

Passover Seder Plate Symbols and Meaning

1. Karpas

A green (usually parsley) which will be dipped in saltwater or vinegar (or *charoset* in some Eastern sects), to remind us of the tears we shed as slaves in Egypt.

2. Matzah

Unleavened bread that commemorates the Israelites' hasty departure out of Egypt: "And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves" ([Exodus 12:39](#)). We store the matzah in a special *matzah tosh* (cloth bag) with three compartments, each of which contains a piece, or a seder box with three drawers, or on a plate separated by napkins. The middle piece of matzah is then broken in half in the ceremony known as *yachatz*, one half being covered and laid aside as the *afikomen*. After breaking the matzah we go through *magid*, the telling of the story of Exodus, and *rachatz*, the ritual washing of hands. Here the matriarch of the house traditionally goes around with a pitcher of water, rinsing and drying off everyone's hands with a fine towel. Finally, we say the ha-Motzi and an additional blessing for the matzah and eat it.

3. Maror

A bitter root, usually horseradish (either whole or ground), to remind us of the bitterness of slavery. Sometimes little children are excused from eating the *maror* as the taste can be quite unpleasant for tender palates. To ease the astringency of the *maror*, we make "Hillel sandwiches" by mixing *maror* with the following.

4. Charoset

A honeyed apple-nut mixture representing the mortar we used to build bricks for the Egyptians. The Talmud tells us: "Abaye observed: Therefore one must make it acrid and thicken it: make it acrid, in memory of the apple-tree; and thicken it, in memory of the clay" (*Pesachim* 116a). The maror and charoset are both smeared on a piece of matzoh to make the Hillel sandwich, named after the ancient rabbi Hillel. The sweetness of the charoset offsets the intense burning of the maror, so that we experience multiple aspects of the Passover story at once.

5. Beitzah

A roasted egg representing the renewal of life. Unconsumed, it represents the discontinued *korban chagigah* (festival sacrifice).

6. Zeroa

a lamb shankbone, unconsumed. The *zeroa* represents the Paschal sacrifice, also discontinued after the destruction of the Second Temple.