

Don't pass over Pesach. Make it a holiday of kindness.



Pesach is meant to be joyous and energizing--a day to celebrate! Pesach is a time of joy, celebrating God's great redemptive act at the time of the Exodus, leading the Israelites out from slavery in Egypt to freedom.

The name of the holiday of Pesach comes from Exodus 12:12-13, where God declares, "And I shall pass through the land of Egypt on that night [of Passover], and I shall smite every firstborn in the land of Egypt from human to animal...and I will see the blood [on the doorposts], ufasachtu you."

As every school child can tell you, God passed over the doorposts of the Israelites, and that is why we call the holiday "Passover". But in his Aramaic translation of that verse, the great first century biblical translator, Onkelos translates the word "ufasachtu" as "va'achus," which means "I will have compassion."

So while Pesach is the holiday of "Pass-over" it is also the festival of Compassion, days to bring more kindness and happiness into the world. Here are some suggestions from Areyvut how to make Pesach a days of compassion for yourself and others and strengthens the bonds of community among people:

1. While cleaning, shopping and cooking for Pesach, remember to speak pleasantly and kindly to everyone you meet.
2. Take out the garbage, clean up after dinner or perform a similar task without being asked. If you are the one in charge, ask for help with what you need. Sometimes having compassion for someone doesn't mean doing for them but telling them what you need done.
3. When someone does something that annoys you, realize that they are doing the best they can with what they've got (emotionally, professionally, financially, and physically) at that moment. If they could do better, they would do better. When you feel yourself getting angry or frustrated, count to ten. If you are still upset, count to ten again. And again.
4. Try to apologize when you say or do something that bothers the people with whom you are spending Pesach.
5. If you're grieving a recent death or loss of a loved one, allow time and space for your feelings to heal. Don't push yourself to "get over it" or stop grieving. Honor your feelings and know that it is okay to feel sad, depressed, and lonely at Pesach.
6. Bring a picnic to the park or zoo and share your food with others there who are celebrating Pesach. Most people won't accept your offer. But for those who do, you will create instant Jewish bonds.
7. Invite someone who is alone over for a *chol hamoed* meal. People who are alone less likely to have done full "holiday preparation" for Pesach and they can also be loneliest during the holiday months because while everyone else is celebrating, they are oftentimes by themselves.
8. A book can inspire, educate, and stretch the mind, transporting a reader to another world and leave them permanently better than before. And Pesach is a time that people are more likely to have time to relax and read. Give someone a book that you've read and enjoyed or one that makes you think about them.
9. At holiday meals or errands, share with someone a specific example of something they did for you and how it made a difference in your life.
10. If someone asks you for a favor, agree and then look for a way to go beyond the request and do even more for them.