

Introduction to Passover

Introduction to Passover: Passover Names

Passover celebrates the seven or eight days starting with the 14th of Nisan, when God took the Israelites out of Egypt about 3300 years ago. The holiday has several names:

- Chag HaPesach--Holiday of "Skipping Over" (reflecting that God passed over the Jewish homes and did not kill the first-born sons, unlike those of the Egyptians);
- Chag HaAviv--Festival of Spring (the Jewish calendar is based on the moon and is adjusted to the solar cycle so that *Passover* always comes in the spring);
- Chag HaMatzot--Holiday of Unleavened Bread; and
- Zman Cheiruteinu--Time of our Freedom.

Introduction to Passover: Passover Observance

Passover observance includes removal of chametz, the *Passover* sacrifice and its reminders, and the *Passover seder*:

Chametz

Chametz Gamur and Ta'arovet Chametz

The *Five Grains*, once fermented into items such as bread or beer, are genuine chametz (chametz gamur) and are forbidden on *Passover* by the *Torah* (*d'oraita*). Ta'arovet chametz (a mixture containing chametz) includes foods such as breakfast cereal and are also forbidden on *Passover*.

Rules for Chametz

- You may not own or see (your own) chametz during the entire period of *Passover*.
- You may not benefit in any way from chametz during *Passover*, whether it belongs to a Jew or to a non-Jew. If the chametz was owned by a Jew during *Passover*, you may not benefit from that chametz even after the holiday has ended.

What To Do with Chametz

Ideally, any chametz should be used up before *Passover*, given to a non-Jew, or destroyed. But if the chametz has significant value, the custom is to sell that chametz to a non-Jew. You do not need to sell kitniyot, but you must sell any genuine chametz and any mixtures of chametz (ta'arovet chametz).

Passover and Nullification by 1/60th

During the year, 1/60th or less of an undesired substance is considered to be inconsequential and nullified by the other substances. But on *Passover*, any amount of leaven mixed in food is forbidden. However, the chametz in food acquired before *Passover* can be nullified before *Passover*, but ONLY if:

- It is 1/60th or less of the total volume of food,
- The food is liquid mixed in other liquid, or solid in other solid, AND
- The chametz/non-chametz elements cannot be easily separated from each other.

Four Steps To Eliminating Chametz

There are four means of eliminating chametz:

- Bedika: Searching
You try to find any chametz.

- **Bitul: Verbal and Intentional Nullification**

Since you may have overlooked some chametz during bedika, declare that any chametz in your possession is not important to you and has no value.

- **Bi'ur: Burning**

By burning and therefore destroying the chametz, we fulfill the Torah commandment of “tashbitu” (making it cease to exist).

- **Mechira: Selling**

By changing the ownership, we no longer own chametz on Passover and we create the opportunity to re-acquire the chametz after Passover has ended if the non-Jewish buyer agrees.

Chametz Symbolism

Fermented grains represent (among other things) arrogance and pride: the puffing up of fermented grains is symbolic of people puffing up themselves. In Judaism, one way to get rid of a bad personal trait is to utterly destroy it and so we symbolically remove and destroy any fermented grain foods from our houses and ownership.

Destroying chametz is not a violation of “do not destroy” (bal tashchit) since it is done to perform a commandment.

What Are Kitniyot

Kitniyot are foods that look similar to the five chametz grains or that could be ground into a flour that could look like flour from those grains, such as beans, peanuts, rice, corn, mustard seeds, and other food plants that are grown near the Five Grains.

What To Do with Kitniyot

Kitniyot may not be used on Passover but do not need to be sold or removed from one's ownership.

Kitniyot should be stored away from kosher for Passover food.

Passover Sacrifice

In Temple times, the Passover sacrifice was to be eaten with one's family and possibly with neighbors, depending on the number of people present. The only two instances of kareit (being cut off spiritually) for not doing a positive commandment are for not doing a brit mila and not bringing a Passover offering (in Temple times).

Seder

The Passover seder (order) was prescribed in ancient times as a means for helping all Jews, of all ages and both genders, to re-experience the transition from having been slaves to becoming free and from having ascended from idol worshippers to being monotheistic.