

Passover For Secular And Humanistic Jews

Contributed by [Society for Humanistic Judaism](#)

Source: Rabbi Miriam Jerris

The holiday of Passover is one of the most celebrated holidays in the Jewish calendar. Some believe that's because the holiday is primarily home-based and does not require membership or involvement in a synagogue or temple, although it can. The history of Passover, like most Jewish holidays, is multi-layered. It began with the celebration of spring, the rebirth of nature, and the birth of baby animals. The Exodus from Egypt was a later layer, which became the central and compelling story of the holiday. Although the story of the liberation of the Jews from Egypt is central in religious Judaism, remnants of the older nature holidays, both pastoral and agricultural, are easy to identify, such as the shank bone and the matzah.

Since the archaeological record is clear—there is no material evidence of the Exodus or corroborating documents of the story—Secular Humanistic Jews are left with the disturbing question: If the story isn't true, can we and do we want to continue celebrating the holiday? The themes of this holiday are universal. It is not difficult to identify with a story of liberation. There are many other reasons why we can and do continue celebrating Passover. Celebrating the holiday connects us to the Jewish people and our traditions. The theme of liberation and freedom is universal and timeless. Telling the entire story, both the myth and the history, only enriches our celebration of the creative imagination of our people at this time of year.

Rabbi Miriam Jerris from the Society for Humanistic Judaism, March 2020