

Seder

The word *seder* is a Hebrew word meaning “order.” It refers to the ritual presentation of Passover, or more specifically the reading and acting out of the Haggadah. The typical seder consists of fourteen (sometimes fifteen) parts. Today these are done in identical order almost without exception. They are:

1. **Kaddesh** – Sanctification
 - A blessing over the first cup of wine in honor of the holiday.
2. **Urechatz** – Washing
 - Washing of the hands without a blessing in preparation for eating the Karpas.
3. **Karpas** – Vegetable Greens
 - A vegetable (usually parsley) is dipped into salt water and eaten.
4. **Yachatz** – Breaking
 - The middle piece of the three matzot is broken in two.
 - Half is returned to the stack and the other is set aside or hidden as the Afikomen.
5. **Maggid** – The Story
 - A retelling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt and the first Passover.
6. **Rachtzah** – Washing
 - A second washing of the hands, this time with a blessing, in preparation for eating the matzah.
7. **Motzi** – Blessing over Grain Products
 - A generic blessing commonly recited over bread or grain products, but which may also be recited for any meal in general outside the Passover.
8. **Matzah** – Blessing over Matzah
 - A blessing specific to matzah
 - In many Haggadoth, this step is combined with the מוציא (Motzi), thus causing the discrepancy between those with fourteen steps and those with fifteen.
9. **Maror** – Bitter Herbs
 - A blessing is recited over a bitter vegetable (usually raw horseradish, sometimes romaine lettuce), and it is eaten.
10. **Korech** – Sandwich
 - מרור (Maror) and a piece of matzah are eaten along with some charoseth.
11. **Shulchan Orech** – Dinner
 - The festive Passover Meal is served.
12. **Tzafun** – The Afikomen
 - The pinnacle of the Seder when the Afikomen is somehow redeemed and eaten by all the celebrants.
13. **Barech** – Grace after Meals

- Similar to the grace that would be said on any Sabbath, this is said over the third cup of wine.

14. **Hallel** – Praise

- Several psalms are recited. A blessing is recited over the last cup of wine.

15. **Nirtzah** – Closing

- A simple statement that the Seder has been completed, with a wish that next year, Passover may be celebrated in Jerusalem.

It is difficult to determine precisely when the Seder was first developed, although we do find the essence of it in the Mishnah (2nd Century C.E.). There is strong indication that the Seder was already solidly in place near the end of the Second Temple Period (516 B.C.E. – 70 C.E.) and many believe that Jesus and his disciples performed a seder at the Last Supper.¹ However, there is no doubt that at least one thing has changed in the Seder since that time. The Mishnah records that immediately following the Karpas - כרפס, the Shulchan Orech - שלחן ערך was served, occupying the present location of the Yachatz - יחץ. This would elicit the asking of the Four Questions that would lead to the Maggid - מגיד. However, it is later recorded in the Talmud that the Shulchan Orech - שלחן ערך is not served until well after the Maggid - מגיד. This altered order is still practiced today almost exclusively, probably in order to keep the attention of the celebrants, particularly the children, throughout.²

It is also noteworthy to take notice of the similarities that exist between the Seder and the dinner of Greek and Roman antiquity. The Jews were heavily influenced by Greek and Roman culture during the Second Temple Period (516 B.C.E. – 70 C.E.), and it is not unlikely that some aspects of this dinner of antiquity found their way into the order of the Seder.

This dinner began with wine and hors d'oeuvre, which were taken while seated in the antechamber. The diners then proceeded to the main course, which they ate while reclining on pillows as a sign of a free and affluent person. The meal typically consisted of bread with meat or fish, and as a rule was taken with wine. At the conclusion of the meal, a dessert of fruit or some other delicacy was eaten and grace was said. In most occasions, this was climaxed by enthusiastic drinking.

The order of the Seder loosely follows this same pattern. It begins with drinking wine – the Kaddish - קדש. This is followed by the Karpas – כרפס, or hors d'oeuvres. In the Second Temple Period (516 B.C.E. – 70 C.E.), the meat of the Paschal sacrifice was the main dish and was served with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.³ Today, bread with meat and/or fish constitutes the main portion of the meal. After the meal, the Afikomen is eaten as dessert, and this is followed by at least two more cups of wine.⁴

¹ Zeitlin, Solomon. "Jesus and the Last Supper." Printed in *The Passover Haggadah*. ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1979) xii

² Glatzer, Nahum N. *The Passover Haggadah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979) 6-7

³ Exodus 12:8

⁴ Glatzer ---