

# Religion

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## Next year in Jerusalem

Passover, or Pesach, the most notable of Jewish festivals held in the spring, begins next Saturday.

The eight-day festival celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people from the tyranny and slavery of the Egyptian pharaoh.

As well, it is one of three festivals during which the Jewish people make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

It commemorates the "passing over," or the sparing of the firstborn of the Israelites when Yahweh (God) destroyed the firstborn of Egypt.

On the night of Exodus, Yahweh ordered the Israelites to mark their houses with the blood of a sacrificed lamb to signify they were children of God.

The celebration is integrated with a festival of the "unleavened bread," commemorating the fact that in their

haste to leave Egypt, the Israelites had no time to leaven their bread.

A family-oriented holiday, members gather for the traditional Seder meal. During it, the Exodus story is told, since it is essential for every generation to tell its children the story of the liberation of Jewish people from bondage.

Notably, the Shema, the most important prayer in Judaism, concludes with the words:

"I am the Lord your God Who brought you out of the land of Egypt to your God; I am the Lord your God."

To help Herald readers understand the significance of Passover, we asked members of the Jewish community to tell us what the festival means to them. Here, and on Page B13, are their responses.

## It is the season of our liberation

By Eliezer Segal, assistant professor of religious studies at the University of Calgary, married to Agnes Romer-Segal and father of Yannai, 12, Hananel, 8 and Akivah, 5.

According to the Jewish cycle for the public reading of the Torah, the biblical account of the "Ten Plagues" this year was read just as the first volleys of SCUDs began to make their way towards Tel Aviv.

It was eerie to reread the commands issued to the Israelites at the time: "None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning" (Exodus 12:22). As we chanted those verses, Israelites confined to their "sealed rooms" were praying that the agents of death would pass over them and leave them unscathed inside.

These events are typical of the innumerable ways in which the lives of Jews are given religious meaning through a reliving of the past. This feeling is most intense on Passover, "the season of our liberation."

For Jews, it is never enough to merely think of ideals like freedom or to speak them; they must be acted concretely as a part of life, even as Abraham's descendants had to suffer the bondage of Egypt before they could proclaim the ideal of human freedom.

In Passover each year we relive simultaneously the degradations of slavery and the exhilaration of freedom.

The bondage of Egypt influences much of biblical law: It is because we ourselves were "strangers in a strange land" that we must show sensitivity to

the strangers among us, and it is because we experienced slavery that we must allow our dependants — and ourselves — a day of rest.

Perhaps the most surprising of these laws is where the Torah admonishes: "You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land" (Deuteronomy 23:8). Even when fighting for your liberation you cannot forget the humanity of your enemy. Yet sympathy for the enemy does not cancel the obligation to fight tyranny.

The traditional Passover celebrations strive to maintain this difficult balance, expressing our joy over our deliverance, without gloating over the defeat of Pharaoh's armies. Accordingly, the Exodus from Egypt is celebrated on the first days of the festival with the singing of the full "Hallel" passage from Psalms, but on the final days, which commemorate the drowning of the Egyptians at the Red Sea, only a truncated version is recited, expressing the incompleteness of our joy.

Jewish legend describes how God Himself, while allowing the Israelites to celebrate in song their deliverance at the Red Sea, ordered the angels, who had not themselves known enslavement, to refrain from intoning God's praises in the face of the drowning Egyptians.

The Jewish ideal of a human (and never dehumanized) struggle for freedom is neither simple nor simplistic, and must be confronted anew in each generation. This is truly what Passover is about.



Tom Walker, Calgary Herald

**SEDER PLATE:** Silversmith David Cramer with special plate he made for the Passover Seder

## Celebration renews the Jewish identity

By David Cramer, silversmith, married to Marilyn Samuels and father of Avi, 9 and Aliza, 12.

A major element in the celebration of Passover is that through retelling this epic event in the Jewish historical experience, and thus reliving those events, our own identity is renewed and strengthened.

Because we know that all Jews everywhere are also celebrating the same holiday, this acts to unite Jews in space and time.

We feel at one with our immediate family and friends who share our Seder table; we feel a bond with all Jews everywhere who are also celebrating the same event; and sometimes in some

strange way we can transcend time to link with our ancestors who are said to have actually lived and experienced those events.

It is also a happy time, a time of intense preparation and expectation and above all time for family, fun and feasting.

## Time for families and friends

By Val Bracey, local caterer and food columnist for CBC's Homestretch. Val is married to Lou and the mother of Sarah and Nathan.

Passover, the word conjures up so many varied feelings within me.

Historically, it represents "Freedom," a priceless commodity, especially in view of present-day events.

On Passover we gather around a Seder table with our loved ones to retell the story and observe the holiday by eating matzo (unleavened bread).

But I must say that the events leading up to that glorious moment when the soup is bubbling on the stove, the matzo balls are floating as light as a feather in yet another pot, chicken is roasting in the oven, and chiffon cakes are still standing tall, create moments of anguish in the hearts of even the most seasoned of cooks.

As March appears on my calendar, fleeting thoughts of Passover begin to take shape in my mind.

I mentally count the number of guests at my table, and then there is the task of putting together a menu.

Perhaps something different this year, but what?

Years of tradition seem to dictate the same menu year after year, and you can't fight tradition.

My phone starts to ring; it's my mother phoning to tell me that the Passover products are now available in the city.

Should I buy Manischewitz or Rakusens matzo?

Is it really necessary to buy matzo Cheerios?

Can't we make the eight days special by eating basic Passover food, or do we really need to make the week's meals as close to our normal meals as possible?

I feel confused!

I begin going through my cook books looking for recipes that I haven't made before and here is the menu that I have decided to serve:

Gefilte fish served on lettuce leaf with sliced tomato and cucumber.

Chicken Soup with matzo balls.

Tossed Salad.

Roast Chicken.

Baked shortribs cooked with dumplings.

Apple matzo kugle (pudding).

Honey glazed carrots.

Fruit tray.

Chocolate Dacquoise.

Assorted pastry.

Tea.

Wine served throughout the meal.



**LABOR OF LOVE:** Val Bracey loves preparing the Seder table

The days fly by.

I now have everything (and more) that I will need to get me through the two Seders as well as the remaining six days.

My next job is to eliminate all traces of bread and bread products from my house.

As a child, Passover was my favourite holiday.

I remember the excitement in the house when my mother would begin the task of cleaning out the cupboards — it was the ultimate spring cleaning.

Once the cupboards were cleared it was then time to bring up the Passover dishes that were packed in boxes and made their home in the basement the rest of the year.

As a child I never really stopped to think about what a difficult task this really was for my mother.

For me it was a time of change — a whole different feeling enveloped our family.

Now I am the one who must carry on

the traditions so that my children will appreciate and love Passover.

The week before the first Seder becomes a labor of love.

My house is filled with the same smells that I remember as a child.

There is a feeling of continuity as I stand and prepare foods that my mother, her mother and her mother's mother prepared before me.

There is a history in every recipe.

As my daughter stands beside me helping with the preparations, I relate to her some of my Passover history.

The time is now! My family and friends arrive for yet another Seder. The table is set with my finest Passover dishes, the Seder plate is arranged with the symbols that link us to past history and as I look around the table at the people that mean the most to me; my parents, my sisters and their families, my husband and my children and my good friends, I thank God that we are all together and I know that all the hard work that brought us to this moment was well worth the effort.

## Past is always present

By Sophie Kettner, married to Frank and mother of Carla and Eric. Honorary National Vice-President Hadassah-Wiso.

Passover has always been a very special holiday in our home. When we were children it meant the clean smell of spring cleaning, because my mother washed every wall, curtain and corner of the house before she began her preparations for the Seder.

It still brings back memories of carrying all the dishes and utensils up from the basement because we don't use anything that is used the rest of the year. I'm still amazed at how my mother accomplished what she did without all the modern kitchen appliances that we take for granted.

When we were children we had beautiful Seders with aunts, uncles, all the cousins and friends. The aunts each took a turn at holding it at her home. The numbers grew to more than 50. As we married and our immediate family grew, we broke away and held our own Seder.

Passover is a time when we bring out

## Story of Jewish exodus

By Avi Cramer aged 9, student at University Elementary.

Passover is a time of remembrance because of the slavery in Egypt. We remember so it doesn't happen again. It is also a sad time because of the long years the Jews spent in Egypt. But, it's a time of happiness as well. We celebrate the exodus from Egypt.

When you put them all together you get a seder, my favorite part of Passover. The seder tells the story of the exodus. There are six things on the seder plate that represent different actions that took place when the Jews were in Egypt and when they were leaving. One of them is called charoset. It is my favorite food. It is supposed to represent the mortar that they used for the bricks. It is made of apples, nuts and a few drops of wine.

We also drink four cups of wine during the seder but I drink grape juice. The part of the seder I like the best is finding the afikomen. It is hidden at the beginning of the seder and the kids try to find it. The seder can't be finished

special recipes only used for this holiday, and exchange menus and recipes with friends. When we bring out our Passover dishes we have fond memories of Passovers past. Each dish reminds us of our parents who are no longer with us. We reminisce about what was made in this pot or served in this bowl; when the silver wine goblets that were purchased one at a time in Israel were bought. Now that we are the matriarchs we love continuing the traditions.

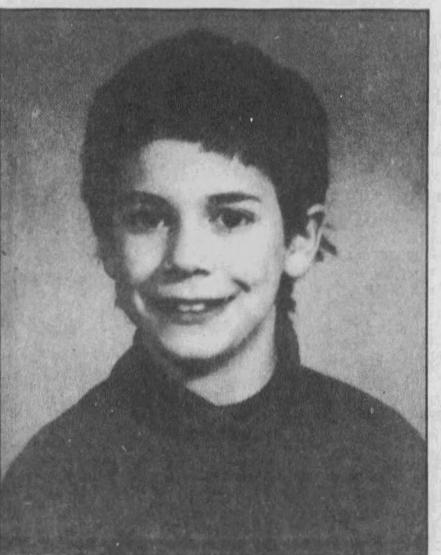
■ To gather around a beautiful table reading the story of the Exodus from Egypt, freedom for the Jews from slavery.

■ Watching the little ones grow and reciting their part of the Haggadah.

■ Their excitement at participating in the rituals.

■ Listening to their special songs about freedom.

This year, and last also, Passover is even more meaningful to us, because we are, in our lifetime witnessing a miracle — another exodus of Jews to freedom, that of Russian Jewry's exodus to Israel.



without it so when we find it, we bargain for money.

I sing the ma nysht ta na, more commonly known as the four questions, since I am the youngest. Safam is a Jewish singing group which sings the ma nysht ta na with a different tune. I love their tune so I learned it and sing it at the seder.