

The Seder Plate

Many people have the custom of arranging the various foods for the Seder plate upon returning from shul. While this is indeed an honourable thing to do, it is best to prepare all the foods before the festival starts in order to commence the Seder as soon as possible.

The following is a list of the Seder plate items and their meaning:

Shank Bone (z'roa)

The shank bone represents the Passover sacrifice that was offered before the Jewish people left Egypt and subsequently each year on the day before Passover in the Temple.

There are varying customs regarding what to use to for the shank bone. It is best to avoid using something that will look too similar to the Passover offering. Therefore, many people use a chicken leg or neck. It should be roasted on all sides before being placed on the Seder plate. The shank bone is not eaten or used during the Seder.

Egg (beitza)

The hard boiled egg represents the Festival offering that was offered in the Temple. Each Seder plate should have its own egg which is eaten just before the meal begins. The most common way of eating the egg is to peel it and chop it up in salt water.

Bitter Herbs (marror)

The bitter herbs are a very clear reminder of the bitter times the Jews suffered in Egypt. The most popular choice for bitter herbs is grated or whole horseradish. Some have the custom of using romaine lettuce.

The horseradish should be grated before Passover starts. It is placed on the seder plate and used twice during the Seder: once for the mitzvah of eating marror and again for the sandwich.

Charoset

This mixture represents the mortar used by the Jews when they were in Egypt. There are many recipes for charoset but they should all at least contain chopped nuts, apples, figs and wine.

Once made, it is placed on the Seder plate and used as a dip for the marror.

Karpas

Karpas alludes to the backbreaking work that the Jews did in Egypt. There are a variety of vegetables that can be used depending on family tradition. Commonly used vegetables include onion, potato and parsley.

After Kiddush all the Seder participants wash their hands without making a blessing. After returning to the table, everyone eats a small piece of karpas which has been dipped into salt water.

Lettuce (Chazeret)

Chazeret represents the type of slavery that the Jews endured while in Egypt. Many people have the custom of using romaine lettuce which has a bitter root if left in the ground too long. Similarly, the

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Jewish people started work in Egypt voluntarily but after some time the work became slavery.

Whichever lettuce you use, it will need to be well cleaned and inspected for infestation. It is best to ensure that these tasks are completed before the festival begins.

The lettuce is placed on the Seder plate and used together with the bitter herbs on two occasions - once when eating the marror dipped in charoset and later in the sandwich.

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