Dear Families,

Pesah is the holiday commemorating the exodus from slavery in Egypt. The Biblical book of Exodus describes how Jacob and his sons went to Egypt during a great famine and settled because Joseph (their brother) was an important advisor to Pharaoh. Life was good until "a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph." (Exodus 1:8). Suddenly, the Jews went from favored status to slavery; they were "ruthlessly oppressed" by the Egyptians. After many generations of slavery, God spoke to Moses, first through the burning bush, then directly. God told Moses to approach Pharaoh to ask that the Jewish people be freed.

After both miracles and plagues, Pharaoh finally relented and let the Israelites leave. However, before the tenth plague, the Israelites were instructed to paint their doorposts with lamb's blood so that the angel of death would pass over their homes. The Hebrew root for "passing over" is D - D from which originated the name of the holiday: D D = D (Pesah).

Chapters 12-13 of the Book of Exodus outline some of the original practices for the holiday, many of which are still followed today. The most common ritual associated with *Pesa<u>h</u>* is the *seder*, though it was formally developed about a thousand years after the actual exodus from Egypt. Commanded to relive the story of the exodus in every generation, Jews gather worldwide at the homes of family and friends on the first nights of *Pesa<u>h</u>*, to tell the story using ritual objects, symbolic foods, and the *haggadah* (a guidebook of sorts).

Throughout the seven (or eight)¹ day holiday, Jews avoid eating <u>hametz</u> (leavened products of wheat, barley, oats, rye, or spelt). Instead they eat <u>matzah</u>, also known as "the bread of affliction" or "poor person's bread." Because the ancient Jews left Egypt so quickly during the Exodus, they did not have time to let their bread rise. Today, <u>matzah</u>, or unleavened bread, is eaten to remember that quick exodus, as it says,

You shall eat no leavened products. For seven days you should eat matzah, the bread of affliction, because you left Egypt in a hurry, so that you remember the day of your departure from Egypt, all the days of your life. (Deuteronomy 16:3).

THINGS YOU CAN DO AS A FAMILY



אורחים אורחים Hahnasat orhim, the act of welcoming a visitor into one's home, is a Jewish value emphasized on Pesah. In the middle of the seder, it is traditional to say "Let all who are hungry come and eat."

- As a family, discuss what it means to have visitors in the home. What can you do to make someone feel welcome? How do you act when you are a host or hostess?
 What does it mean to be a guest in someone's home? How do you act when you are a guest?
- If you are hosting a *seder*, search out those who may not have a place to celebrate *Pesah*, and invite them.
- If you would like to be invited to a seder, contact someone at your child's school, or any synagogue. Each year there are more people looking to host than there are those who ask to be invited. Don't be shy about identifying yourself.



Each year, as we retell the story of our exodus from Egypt, we are reminded that we were once slaves. It is from this "memory" that we learn to treat others fairly because we

¹ Jews in Israel, as well as Reform and Reconstructionist Jews throughout the world celebrate seven days, whereas Orthodox and Conservative Jews outside of Israel celebrate eight days.

know the hardships of servitude and lack of freedom.

- Talk with your children about slavery. [With very young children, you may wish to say that the Jews lived in a place where people were very mean to them.]
- Encourage your children to reflect on their own behavior. What changes do they
 need to make in order to treat others fairly? What can they do if they see someone
 being treated unfairly?



There are many seder preparations that children can do: help cook by mixing ingredients, place the items on the seder plate, or help set the table. As you prepare for seder, allow your children to help and to taste the items on the seder plate. Can they guess what each item symbolizes?



Today, there are several types of *matzah*, ranging from very traditional to grape juice flavored! As a family, go to the store and purchase several different kinds. When you return home, taste-test each one. How does each one taste? Which is your favorite?



Eating customs vary on *Pesah*. Depending on the synagogue to which they belong and their own personal commitment to following Jewish commandments, Jewish families observe the restriction on אָםֶהְ (hametz; leavened products) differently:

- Some rid their homes of all breads and rolls, and substitute matzah instead.
- Some rid their homes of all products with leavening (bread, noodles, non-matzah crackers, cereals) and substitute matzah and other kosher-for-Pesah products.
- Some not only remove all <u>hametz</u> from their homes, but also change all their dishes, pots and pans to ones only used at *Pesa<u>h</u>*.



At *Pesa<u>h</u>* time, people often seek the help of a rabbi regarding their home observance. This is a great step for a young family to take. If you do not yet belong to a synagogue, consider asking questions of a rabbi from a synagogue with which you are most comfortable.



There is a custom called בְּדִיקֵת חָמֵץ (b'dikat hametz; being on the "lookout" for things that have leavening in them). This search is done the night before the first seder in order to make sure all the leavening (bread products) are out of the house. Traditionally this is done with a feather used as a small sweeping device, a wooden spoon as the dustpan, and a candle for extra light. Allow your children to participate in this cleaning experience by giving them a feather, a wooden spoon, and (for safety reasons) a flashlight instead of a candle. Have your children go through the house looking for any left over bread. Often parents hide 10 croutons or bread crumbs so that the children are sure to find something! Once the house is checked, any leavened products found need to be destroyed. An explanation of the ritual and its blessings may be found at: http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/

Passover/TO_Pesach_Home/Isaacs_Leaven_717.htm [scroll down towards the bottom of the page.]



Local bookstores have a variety of resources for those who would like to lead a home *seder*, whether for the first or fiftieth time. Also, check out this webpage for some really good advice for livening up a *seder*.

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Passover/TO_Pesach_Seder/Seder_Tips.htm

For additional background information, family activities, and holiday recipes, see:

http://www.jccathisnewmonth.org (click on Nisan)
or http://uahc.org/educate/parent/ (click on Pesach)

