

The Seder Plate

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Source:

The Seder plate

Point to each item as we read the explanation.

Charoset: Charoset represents the mortar we were forced to make as slaves in Egypt.

Maror: Maror represents the bitterness of slavery. It is on the seder plate so that we never forget the bitterness of slavery and oppression.

Karpas: Karpas symbolizes spring, regeneration and growth, just as the children of Israel were reborn as a people as they left Egypt and their lives of slavery.

Beitsa: The egg is a sign of new life and rebirth. The egg represents the birth of the Jewish people, delivered from slavery into freedom and nationhood.

Zro'a: The shankbone is a reminder of the lamb sacrificed every Passover.

Matza: Unleavened bread symbolizes humility and simplicity, and tonight we eat unleavened bread because our foremothers baked in haste as they left their enslavement in Egypt.

This Orange, why do we eat it? To remember those excluded from mainstream Jewish culture: women, gay and lesbian Jews, patrilineal Jews, etc. To reimagine Judaism is a form of national determination. The orange was first introduced to the seder plate by Susannah Heschel. She explains 'I chose an orange because it suggests the fruitfulness for all Jews when lesbians and gay men are contributing and active members of Jewish life. "Be fruitful and multiply" is the Bible's first commandment, and we need to recognise the fruitfulness of gay and lesbian presence, and encourage that presence to multiply.' Having spent her life struggling for inclusion in Jewish ritual she said 'I also saw the orange as representing the fruitfulness that results when women lead the seder.... All the barriers that my generation of feminists was able to pull down needed public markers.' She then extended the ritual to include issues surrounding homosexuality, as while the community began to accept women's rights, 'Jewish attitudes... remained hostile and mocking toward gay liberation.

Seder in the Warsaw Ghetto: Sixty years ago, in April of 1943, the remaining Jews in the Ghetto decided to fight back. The actions of the heroic Warsaw Ghetto Fighters made its way into our lexicon as one of the great defining moments of Jewish History. The story of the last remnants of the Ghetto cutoff from the world, without food, without supplies, pitted against the might of Nazi Germany. Together they huddled in bunkers and destroyed buildings to celebrate their last Passover, recalling the Exodus of their forefathers from the land of Egypt 3,500 years earlier. How difficult this last Seder must have been. Hundreds of thousands of Jews, including their fathers and mothers, their grandparents, their brothers and sisters had already been deported from the Ghetto to Treblinka and Auschwitz during the past year. There were no longer any children with them to ask the four questions at the Seder, nor was there enough Matza for all the participants, nor could they spare the wine to pour an extra cup in honor of the prophet Elijah who according to Jewish tradition would one day herald the final redemption. Yet nothing could deter them or prevent them from defying the Nazis by celebrating the Festival of Freedom. A diarist who was there recorded the following: On Monday,

April 19, 1943 at 5:30am the small ghetto was surrounded by German SS Troops and Latvians. They appeared at Wolynska and Mila Streets and soon walked into a trap, as firing broke out from Zaminoff and

Murawskn Streets. The battle lasted until 11:30 a.m. Then the Germans were forced to retreat. Meanwhile, the long day moved toward evening. Everywhere people gathered for the Seder in bunkers and cellars. Although they followed the standard ritual, they could palpably sense that this was their last Pesach in this world. At 21 Salmenach Street, a Seder was in progress. Among those present was Rabbi Ruvein Horowitz, a Mizrachi activist, the Rodel brothers, Yosef Konisberg, Menachim Kershimbau and his daughter, Avrahm Zember, Yosef Tenenbaum, Fogel, Finklekraut, Mordechai Analevitz (who was the leader of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising).