

Happy Jewish Humanist Passover!



Passover is my favorite Jewish holiday, and one that I can't imagine doing without. I am apparently not alone, since according to the [Pew Research Center](#), attending a Passover seder is the one ceremony Jews are most likely to attend.

But as a Jewish Humanist, one may ask, why do I love Passover? For those of us who don't believe the story of the Jews fleeing Egypt is based on divine intervention — or even historically accurate— why is this night nonetheless different from all other nights?

Here are a few reasons why I, a Humanist Jew, love Passover.

1. Because Jewish Freedom From Oppression Rocks

The Passover story is about Jews fleeing oppression. Whether or not this particular Biblical story ever happened, there is no doubt that Jews have fled oppression many times. We are a strong people who take pride in our endurance, and that's a story worth telling to our children every year. Or, as the saying goes about the essence of Jewish holidays, "They tried to kill us. We survived. Now let's eat!"

2. Because All Freedom From Oppression Rocks

As humanists, we cherish individual and cultural freedom as one of the most essential human values. When we tell the story of the Jews fleeing Egypt, we are

telling the story of one of humanity's greatest yearnings: to be free. These days (and throughout all of human history), you don't have to look far to find parallels between the story of the Jews fleeing Egypt and the story of others who yearn to be free from slavery and oppression. It's very appropriate that modern seders frequently include a rendition of "Let Me People Go," the African-American slave spiritual. And at many modern seders, time is taken to reflect on current situations where slavery and oppression still prevail — and some Jews have taken to including [an olive on the seder plate](#) to represent solidarity with the Palestinians.

3. Because Our Ancestors Told This Story



Poor Jews taking free matzoh in 1906 in NYC.

The story of what happened in Egypt may not be true. But here's what is undoubtedly true. Our ancestors have been gathering around tables for several thousands of years to tell this story to one another, eating brisket and gefilte fish and cake-like concoctions that contain no flour, and leaving a cup out in case Elijah shows up. We all have stories about how our Baubies and Zadies and other relatives shared the story of Passover with us. Now we get to do this with our children — and along with that, we get to tell our children the story of our Baubies and Zadies. And I'm old enough to already have memories of the people I shared Passover with who are no longer with us — like my grandmother and a wonderful dog named Cookie who spent Passover dinners curled up at her feet. To me, Passover is the event makes me feel more connected to my history on this planet as a Jew.

4. Because Jews Everywhere Tell This Story

When I am at a seder, there's something powerful in knowing that Jews all around

the world are doing the same thing. Jews are a diverse people, especially in the modern world when so many of us have taken to defining our Jewish heritage in nontraditional ways. On this night, we all come together as one people to tell the same story. The seders I have shared with my extended family are special, but one of my favorite Passover memories is of attending a Hillel seder at Colorado State University, where I worked at the time, with my husband and my infant daughter. We sat with a table of students who were strangers. Although part of me wished I could bring my daughter to celebrate with family, I found myself feeling deeply connected to the Jews in attendance and to Jews everywhere. On Passover, Jews all sit down together for a meal.

5. Because Passover is Awesome for Kids



The Four Questions! The Afikommen! Elijah's cup! Ha Gad Ya! In many ways, the whole point of Passover is to pass on these traditions to our children. Humanist Jews may not be concerned with passing along religious beliefs, but we identify as Jews and want very much to pass this identity on to our children.

6. Because Passover is Fun!



Passover is a deeply moving time for me, but it's also just plain fun — and not just because there are four glasses of wine. (Although one year my sister and I poured glasses that were a little too big and then wrote a Top 10 list of places not to hide the afikommen, much to my uncle's chagrin.) There's songs and Hillel sandwiches and the company of family and friends. There are stories of years past and hope for the year to come.

Chag Sameach, everyone!

