

Urhatz

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Source: Rabbi Hayim Leiter in <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-haggadah/>

They say that cleanliness is close to Godliness. This couldn't be closer to the truth, Jewishly speaking. We are all about preparation. It is well known that holiness is all in the details. The preparation on Friday is what imbues shabbat with its kedusha (holiness). Urhatz (washing) is our first step in the preparation for the seder. It is both a physical and a spiritual cleansing. We are in a sense, washing away the last spiritual crumbs of hametz in preparation for our first taste of matza (unleavened bread) in, at least, thirty days. Much like Israel's first rain which washes away the top layer that has collected since the last rainy season, Urhatz washes away our layer of spiritual 'build-up'. Similarly to the tumat meit (impurity of sleep) that resides in our fingertips when we wake up in the morning, Urhatz is a wash of our fingertips alone.

The Rabbis decreed that a ritual wash be done without a blessing before eating vegetables such as those we eat for Karpas because they could become ritually unfit if touched by impure hands. This type of washing was common in Temple times. Urhatz, along with the kittel (white robe) that many wear on seder night, all hark back to an earlier time. To a time when each person who went to the Temple to make the Passover offering was considered a Kohen (priest) for the day. So in effect, we're now going through a process that helps us become Kohanim. This is our day. Our time to do the Temple service. So, wash away your individual past, so we can relive our collective past.

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