

YOUNG JUDAEA



PESACH KIT 5771 (2011)

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The Story of Pesach (Passover) in a Nutshell

The story of Pesach is widely considered the defining story of the Jewish People. It sets in motion the narrative that has defined us over the past 3,000 years: the struggle of journeying from oppression to freedom. In this story, we are introduced to the most central personality in Judaism, Moses, the Torah, the Ten Commandments, wandering in the Desert, and our yearning to return to Eretz Yisrael. It begins at the beginning of the Book of Exodus and includes Parshiot *Shemot*, *Veirah*, *Bo*, and most of *Beshlach*.

The story of Pesach begins with Joseph, who sojourned from the Land of Canaan (which would later be the Land of Israel) to Egypt and was eventually there reunited with his brothers. Joseph himself had secured a high place as Pharaoh's advisor. However, after Joseph's death, the status of the Israelites was degraded by a Pharaoh who "knew not Joseph," to the point of slavery.

After hundreds of years of bondage in Egypt, the Pharaoh decreed, out of fear of the strength in numbers of the Israelites, that all male newborns in Egypt be killed, thrown into the Nile River. To protect her child an Israelite woman, Yocheved and her daughter, Miriam, put her newborn son into a basket and it in the Nile, where eventually it was recovered by a daughter of Pharaoh, who named the child Moses and raised him as a Prince of Egypt. Eventually Moses grew up and slew an Egyptian taskmaster who he saw beating an Israelite. Fearing for his life, Moses fled Egypt and eventually ended up in Midian, where he married Tziporah and had a son, Gershom.

Later, after Pharaoh died and Ramses came to be Pharaoh, the People of Israel cried to G-d, who heard their cry and remembered his covenant with Abraham and Isaac. He appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush and instructed Moses to return to Egypt on G-d's behalf to free the Israelites.

Upon his return, Moses and his brother Aaron demanded from Pharaoh to free the Israelites, but as G-d had previously described, Pharaoh stubbornly refused. Therefore G-d demonstrated his might through setting the famous ten plagues upon Egypt: **Turning water into blood, Frogs, Lice, Flies, Pestilence (Death of the cattle), Boils, Fiery Hail, Locusts, Darkness, Death of the First Born Son**. Before each plague, Moses repeated his demand to Pharaoh, but Pharaoh remained stubborn and would not grant the Israelites freedom. However, after the death of the first born of Egypt, Pharaoh relented and allowed Moses to take the Israelites from Egypt.

However, as the Israelites camped at the edge of the Sea of Reeds (commonly mistranslated as the Red Sea) Pharaoh and an army of 600 chariots pursued the Israelites. To protect the Israelites, God blocked the Egyptians with a pillar of fire and then instructed Moses to raise his staff at which pointed a wind parted the sea and the Israelites crossed on dry land. When the Egyptian army eventually followed the Israelites into the sea, Moses stretched his hand again and the waters converged drowning Pharaoh's army.

As the Israelites begin their journey through the wilderness, G-d supplies the Israelites with sweet water and Manna, which will sustain the Israelites over the next forty years in the Desert.

For the full text, Chabad provides an excellent translation as well as Hebrew text at the following links: [Parshat Shemot](#), [Parshat Veirah](#), [Parshat Bo](#), and [Parshat Beshalach](#).

Selected Midrashim (Commentaries & Supplementary Stories)

A Selection of Interpretations of the 10 Plagues

One of the most troubling parts of the Exodus story is that of the 10 Plagues and struggling with the concept of collective punishment that is generally dismissed as unethical by today's standards. There are many different interpretations of why G-d selected the 10 methods of persuading Pharaoh to release the Jewish People. Traditional Rabbinical sources attribute the harshness as not punishment for Pharaoh's treatment of the Jewish People but as a repudiation of their idol worship.

By turning the Nile water into blood, G-d singles out one of the most significant sources of life for Egypt, which was customarily worshipped as a God. Other Rabbis have argued that turning the water into blood was a consequence the Egyptians put on and that the Nile was already metaphorically tainted with the blood of the slain first born Israelites. G-d was merely bringing to fruition the horror they committed.

There is an interpretation of the fiery hail that G-d chose to use two opposites, ice and fire, together to show the unity of G-d, that even things that seem to be entirely contradictory and mutually exclusive function together under the sole power of G-d.

The final plague, the slaying of the first born, is often linked to a line in Exodus 4:22 "And thou shalt say to Pharaoh: Thus saith the Lord: Israel is my son, my first-born." As Pharaoh had shown a willingness to enslave and murder the first-born of G-d, G-d smote Pharaoh with a decree that mirrored Pharaoh's own policies, leaving him to deal with the consequences of his own practices towards the Israelites.



Nachshon and the Parting of the Waters



In Midrash Tehillim, it is explained that the waters were not actually parted before the Israelites walked across the sea. At first, Moses prayed to G-d to part the seas and allow passage for the Israelites but nothing happened, they were still trapped. Then, a son from the Tribe of Judah, named Nachshon, compelled G-d to part the sea.

He did this by walking into the water and praising G-d through song. He sang *Mee Kamocha Ba-eileem Adonai? Mee chamocha nedar Bakodesh?* (Who is like You, oh Lord, among the mighty? Who is like You among the holy?)

As he walked into water, at first nothing happened. By the time he got to the second line of the song, he was so far in that his mouth was nearly underwater, and instead of pronouncing *Mee Kamocha* (like with a "k") his words were garbled from water and pronounced it, "mee chamocha (with a hard "h")", but at the point the waters began receding and the miracle occurred, allowing the children of Israel to pass on dry land. Today, we commonly sing G-d's praise through the very song, *Mee Kamocha*, after reciting the *Shema* during Shacharit (morning prayers).

The basic lesson we take away from this is that G-d only responded with a miracle to save the Jewish People when the Jewish People themselves take action to show faith in him and take the initiative, as opposed to passively depending on being rescued by G-d.

The Jewish Passage from Oppression to Freedom



There are two locations in the Tanach that have the suffix “ayim.” Jerusalem, which in Hebrew is “*Yerushalayim*,” and Egypt, which in Hebrew is “*Mitzrayim*.” Why is this important? In Hebrew the function of the suffix “ayim,” suggests a pair: *Regel* is foot, *regelayim* is feet; *yad* is hand, *yadayim* is hands. This suffix then suggests that Egypt and Jerusalem are each part of a pair.

Many Rabbis have interpreted that Jerusalem is part of a pair because there is always an earthly, physical city of Jerusalem. This is where the Temple once stood, the city of David, and the one that Israel rules over today since 1967.

However, there is also another intangible Jerusalem that is of a spiritual nature, analogous with God and Heaven. This concept of a Heavenly Jerusalem, which became particularly relevant after the destruction of the Temples, can be found in the Prophets' writings, specifically the Books of Ezekiel, Ezra, Isaiah, and Zachariah. The Christian Bible also entertains the notion of a “New Jerusalem,” in the Book of Revelations and is described in terms of being a city of angels.

But what pair is Egypt (*Mitzrayim*) a part of? The root of the word *Mitzrayim* is *Mem*, *Tzadik* and *Resh*: *Metzer*, which means in Hebrew “a narrow place.” There are at least two competing (or complementary) interpretations of this term:

- *Metzer*/a narrow place = our metaphorical oppression while in bondage in Egypt
- *Metzer*/a narrow place = the womb/birth canal; this implies that it was our emergence from Egypt in which we became a people, metaphorically reborn into the world, transformed since Joseph and his Brother sojourned there 400 years earlier.

In this way there is meaning in the story of the Jewish People that applies allegorically. The story on one level takes place thousands of years ago and is the beginning of our passage from Egypt to Jerusalem. However, on another level the story is an allegory about our collective and personal journey in life. The story of Pesach is not just the story of what once happened to us as the Jewish People; it is a microcosm of what we still are continually going through, even today.

This is part of the reason why in the Seder we tell the story of Pesach in the first person, instead of the third person. We do not say, “they were once slaves in the land of Egypt” but instead, “we were once slaves in the Land of Egypt.” Every year when we gather to tell the story of Pesach, we are not only recounting a historical narrative, we are reliving the experience that the Jewish People has gone through and we reconnect to our collective Jewish experience and consider our own passage from *Mitzrayim* to *Yerushalayim*.

INTERESTING SEDER TRADITIONS FROM JEWISH COMMUNITIES AROUND THE WORLD

Source: Huffington Post article "Top 5 Passover Traditions from Around the World" on April 8, 2009



The Pesach Seder is the most widely held tradition practiced by Jewish families around the world. Part of the appeal of the seder is that while the commandment to tell the story of Pesach is clear (and directly from the Torah), the manner in which the story is retold is left to the head of each household. Because of this room for creativity, many different traditions have developed in different Jewish communities to help retell and relive the Pesach story, including:

1) AFGHANISTAN: Jews living in Afghanistan created the tradition of gently whipping themselves with scallions as a symbol of the Egyptian slave drivers' whips used against the Israelites, says Beliefnet.com. According to the Online Database of Jewish Communities, there is currently only one Jew living in Afghanistan, and the largest population of Afghan Jews is in Queens, New York.

2) POLAND: Hasidic Jews living in Góra Kalwaria, Poland, reenact the crossing of the Red Sea in their living rooms. On the seventh day of Passover, each Jewish family pours water on the floor of their homes, hikes up their coats and says the name of the towns in the region they would pass while making their crossing, according to Beliefnet.com.

3) INDIA: A Jewish community has lived in Cochin in the Indian state of Kerala for more than 2,000 years. Its members go to shockingly great lengths to prepare for Passover, reports The Jewish Week. "Pesach work," as it was called in Cochin, would begin immediately after Chanukah. In the Cochin community, it was believed that if a Jewish woman were to make even the slightest mistake in Passover preparation during the 100 days before the actual Seder, then the lives of her husband and her children would be endangered.

The pursuit of chametz was a serious business. To ensure purity, the Jews of Cochin kept special rooms in which all Passover utensils, thoroughly scrubbed, were stored. Houses would be scraped and repainted immediately after Purim. Wells would be drained and scrubbed, lest they be polluted. Each grain of rice -- an essential staple even during Passover -- would be examined to ensure that it was free from cracks into which polluting chametz might find its way.

4) GIBRALTAR: In the British territory of Gibraltar, the tiny island off the coast of Spain, Jews actually mix the dust of bricks into their charoset dish, a symbol of the mortar used to hold together the brick walls the Jews built in Egypt, according to Hillel.

5) ETHIOPIA: Ethiopian Jews' history is strikingly similar to that of their Israelite ancestors. The Jewish community there underwent an exodus of their own in 1985, when Operation Moses and Joshua took almost 8,000 Jews from Sudan to a safe-haven in Israel, according to the Jewish Virtual Library. In commemoration of Passover and their own past, Ethiopian Jews break all of their dishes and make new ones to symbolize a complete break from the past and a new start, reports The Jewish Daily Forward.

Additional Resources for Pesach

Books

[Passage to Pesach: Preparing for Passover through Text and Tradition](#) by Frances Weinman Schwartz
[Entree to Judaism: A Culinary Exploration of the Jewish Diaspora](#) by Tina Wasserman
[The Matzah Ball Fairy](#) by Carla Heymsfeld, Illustrated by Vlad Guzner
[A Tree Trunk Seder](#) Written and illustrated by Camille Kress
[The New York Times Passover Cookbook : More Than 200 Holiday Recipes from Top Chefs and Writers](#) by Linda Amster

Websites

[Chabad Passover Webpage](#)
[Union for Reform Judaism Passover Webpage](#)
[The United Synagogues of Conservative Judaism Passover Webpage](#)
[Jewish Reconstructionist Federation Passover Resource Webpage](#)
[Orthodox Union Passover Webpage](#)
[Ayeka Passover Activity Page](#)

Movies (from imdb.com)



Leylasede ([1995](#))

100 min - [Drama](#)

6.5/10

Users: ([82 votes](#)) [1 review](#) | Critics: [5 reviews](#)

Director:

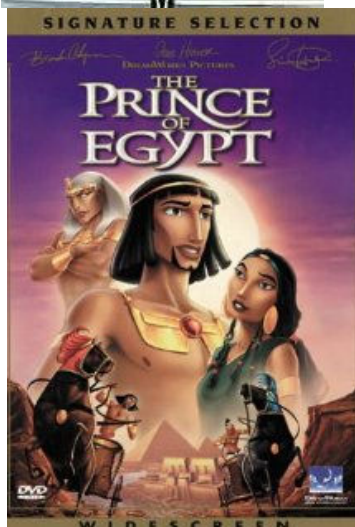
[Shemi Zarhin](#)

Writer:

[Shemi Zarhin](#)

Stars:

[Alon Aboutboul](#), [Gila Almagor](#) and [Icho Avital](#)



The Prince of Egypt ([1998](#))

PG 99 min - [Animation](#) | [Adventure](#) | [Drama](#) - [18 December 1998 \(USA\)](#)

6.8/10

An Egyptian prince learns of his identity as a Hebrew and, later his destiny to become the chosen deliverer of his people.

Directors: [Brenda Chapman](#), [Steve Hickner](#)

Writers: [Philip LaZebnik](#) (screenplay), [Nicholas Meyer](#) (additional screenplay material)

Stars: [Val Kilmer](#), [Ralph Fiennes](#) and [Michelle Pfeiffer](#)

Ofarim/Tsofim Peulah: What's on the Seder Plate?

Objectives:

- To understand the story of Pesach and some of the traditions of Pesach.
- To learn what everything on our Seder plate is and why it is all there.
- To learn what other Jewish communities do on Pesach that is different from our own.

Time: 60 minutes – 80 minutes

Materials:

- Paper seder plates
- Coloring utensils for the seder plate
- Lap top (to show video) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOkexg5oiOQ>
- Charoset
- Small pieces of paper for notes to Kotel
- Costumes for the parts of the seder plate (can be made out of butcher paper)
- Foods on the seder plate to try –Matzah –Hard boiled egg –Parsley –Horse radish
- Lima beans
- Wet paper towels
- Saran wrap
- String for necklace

Trigger: The story of Pesach (10 min)

The Bogrim will be putting on a skit of the story of Pesach. They will be playing a game of tap out to perform this skit in a funny way.

How this works- a couple of bogrim will start off the skit and start acting out the story of pesach. Then the other bogrim will call freeze and tap the person on the shoulder and switch with them and continue the scene. This should be very funny and an entertaining way for the chanichim to learn the story.

Implementation Part 1- A trip inside the seder plate (8-10 min each station: 40 -60 minutes total)

First the chanichim will go around and talk about what they do at home for Pesach.

They will then watch this short clip about the seder plate.

[Seder Plate Music Video by the Macaroons](#)

Then the chanichim will all get a tiny piece of "Magic matzah" that will shrink them (think Alice in wonderland). They will then take a magic school bus trip inside our seder plate. They will visit each of the items on our seder plate and learn what they are, why they are their and what they represent. The chanichim will each receive a paper plate with drawn out circles on it for each item. This will be their own seder plate and they will be drawing the items onto it as they complete each station.

1. Zeroah (Bone)

The bone is on the seder plate to represent the sacrifices the Jews made to god. Sacrifices are a way that the Jews used to communicate with god. Now a days we communicate to god in different ways. The chanichim will be given pieces of paper to write notes to the kotel. Once they finish their notes they will get to draw in the bone on their seder plate.

2. Matzah

Matzah is unleavened bread because when the Jews were escaping Egypt they didn't have enough time to let it rise. The Chanichim will participate in their own race just like the Jews did when leaving Israel. They will have a little relay race. First two chanichim will have to do a wheel barrow race back and forth. Then another two will have to do a three legged race. Together at the end they will have to do a hola hoop race- they will get in a line and hold hands and then have to pass the hola hoop over and under from one side and then back. Once they complete the race they will get to try a

little piece of matzah and then add it to their seder plate.

3. Beitzah (Egg)

The Egg represents life. The chanichim will have to participate in an egg toss and try to keep the life in the egg by not breaking it. Once they successfully complete this they will get to try a piece of hard boiled egg and then add it to their seder plate.

* note- please use hard boiled eggs for the egg toss.

4. Maror (Bitter Herb)

The bitter herb represents the bitterness of the Jews being enslaved in Egypt. The Jews had to build pyramids so the chanichim will now have to build a human pyramid in under a minute. Then once they make the pyramid the Bogrim will feed the person on top maror- the chanichim must do this without falling down. Once they succeed they will get to try a little bitter herb and then add it to their own seder plate.

5. Charoset

Charoset represents the mortar that the Jews used to make the pyramids. The chanichim must build their own pyramids out of charoset. When they are done they will be able to eat the delicious apple treat and then draw it onto their own plate.

6. Karpas (Parsley)

Karpas represents spring time so in order to celebrate this; the chanichim will be planting their own seeds for spring. They will be taking a lima bean and wrapping it in a wet paper towel. They will then cover this in saran wrap and then the Bogrim will tie it onto a necklace for them. Over the course of a couple days the chanichim can keep it with them and it will start to sprout into a plant ☺ Once they finish this they will get to try some parsley and add it onto their own plate.

http://www.ehow.com/how_7682019_sprout-lima-bean.html → here are the instructions for your lima beans.

7. Next Year in Jerusalem!

When they have finished every station and added them all to their plates they will each get a small cup of grape juice and say next year in Jerusalem.

Sicha leader will explain: There are a lot of things families do differently during the Passover Seder, but one thing we all do is say, "Next Year in Jerusalem!" drink a little wine or grape juice, to remember that we always are thinking about going to Israel soon!

Transition to learn about Mimouna, which is something that most Jews in America don't observe or even know about:

Sikum: Mini Mimouna (10 minutes)

The Chanichim will learn about Mimouna (Me-Moo-Nah) which is a celebration that Jews in Morocco have once Pesach ends. It consists of eating (lots of bread!), dancing, singing and music! The chanichim will listen to some traditional Moroccan music while they decorate the seder plates they have been working on throughout the peulah.

During their Mimouna they will share what they do at the end of their pesach.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-umzFD9t9Rw> → this is 15 minutes of awesome Jewish Moroccan music.

SEDER SUPPLEMENTS

Not only Remembering Our Own Oppression in Egypt:

Tikun Olam on Your Seder Plate

Passover is a time of year for us to triumph in our freedom and celebrate the fortune we are blessed with. However, as we rejoice, we must remember that there are those who are still not free, those who are fettered by oppression, hunger, hatred and other evils. This Passover take into account these people and use this time to reflect and to help them. Here are some different ways to do so.

Feed the Hungry with Chametz (Before Passover)

Let's face it; you are never going to eat those Goya beans. We find all sorts of crazy old food when we are cleaning for Passover. This Passover take a look at all of those cans and non-perishables that have been hiding in the back of your cupboards since last Passover. Take a trip to a local food bank, soup kitchen, synagogue or church and donate those cans! Those cans that are cluttering your house could actually provide someone with a much-needed meal.



Keep Gilad Shalit at Our Seder Table



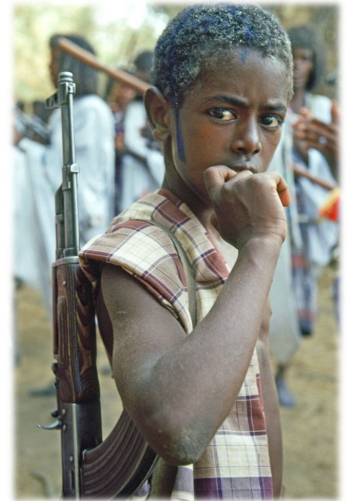
Cpl. Gilad Shalit of the Israeli Defense Forces has now been held in Gaza for nearly six years in captivity by the Hamas. His captivity continues despite years of negotiations, glimmers of hope and ultimately disappointment. We must do our part to remember that so long as Gilad is held captive for his role as defender of the Jewish State, the Jewish People are not completely free. Two things you can do to help:

1. Keep an empty seat and/or plate setting for Gilad at your table.
2. Read the following at your seder, specifically towards the end when talking about our freedom:

Gilad Shalit was born August 28, 1986. Like any other Israeli, Gilad Shalit went into the army when he was 18. Gilad loyally served his time in the army until he was brutally kidnapped by Hamas (an Islamist terrorist organization) in the summer of 2006. Since then, Gilad has been denied any humanitarian aid or contact with his family. Noam and Aviva Shalit (Gilad's parents) have stood alongside numerous Israelis and Jews worldwide to fight for Gilad's freedom. Hamas however has set a costly price for Gilad's freedom. In negotiations, Hamas has demanded Israel to release 1,000 plus known terrorists from Israeli prisons in order to free Gilad. The unlawful and inhumane capture of Gilad should weigh in us as a people. During Passover we celebrate freedom yet even as we do so one of our own is held in captivity. This Passover let your hearts and prayers be with Gilad and his family. Don't stay silent about Gilad's plight. Voice it to those who have not heard about his kidnap. Remember that we will not truly be able to rejoice in freedom until we, as a people, can share it together."

Give Voice and Hope to the Invisible Children

Join Young Judea's Human Rights Tikun Group this Passover to help those affected by Joseph Kony's army in the Congo. Our ancestors and the child soldiers are alike in a few ways. Both were/are mistreated without a voice to speak out. While God instructed Moses to save us, child soldiers are still waiting to be given the freedom for which they yearn. WE can be their Moses and help give them the freedom they are entitled to. WE have the power to help save lives. Here are three different ways you can help:



1. **Speak at the Seder**

If you are attending a Seder, get up at the Seder and talk about what is happening now in the Congo. As we remember our own oppression and celebrate our freedom, we must remember that there are still those who are not free to educate on their situation and help them. Sample Script:

For the past 25 years 104,000 or more boys and girls have been abducted to become child soldiers for the LRA (Lord's Resistant Army). Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, has been abducting these children along with his followers since 1986 when the fighting started in Congo. Child soldiers haven't been given the voice to cry out for help to be saved from their horrific life of fighting against their brothers. In 1428 BCE, our ancestors were enslaved in Egypt. For 116 years, they were cruelly treated by their slave masters. Our ancestors couldn't speak out and fight back for their rights. Let us do our part to speak out and fight for the children of the Congo.

2. **Fundraising**

Throughout the week fundraise for the people of the Congo (do not feel limited to just the week of Passover! We will be starting now!). The money raised will go to building a rehabilitation center in the Congo. Give the money to a Human Rights Tikun Group collector in your area (see list below) or donate directly to Invisible Children here: <http://ic.stayclassy.org/member/ic-fundraising?fcid=15443>. We will also be selling YJ for Invisible Children pins for \$5 (all proceeds will go to Invisible Children)

3. **25 Hours of Silence**

On April 25th, the last day of Passover, stay silent for 25 hours. This violence has been going on for 25 years. It is time to take action and stop it. We will be joining Invisible Children on this day of silence. Here is the link to the Invisible Children event that we will be participating in on this day:

<http://www.invisiblechildren.com/25>.

Go to the Invisible Children store to get a kit for this day (wear the shirt on both this April 25 and at the seder: <http://store.invisiblechildren.com/25-action-kit.html>)

Want to know more about the Invisible Children?

Watch this video to understand more about the situation and where our money will be going to help it: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbljvOnKtbs&feature=channel_video_title
<http://www.invisiblechildren.com/25>

Any questions? Email humanrightstGYJ@gmail.com or send a message to Stephanie Blitzer, Valerie Schnapp, Rachel Gluckman or Maya Billig.

Money Collection:

East Windsor, NJ – Stephanie Blitzer
Livingston, NJ – Valerie Schnapp
Westchester, NY – Maya Billig
Woodstock, NY – Sequoia Sellinger
New York, City – Talia Niederman

Edgewater, NJ – Talia Niederman
Syosset, Long Island – Rory Vinokor
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San Diego, CA – Odessa Max
Stowe, VT – Josh Trowbridge

Miami, FL – Arielle Kleiman
Rock Island, IL – Sarah Diamond
Washington, DC – Frances Lasday

Next Year in the White House: A Seder Tradition

(New York Times Article)



Pete Souza/White House

Last year's Seder, a White House first, saw the Macaroon Security Standoff.

By JODI KANTOR

Published: March 27, 2010

WASHINGTON — One evening in April 2008, three low-level staff members from the Obama presidential campaign — a baggage handler, a videographer and an advance man — gathered in the windowless basement of a Pennsylvania hotel for an improvised Passover Seder.

The day had been long, the hour was late, and the young men had not been home in months. So they had cadged some matzo and Manischewitz wine, hoping to create some semblance of the holiday.

Suddenly they heard a familiar voice. “Hey, is this the Seder?” Barack Obama asked, entering the room.

So begins the story of the Obama Seder, now one of the newest, most intimate and least likely of White House traditions. When Passover begins at sunset on Monday evening, Mr. Obama and about 20 others will gather for a ritual that neither the rabbinic sages nor the founding fathers would recognize.

In the Old Family Dining Room, under sparkling chandeliers and portraits of former first ladies, the mostly Jewish and African-American guests will recite prayers and retell the biblical story of slavery and liberation, ending with the traditional declaration “Next year in Jerusalem.” (Never mind the current chill in the administration's relationship with Israel.)

Top aides like [David Axelrod](#) and [Valerie Jarrett](#) will attend, but so will assistants like 24-year-old Herbie Ziskend. White House chefs will prepare Jewish participants' family recipes, even rendering chicken fat — better known as schmaltz — for just the right matzo ball flavor.

If last year is any guide, Malia and Sasha Obama will take on the duties of Jewish children, asking four questions about the night's purpose — along with a few of their own — and scrambling to find matzo hidden in the gleaming antique furniture.

That event was the first presidential Seder, and also probably “the first time in history that gefilte fish had been placed on White House dishware,” said Eric Lesser, the former baggage handler, who organizes each year's ritual.

As in many Jewish households, the Obama Seder seems to take on new meaning each year, depending on what is happening in the world and in participants' lives (for this group, the former is often the same as the latter).

The first one took place at the bleakest point of the campaign, the long prelude to the Pennsylvania primary, which was dominated by a furor over Mr. Obama's former pastor. “We were in the desert, so to speak,” remembered Arun Chaudhary, then and now Mr. Obama's videographer, who grew up attending Seders with his half-Jewish, half-Indian family.

No one led the proceedings; everyone took turns reading aloud. Mr. Obama had brought Reggie, his personal aide, Ms. Jarrett and Eric Whitaker, another close friend, all African-American. Jennifer Psaki, the traveling press secretary, and Samantha Tubman, a press assistant, filtered in. Neither had ever been to a Seder, but they knew the Exodus story, Ms. Psaki from Catholic school and Ms. Tubman from childhood Sundays at black churches.

They peppered the outnumbered Jews at the table with questions, which the young men sometimes struggled to answer. “We're not exactly crack Hebrew scholars,” said Mr. Lesser, now an assistant to Mr. Axelrod.

Participants remember the evening as a rare moment of calm, an escape from the din of airplanes and rallies. As the tale of the Israelites unfolded, the campaign team half-jokingly identified with their plight — one day, they too would be free. At the close of the Seder, Mr. Obama added his own ending — “Next year in the White House!”

Indeed, the group, with a few additions, has now made the Seder an Executive Mansion tradition. (No one considered inviting prominent rabbis or other Jewish leaders; it is a private event.)

But maintaining the original humble feel has been easier said than done.

Ms. Tubman and [Desirée Rogers](#), then the White House social secretary, tried to plan an informal meal last year, with little or even no wait staff required. White House ushers reacted with what seemed like polite horror. The president and the first lady simply do not serve themselves, they

explained. The two sides negotiated a compromise: the gefilte fish would be preplated, the brisket passed family-style.

Then came what is now remembered as the Macaroon Security Standoff. At 6:30, with the Seder about to start, Neil Cohen, the husband of [Michelle Obama](#)'s friend and adviser Susan Sher, was stuck at the gate bearing flourless cookies he had brought from Chicago. They were kosher for Passover, but not kosher with the Secret Service, which does not allow food into the building.

Offering to help, the president walked to the North Portico and peered out the door, startling tourists. He volunteered to go all the way to the gates, but advisers stopped him, fearing that would cause a ruckus. Everyone seemed momentarily befuddled. Could the commander in chief not summon a plate of cookies to his table? Finally, Mr. Love ran outside to clear them.

Mr. Obama began the Seder by invoking the universality of the holiday's themes of struggle and liberation. [Malia](#) and [Sasha](#) quickly found the hidden matzo and tucked it away again, so cleverly that Mr. Ziskend, the former advance man, needed 45 minutes to locate it. At the Seder's close, the group opened a door and sang to the prophet Elijah.

In preparation for this year's gathering, Mr. Lesser and others have again been collecting recipes from the guests, including matzo ball instructions from Patricia Winter, the mother of Melissa Winter, Mrs. Obama's deputy chief of staff.

"We like soft (not hard) matzo balls," Mrs. Winter warned in a note to the White House chefs, instructing them to buy mix but doctor it. Use three eggs, not two, she told them; substitute schmaltz for vegetable oil, and refrigerate them for a day before serving (but not in the soup).

The Seder originated with Jewish staff members on the campaign trail who could not go home, but now some celebrate at the White House by choice. Participants say their ties are practically familial now anyway. "Some of the most challenging experiences of our life we've shared together," Ms. Jarrett said.

No one yet knows exactly what themes will emerge this year. Maybe "taking care of people who can't take care of themselves and [health care reform](#)," suggested Ms. Sher, now Mrs. Obama's chief of staff.

The evening might also reflect a group that has settled into the White House and a staff more familiar with the new custom. Last week, Ms. Sher was leaving the East Wing when a guard stopped her.

"Hey, are you bringing macaroons again this year?" he asked.