

Topic Page: [Seder](#)

Definition: **Seder** from *Collins English Dictionary*

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1 *Judaism* a ceremonial meal with prescribed ritual reading of the Haggadah observed in Jewish homes on the first night or first two nights of Passover

[from Hebrew *sēdher* order]

Summary Article: **Seder**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Ceremonial meal that begins the Jewish festival of Pesach (Passover), which celebrates the Exodus. The order of the service is laid down in a Haggadah, which includes prayers, hymns, and a liturgical narration of the flight from Egypt.

Prior to the meal the house is ceremonially cleaned, and all food containing raising agents, such as cake, bread, and grains that rise during cooking is removed from the house for the duration of the festival. The table for the Seder is set with crockery used only during Pesach. A plate is laid out with symbolic objects to be used in the service. A roasted egg – traditionally a symbol of mourning – symbolizes the Hebrew's new life when they left Egypt. A roasted lamb shank-bone recalls the sacrificed lamb and the blood on the doorposts of the Jews. Salted water remembers the tears and sweat of slavery. Horseradish is the bitter herb or *maror* that reminds Jews of the bitterness of those times. Charoset, a sweet paste of almonds, apples, raisins, and wine recalls the mortar used by the Hebrew slaves and the sweet taste of freedom. Mazot, an unleavened bread, remembers the hasty exodus, and parsley (*carpas*) symbolizes spring. There will also be wine, two candles, and a prayerbook called a Haggadah for each person present.

The Seder begins with family and guests sitting round the Pesach table, while the woman of the household lights the candles and says a Pesach berachah (prayer). The order of the service is laid down in the *Hagaddah*. At given points in the service four small glasses of sacramental wine will be drunk to represent freedom and rejoicing, and to mark the four stages of redemption. Everyone should put their elbows on the tables and drink the wine while leaning to one side, thus recalling the Romans who were free and ate leaning on couches at their banquets. At various points, the symbolic foods on the special dish are eaten by the guests, while their meaning for Jews is explained to all. The youngest child present has to ask four set questions relating to the customs of Pesach, and these are answered with a narration of the Exodus, emphasizing that Jews must identify with the story as if they themselves were set free from Egypt.

A goblet called the 'cup of Elijah' is filled with wine, and the front door opened to let Elijah in, symbolizing the future when Elijah will herald the arrival of the Messiah, and freedom will come to the whole world. It is also an act of faith for Jews to practise their religion freely with open doors in the face of centuries of persecution. Half way through the service there will be a meal, often beginning with hard-boiled eggs in salty water to symbolize both the hope of spring and new life, and the tears of the experience in Egypt. At the end of the meal a special mazot, the *Afikomen*, will be hidden for the children to find and win a prize. The *Afikomen* is then shared with all present so that the last thing eaten

is mazot, representing the sacrifice that used to be made for Pesach in the Temple.

Both during and at the end of the service, hymns and special Seder songs are sung. The emphasis during the service is to remember God's actions in redeeming the Jews, to rejoice that the Exodus was the beginning of the independent religion of the Israelites, to remember with sadness the oppression of people all over the world and throughout history, and to pray for the return of the Messiah and a reign of peace for all.

Orthodox and many other Jews have two Seder nights, to ensure that the correct date is celebrated. The second Seder night is sometimes a communal one at the synagogue.

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