

# The Seder Plate

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Source:



Nothing on the Seder table is selected randomly; each item has its purpose and often its specific place. The Seder plate holds the ritual items that are discussed during the Seder: the shankbone, maror, charoset, karpas and a roasted egg.

## ROASTED SHANKBONE

One of the most striking symbols of Passover is the roasted lamb shankbone (called zeroah), which commemorates the paschal (lamb) sacrifice made the night the ancient Hebrews fled Egypt. Some say it symbolizes the outstretched arm of HaShem (the Hebrew word zeroah can mean "arm"). Many vegetarians use a carrot instead. This isn't a new idea; the great Biblical commentator Rashi suggested it back in the eleventh century.

## MAROR (BITTER HERB)

Bitter herbs (usually horseradish) bring tears to the eyes and recall the bitterness of slavery. The Seder refers to the slavery in Egypt, but people are called to look at their own bitter enslavements.

## CHAROSET

There's nothing further from maror than charoset ("cha-ROH-set"), the sweet salad of apples, nuts, grape juice or wine and cinnamon that represents the mortar used by the Hebrew slaves to make bricks.

## KARPAS

Karpas is a green vegetable, usually parsley (though any spring green will do). Karpas symbolizes the freshness of spring. Some families still use boiled potatoes for karpas, continuing a tradition from Eastern Europe where it was difficult to obtain fresh green vegetables. We dip the karpas in salt water before eating them to remind ourselves of the bitter tears that were shed by the enslaved Hebrews in Egypt.

## ROASTED EGG

The roasted egg (baytsah) is a symbol in many different cultures, usually signifying springtime and renewal. Here it stands in place of one of the sacrificial offerings which was performed in the days of the Second Temple. (So glad we don't do that anymore!)

#### **ORANGE**

The tradition of putting an orange on the seder plate is a response to a rabbi who told a young girl that a woman belongs on a bimah as much as an orange on a Seder plate. The orange is now said to be a symbol of the fruitfulness of all Jews, whether they be gay, straight, male or female.

#### **AN OLIVE**

Some Jews have begun putting an olive on the seder plate to symbolize the hope that one day soon Israeli and Palestinian will be able to live side-by-side in peace.

Judaism gives us many holidays to celebrate throughout the year and they are all times for self reflection, gently guiding us to a better path in life. We are each given a chance to reflect on our past year; to think about where we have been and how we will live our lives in the year to come. We reaffirm our commitment to lead good and meaningful lives, promoting peace wherever we can.