

Torah Weekly

THE SPIRITUALITY OF DOUGH

Passover is a time to receive the Divine energy and blessing from above. If we are in Egypt, we now look to G-d for His assistance to release us. For one who is bound cannot release himself. (If he could it would make a marvelously entertaining act.) So we must become a vessel for this Divine blessing. The trick to being a vessel is to remember that your purpose is to contain. If a barrel feels that it must give forth we call this a leak. If the container is able to keep this straight it is a blessing for the liquid and a blessing for the barrel. Practically speaking, the time of receiving the Divine expression (blessing), is not the time for self-expression. After receiving the blessing, we may and must grow. But while we are receiving we must be still and intent upon the blessing. Chametz is the rising of the dough. It is not the real substance, rather the self-expression. Which is heavier, a pound of bread or a pound of Matzah? The pound of bread takes up more space, but it is merely the presence of air. This is the person's ego. During Passover not only are we not to ingest this substance, but we are to thoroughly eradicate it. It may not be found in our domain nor are we to possess it. Chametz is a general term for all food and drink made from wheat, barley, rye, oats, spelt or their derivatives, which is forbidden on Passover because it is leavened. Even a food that contains only a trace of Chametz is prohibited and must be removed from our homes. Note: Matzah used all year round is not for Passover use. Only matzot baked especially for Passover may be used on Passover. The concrete manifestations of this concept are the Mitzvot connected to getting rid of Chametz. They include cleaning and searching the entire house, nullifying the Chametz in our heart, and burning it the day before Passover. According to the Kabbalistic understanding everything in the physical world is a reflection of a spiritual element. Conversely, the physical realm has an impact on what occurs, and what spiritual energy is produced in the spiritual realm. Each Mitzvah is the concrete, actual form of the spiritual concept. This is the reason that Mitzvot must have a physical component. Without it, the spiritual level is left void and meaningless. In other words, the physical realm is the generator of Divine energy.

So, Chametz does not merely teach us a lesson about self-expression and ego. It is a real entity that prevents the Divine blessing from being realized. The purpose of the Mitzvah of getting rid of Chametz is to allow us to take full advantage of the blessings that Passover bestows.

PASSOVER IN THE BIBLE

The Proto-Passover

The first Passover celebration in the Bible is found in Genesis Chapter 18, where we read how Abraham and Sarah were visited by angels who informed them that they would

bear a son one year later. Tradition records that the visit (and Isaac's birth) was on Passover. This is not stated explicitly, but the astute reader will note that Abraham instructs Sarah to knead some cakes (ugot) for their guests. This same term is used regarding the Passover matzah that their descendants would eat every year on Passover. Thus the conclusion is reached that it must have been Passover.

The First Mandated Passover

Isaac's descendants (by then known as the People of Israel) eventually wound up in Egypt, where they were enslaved. The time then came and G-d decided to free them from their cruel taskmasters and take them back to the land that He had promised them so many years before. He instructed Moses and Aaron to repeatedly ask Pharaoh to release the people of Israel; each time Pharaoh refused, another plague was brought upon the Egyptians: blood, frogs, lice etc. Finally, as G-d was about to bring the final plague—the death of the firstborn son—He instructed Moses to tell the people of Israel to prepare by bringing a sheep into their homes. On the night that He was about to bring death upon the Egyptians, the Israelites slaughtered the lambs and ate them with unleavened bread (matzah) and bitter herbs (maror). They were also instructed to take the blood of the lamb and smear it on their doorposts, a sign to G-d that this was an Israelite home, to be passed over, when death was visited upon the firstborns in all other homes. This is what gave the Passover sacrifice (and holiday) its name. In the original Hebrew, the word is Pesach. At that same time, G-d also instructed them to observe the Passover celebration every year on the anniversary of their Exodus: at the full moon of the first month of spring (Aviv). This entire episode is known as the Exodus.

Passover in the Desert: The Second Passover

A year after the Exodus, G-d instructed the people of Israel to bring the Passover offering on the afternoon of the fourteenth of Nissan, and to eat it that evening, roasted over the fire, together with matzah and bitter herbs, as they had done the previous year just before they left Egypt. "There were, however, certain persons who had become ritually impure through contact with a dead body, and could not, therefore, prepare the Passover offering on that day. They approached Moses and Aaron . . . and they said: ' . . . Why should we be deprived, and not be able to present G-d's offering in its time, amongst the children of Israel?' " (Numbers 9:6-7). In response to their plea, G-d established the 14th of Iyar as a "Second Passover" (Pesach Sheni) for anyone who was unable to bring the offering at its appointed time in the previous month.

The First Passover in the Promised Land

After 40 years in the desert, Moses passed away just prior to leading the Israelites into the Promised Land. His death was on the 7th of Adar, just five weeks before Passover. In The Book of Joshua, Chapter 5, we read the account of Joshua organizing the circumcision of the Israelite males, something they had not been able to do in the desert. This was followed by a celebration of Passover. "And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and they made the Passover sacrifice on the fourteenth day of the month at evening in the plains of Jericho." (Joshua 5:10)

The Great Passover Revivals

The next mention of Passover is in II Chronicles 30, where we read how King Hezekiah, the righteous king remembered for his campaign to reintroduce the people of Israel to the Torah way of life, sent out messengers enjoining everyone to celebrate Passover with him. Since they were not in a proper state to celebrate Passover on time, they celebrated one month later, on "Pesach Sheini", the 14th of Iyar (in accordance with the laws of the Second Passover discussed above.) Despite the fact that the members of some tribes refused to participate, "there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the days of Solomon the son of David,

PASSOVER

14 – 22 Nissan, 5786
1 – 9 April, 2026

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

Sacred material – do not desecrate

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king of Israel [there had] not [been] the like in Jerusalem" (II Chronicles 30:26). Approximately 100 years later, a similar event happened in the days of King Josiah. In the eighteenth year of his rule, Josiah announced his plan to have the Holy Temple renovated. In the course of the repairs, the High Priest Hilkiah found a scroll which turned out to be the Torah scroll written by Moses. The passage that was read before the king contained the warnings of heavy punishment for the Jewish people if they failed to follow in G-d's ways. The king was determined that the words of the Torah and the warning of the prophets should spread through the length and breadth of the land. After the Temple was rededicated and the people returned en masse to G-d, they celebrated Passover in grand scale, such as had not been seen since the days of Samuel the Prophet (II Chronicles 35:18).

Passover in the Second Temple

Solomon's Temple was eventually destroyed, and the people were exiled. Decades later, Ezra and Nehemia led a group of Jews who returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the Temple once again. We read in Ezra 6 how the returnees purified themselves and celebrated Passover "with joy, for the L-rd made them joyful and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to strengthen their hands in the work of the House of G-d, the G-d of Israel." The Passover celebrations then continued in the Second Temple, until it was destroyed by the Romans more than 400 years later.

Passover Today

Following the destruction of the Second Temple and its altar in Jerusalem, we have been unable to celebrate Passover completely, without the sacrifice the Passover lamb. And yet, Jewish people gather every year to celebrate the other elements of this special evening. As we hope and pray for the Passover lamb to be reinstated, matzah and maror are eaten, four celebratory cups of wine are drunk, and Jewish parents tell their children (and themselves) the story of our nation's miraculous exodus from Egypt. and Shemini Atzeret.

READINGS FOR PASSOVER

First Day Nissan 15, 5786 - April 2, 2026

First Torah: Exodus 12:21-51

Second Torah: Numbers 28:16-25

Haftarah: Joshua 3:5-7; Joshua 5:2 - 6:1; Joshua 6:27

Second Day Nissan 16, 5786 - April 3, 2026

First Torah: Leviticus 22:26 - 23:44

Second Torah: Numbers 28:16-25

Haftarah: Kings II 23:1-9; Kings II 23:21-25

Third Day Nissan 17, 5786 - April 4, 2026

First Torah: Shabbat, Chol Hamoed, Pesach: Exodus 33:12 - 34:26

Second Torah: Shabbat, Chol Hamoed, Pesach: Numbers 28:19-25

Haftarah: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Fourth Day Nissan 18, 5786 - April 5, 2026

First Torah: Chol Hamoed Day 1 (E"Y 2): Exodus 13:1-16

Second Torah: Chol Hamoed Day 1 (E"Y 2): Numbers 28:19-25

Fifth Day Nissan 19, 5786 - April 6, 2026

First Torah: Chol Hamoed Day 2 (E"Y 3): Exodus 22:24 - 23:19

Second Torah: Chol Hamoed Day 2 (E"Y 3): Numbers 28:19-25

Sixth Day Nissan 20, 5786 - April 7, 2026

First Torah: Chol Hamoed Day 4 (E"Y 5): Numbers 9:1-14

Second Torah: Chol Hamoed Day 4 (E"Y 5): Numbers 28:19-25

Seventh Day Nissan 21, 5786 - April 8, 2026

First Torah: Shvieve Shel Pesach: Exodus 13:17 - 15:26

Second Torah: Shvieve Shel Pesach: Numbers 28:19-25

Haftarah: Samuel II 22:1-51

Eighth Day Nissan 22, 5786 - April 9, 2026

First Torah: Achron Shel Pesach: Deuteronomy 15:19 - 16:17

Second Torah: Achron Shel Pesach: Numbers 28:19-25

Haftarah: Isaiah 10:32 - 12:6

Wednesday, 14 Nissan, 5786 – 1 April, 5786

Maimonides Born (1135)

Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, Talmudist, Halachist, physician, philosopher and communal leader, known in the Jewish world by the acronym "Rambam" and to the world at large as "Maimonides", was born in Cordova, Spain, on the 14th of Nissan, 4895 –1135 CE.

Thursday, 15 Nissan, 5786 – 2 April, 2026

"Covenant Between the Parts" (1743 BCE)

On the 15th of Nissan of the year 2018 from creation (1743 BCE) G-d forged a special covenant with Abraham in which the destiny of the Jewish people was foretold: the Holy Land was bequeathed to them as their eternal heritage, but first they would have to experience galut--exile and persecution. "And He said to Abram: 'Know surely that your descendents shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will be enslaved to them, and they will afflict them four hundred years... and afterwards they shall come out with great wealth.' And when the sun went down and it was dark, behold, a smoking furnace and a burning torch which passed between those pieces... On that day G-d made a covenant with Abram, saying: 'To your seed I have given these land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates'" (Genesis 15:13-18).

Friday, 16 Nissan, 5786 – 3 April, 2026

Esther Appears Before Achashverosh (357 BCE)

On the 3rd day of the fast proclaimed by Mordechai at her behest, Queen Esther appeared unsummoned before King Achashverosh--a capital offence. The king, however, extended the royal sceptre to her, signifying his consent that she approach him. Esther requested that Achashverosh attend a private wine party with her and Haman (according to one opinion in the Talmud, her plan was to make Achashverosh jealous of her apparent friendship with Haman so that he would kill them both, thus saving the Jewish people from Haman's decree).

Shabbat, 17 Nissan, 5786 – 4 April, 2026

Haman Hanged (357 BCE)

At the 2nd wine party she made for King Achashverosh and Haman, Queen Esther revealed her identity to the king and began to plead for her people, pointing to Haman as the evil schemer plotting to destroy them. When Charvonah, a royal servant, mentioned the gallows which Haman had prepared for Mordechai, the king ordered that Haman be hanged on them, opening the door for the Jews' salvation from Haman's decree. Note that according to many this took place on Nisan 16, yesterday.

Sunday, 18 Nissan, 5786 – 5 April, 2026

R. Levi Yitzchak Schneerson born (1878)

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson (1878-1944), was born on the 18th of Nissan in the town of Podrovnah (near Gomel) to his parents, Rabbi Baruch Schneur and Rebbetzin Zelda Rachel Schneerson; his great-great grandfather was the 3rd Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch. In 1900 Rabbi Levi Yitzchak married Rebbetzin Chanah Yanovski, whose father, Rabbi Meir Shlomo, was the rabbi of the Russian city of Nikolaiyev. In 1902, their eldest son, Menachem Mendel, later to be known as The Lubavitcher Rebbe, was born. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak lived in Nikolaiyev until 1909, when he was appointed to serve as the Rabbi of Yekatrinoslav (today, Dnepropetrovsk). In 1939 he was arrested by the communist regime for his fearless stance against the Party's efforts to eradicate Jewish learning and practice in the Soviet Union. After more than a year of torture and interrogations in Stalin's notorious prisons, he was sentenced to exile to the interior of Russia, where he died in 1944.