



## A Sense of Jewish Symbols 24/7



for the Early Childhood & Primary School Classroom

A weekly idea from SAJES Dept. of Early Childhood Education

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### Jewish Symbols 24/7 Pesach in Israel *If You Were in Israel Right Now. This is What You'd See*

*by Shira Simchovitch- Early Childhood Director of the Jewish Agency for Israel*

*Chag Haaviv* – the festival of the spring is aptly named and if you were here now, you would see carpets of wildflowers all over the country. Because it has been unseasonably warm, everything has bloomed earlier than usual, well before *Pesach*. On the first day of the Hebrew month of *Nissan*, the wheat is just beginning to ripen and is green.

Jews around the world clean for *Pesach*, but only in Israel is it a national pastime. At this time of year, cleaning products go on sale. In every neighborhood you can find ads posted just about everywhere for special deals on carpet and upholstery cleaning, painting and fixing and help with *Pesach* cleaning including Yeshiva students who not only clean but undertake everything that has to do with making sure your house is also "kosher for *Pesach*". As the holiday approaches, the national cleaning frenzy will become even more apparent as people begin to air out rugs, mattresses and other furnishings on their porches, visible to all passerby. Two or three days before the holiday, on street corners in neighborhoods all over the country, big cauldrons of boiling water and blow torches will suddenly appear. People will bring their pots and cutlery as well as parts of their stovetops and ovens to be koshered for *Pesach*. *Erev layl haseder* - the morning of the day of the *seder*, at around nine in the morning, small bonfires will suddenly appear on empty lots or in peoples yards for burning the *chametz* - bread and other leavened food, collected the night before. All of these events are usually the subject of TV segments which show the whole country getting ready for *Pesach* and photographs in the daily newspapers.

*Pesach* in Israel is also a time when a lot of Israelis buy new household items, new clothes and gifts for family members and friends as well as for the hosts of the *seder* they will be attending. Consequently, there are big *Pesach* sales on all of these items. The word "*Pesach*" is EVERYWHERE.

In the supermarket, there are special aisles for *Kosher le Pesach* foods and just about every product has a *Pesach* version. Since Jews from many different places live in Israel, there are many different food traditions at *Pesach* time. Some groups eat rice and some don't, some eat beans and peanuts and some don't, but you can find food for EVERYONE! In the supermarket there will be a special big bin for donations of kosher for *Pesach* food to be given to people who aren't fortunate enough to have food for their *seder*. During the holiday itself, in most supermarkets, the shelves with *chametz* will be completely covered up. It is against the law to sell bread in Israel during the holiday. Since there are people who do not strictly observe the holiday, some restaurants are willing to pay the fines and serve bread anyway and you can always find pita bread in Arab towns and grocery stores since they do not have to observe the holiday. The day before *Pesach* all of the *chametz* in the entire State of Israel is symbolically sold to a non Jew (in this case an Arab) to be returned right after the holiday is over. This is how we can say we have no *chametz* in our "home" (the State). This fact will be reported in all the newspapers and on the radio and TV.

In bookstores an astonishing array of *Haggadot* –Haggadahs will be displayed as well as *Pesach* cookbooks and books with suggestions for trips around the country.

In preschools, Israeli children do many of the things their Diaspora peers do – learn the story of Passover, do related activities, have a *seder* in school etc. They also usually, bake *matza* from scratch out in the yard and drink wine that they made at *Rosh Hashanna* (at the time of the grape harvest in Israel). The school vacation begins the week before the holiday and goes until the holiday is over.

In Israel, *Pesach* is seven days long, not eight and there is only one *seder*. This is because in ancient times, people knew when a holiday took place by carefully observing when the new moon appeared and calculating from that date. They would then let Diaspora communities know about the sighting of the new moon via torches from mountain top to mountain top, from Jerusalem to Babylonia. Because of the fear that the message would reach it's destination late, it was decided to celebrate for two days in the Diaspora just in case there was a miscalculation of the date based on the late arrival of the news of the new moon.

Because Israel is such a small country and the farthest away from your family that you could be is 8 hours, most families celebrate together. Many people take the entire holiday as vacation and families go on trips to different places in Israel or abroad. During the holiday, the national parks are bursting with families having picnics. *Pesach* is a pilgrimage festival (to Jerusalem) so many people go to visit the city and there are special activities for visitors. All of the national parks and all of the cities offer a wide variety of activities during *chol hamoed* – the intermediate days of *Pesach*.

From the second day of *Pesach*. The *omer* is counted. This happens in synagogues everywhere but only in Israel is it part of the first news broadcast of the day!

The night *Pesach* is over, the *Mimuna* festival begins. The *Mimuna* is a special celebration of Jews from Morocco during which people go from house to house and eat special foods and wish each other well. Today, you can go to a public *Mimuna* celebration if you don't have friends of Moroccan origin.

When *Pesach* is over, Israel gets ready for two events that take place during the following weeks: Holocaust Memorial Day and the Memorial Day for soldiers who fell in Israel's wars and *Yom Haatzmaut* - Israel's Independence Day.

*The Symbol: the outward expression of the inward signification—  
should above all charm the senses by and for itself. Heine*

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