



To help enrich your appreciation of the upcoming holiday, Kolel is happy to provide this “fact sheet.” We hope it helps you prepare both spiritually and physically. Please feel free to study with us any time at www.kolel.org or at any of our classes at the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre, the Bathurst Jewish Community Centre, or the Family Resource Centre at the Promenade. You can reach us at 416-636-1880 ext 255.



PESACH

WHAT IS IT?

The spring holiday, pronounced “Pay-sach” and called in English “Passover.” It commemorates the freedom of the Israelites after 400 years of slavery in Egypt. It is also called Hag Ha-aviv (Spring Festival) Hag Ha-Matzot (the Matzah Festival) and Z'man Herutanu (the time of our freedom.)

WHY IS IT?

Pesach is both a historical holiday and an agricultural one. Agriculturally it marks the beginning of the spring harvest in Israel, and the end of the rainy season. Historically it marks when G-d “passed over” the houses of the Jews while the first born of Egypt were being slain, at the end of the ten plagues visited upon Egypt. These plagues were sent after Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let the Hebrew slaves go free.

WHEN IS IT?

The 15th of the Hebrew month Nisan, which usually falls around late March or into April. This year Pesach begins the evening of April 2.

WHERE IS IT FROM?

The book of Genesis in the Torah ends with Joseph going down into Egypt, becoming second-in-command to Pharaoh, and being a well respected Hebrew among the Egyptians. However when Joseph died, the Torah tells us a new Pharaoh (king) arose, who did not know Joseph or the friendship between the Hebrews and the Egyptians, and he was threatened by the strength and the numbers of the children of Israel. The Torah then tells the story of our liberation from slavery, beginning with the birth of the hero Moses, in the book of Exodus.

WHAT DO WE DO?

The two most significant observances of Pesach

are not owning or eating chametz (anything leavened), and the Passover Seder or special meal on the first and second nights, when we eat matzah. Matzah commemorates when the Jews leaving Egypt were in a hurry, and did not have time to let the bread rise, and its opposite, chametz, is a symbol of the “puffiness” (arrogance, pride) in our souls. The Seder has many special elements and rituals which are followed in a certain order (The word Seder actually means order) in a book called a Haggadah (which literally means “telling.”) There are many Haggadahs of every denomination and type on the market. The essence of the Passover Seder is to remember that we were slaves in Egypt and now we are free- therefore all humanity must be free.

WHAT DO WE EAT?

Matzah, for at least the first two days (one day in Israel) but most people eat it for the whole 8 days (or 7 in Israel and in many Reform and Reconstructionist communities.) Matzah is a flat cracker which is made in under 18 minutes. There are also special Seder foods: on the Seder plate are bitter herbs, a green vegetable (like parsley), charoset (a fruit and nut mixture to resemble mortar) a roasted shankbone and a roasted egg (vegetarians use a roasted beet and/or an avocado pit.) A bowl of salt water reminds us of the tears of slavery, and three matzahs are on the Seder table on a special plate for use during the Seder. During the week we may eat whatever is not chametz- leavened, or fermented. Ashkenazi Jews add the restriction of not eating legumes during Passover (e.g. beans, soy, rice, corn).

WHAT DO WE SAY?

“Chag Sameach”. Some people say “Chag kasher v’sameach” which means “may you have a happy and kosher Passover”, since there are so many special foods and food restrictions!