where Hallel is recited while standing. (See Mishna Berura Siman 480:1)

After Hallel, we recite the bracha of *borei pri hagafen* (some sephardim do not recite the bracha of hagafen here, following the ruling of the Bet Yosef) and we drink the fourth and final cup of wine, *b'heseibah*, while leaning. It is important to drink at least a *revi'is* so a bracha achrona can be recited afterward. (Shulchan Aruch and Rama Siman 480:1)



STEP #15: NIRTZAH

The "Finale"

This is the finale of the Seder where special liturgies (such as Echad Mi Yode'ah, Keil Bnei, Chad Gadya) are recited praising Hashem and extolling the virtues of Klal Yisroel, the Jewish nation, as well as expressing a yearning for the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash.

Many of these have deep, powerful kabalistic meaning and powers, beyond their seemingly being simple "Folk" tunes. (See Aruch Hashulchan Siman 480:3. See also Sefer Yosef Ometz Siman 792)

Many have the custom to recite the entire Shir Hashirim, with joy and feeling, after finishing the Hagaddah, and this is a very praiseworthy custom. (See Chayei Adam Klal 109 and Siddur Ya'avetz)

תּסל סדור פּסח פּהלְכָתוּ
 כָּכֵל מִשְׁפָּטוֹ וְחֻקָּתוֹ
 כַּאֲשֶׁר זָכִינוּ לְסֵדֵר אוֹתוֹ
 כֵּן גִּזְקָה לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ



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