

The Sephardic Jewish
Brotherhood of America
La Ermandad Sefaradi

Sephardic Passover Guide

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THE BASICS

Pesah Alegre! The following pages will explain some of the basic concepts and laws of Passover. This guide is meant to be an overview of Sephardic laws and customs for the holiday. Please keep in mind that a competent Rabbi is still needed in deciding specific questions unique to your situation. It is important to also note that the customs within the Sephardic world vary from community to community.

WHAT IS HAMETS?

1. The Torah in a number of places prohibits the possession and consumption of hamets. (Ex. 12:15, Ex. 12:18, Ex. 12:19, Ex. 12:20, Ex. 13:7, Ex. 13:8, Deut. 16:3).
2. Only the five types of grain can become hamets. These grains include wheat, barley, oats, spelt, and rye.
3. When mixed with water, if these grains are not baked within 18 minutes they become hamets and are forbidden on Pesah.
4. There are a number of factors that speed up the fermentation process. These include warm water and dough that is left standing.
5. Matzah therefore is made by using special flour (guarded to make sure it has never been in contact with water) that is mixed with cold water. The dough is constantly kneaded until it is placed in the oven and baked. The entire process takes less than 18 minutes.



KITNIYOT (LEGUMES)

One of the most common foods that cause confusion during Pesah are Kitniyot (Legumes). These foods, while prohibited in the Ashkenazi community, can vary widely within our Sephardic Community. Generally speaking, Sepharadim from Greece and Turkey varied by city in their custom, with some communities allowing kitniyot and others not. For example, most Ladino-speaking communities have the custom only to eat Fava beans on Pesah, as they're fresh and not dried. Other communities have the custom not to eat rice and chickpeas (hummus) during Pesah. If one does have the custom of eating rice, he must check it 3 times for hamets.

If you are not sure of your family's custom, it's best to consult with your local Sephardic Rabbi.

1. As mentioned earlier only the five grains can become hamets.
2. Legumes such as beans, lentils, rice, and quinoa can never become hamets.
3. Kitniyot are forbidden to Ashkenazi Jews. They cannot become hamets, but since they can be ground into flour, a decree was accepted in Ashkenazi communities not to eat kitniyot. Another reason is because there is a possibility of finding prohibited cereals mixed with the kitniyot.
4. Nevertheless, Ashkenazim are allowed to eat in the homes of Sepharadim during Pesah as long as they do not eat kitniyot and the pots & pans have not been used 24 hours from the last time kitniyot was cooked.



CLEANING FOR PESAH

The Torah teaches that we must tidy our homes from hamets before Pesah. The sages explain that this refers to hamets weighing a kazait (9oz) in weight. For comparison, this is about the size of a half of a pita bread.

Anything smaller would not need to be removed according to the Torah. However, the sages were concerned that if people left at home pieces of bread or cookies around the house, one may accidentally eat it on Pesah. Therefore they decreed that we do bedikat hamets - checking for hamets to remove any "nice sized cookies." They were not concerned that we may eat little crumbs, dust, old or rotten food, or random items such as lipstick, etc. Therefore we do not need to clean the house from crumbs, but only big pieces of hamets that one may accidentally eat. There is no need to move the bed to clean under it for example, as no one is going to accidentally bump into a cookie under the bed on Pesah and eat it. The purpose of bitul hamets is to nullify any small pieces of hamets that may be around the house. The purpose of bedikat hamets is to get rid of actual food that may be eaten.

One should check the car carefully for hamets in the cup holders, glove compartments, etc. Getting a "Pesah car wash" is not necessary.

SEARCHING FOR HAMETS

Before the eve of the 14th of Nissan the home must be cleaned thoroughly so that all hamets is removed, then the searching for hamets is performed and the search should be performed at nightfall. This search is not a symbolic one; rather it must be done thoroughly. The Sephardic custom is to place ten pieces of hamets wrapped in paper around the house. It should be noted that these ten pieces do not constitute the entire search.

As mentioned, the entire home must be searched. The search is performed with a candle, which is used to check all the various places. If one is unable to find a candle, then a flashlight is also permitted. If you have an office or a business, then it too must be cleaned and searched for hamets; the same applies for one's car.

UTENSILS & APPLIANCES

The Shulhan Arukh (Orah Hayim 451,4) teaches the concept of "kebolo kach polto," which means that in order to kosher a utensil that we used for hamets, we have to use the same method that it became hamets to render it kosher lePesah. For example, a pot that was used to boil pasta, has to rest for 24 hours after it was used, then we have to boil hot water in the pot. It is important to make sure the water spills over and onto the outer wall of the pot as well, and then it can be used for Passover.

Utensils and appliances that are used during the year for hamets cannot be used on Pesah. The reason for this is because during the year they absorb the taste of hamets. This taste is hamets and is prohibited on Pesah. Our Rabbis set down a number of rules as to how these utensils can be made kosher and hence their use would be permitted on Pesah.

China and Earthenware: Since they are considered to be extremely porous, if they were used during the year for hot hamets, then they cannot be used during Pesah.

Glass: (This includes Pyrex) The Sephardic custom is to regard glass as non-porous. For this reason, glass used during the year just has to be cleaned and washed very well. If there is no trace of food on it, then it may be used for Pesah.

Metal Cutlery: Cutlery used during the year may be used on Pesah after hagalat kelim is performed. The method of hagalah is as follows:

The cutlery must be cleaned thoroughly so that there is no trace of food on it. It must then not be used for a 24 hour period.

At the conclusion of this 24 hour period it is dipped into a pot (the pot must be Kosher) of boiling water (bubbles must appear in the boil). After it is dipped, it should be run under cold water. The cutlery is then permitted on Pesah. Note: If the handles can be removed, this must be done. If the handles cannot be removed, a competent Rabbi should be consulted.

Metal Pans & Pots Used for Cooking: Pots and Pans require the process of Hagalah by being thoroughly cleaned, waiting 24 hours, then being totally immersed in a larger pot of boiling water. This includes all pots on a stovetop. Alternatively, if you have a self-cleaning oven, you may put your pots and pans into the oven then turn on the self-cleaning cycle (See section on cleaning ovens).

Frying Pans: If they are used with oil, then they are treated as any other metal pot. If one fries without any oil, then it may not be used on Pesah.

Baking Pans, Grates, Etc: Any utensils used in the oven cannot be made kosher by Hagalah. They must be heated until they become red hot (Libun). This can be done by putting them through a cycle inside a self-cleaning oven. If this cannot be done then new ones should be purchased for each item.

Dishwasher: If it is lined with plastic or metal, then it must be cleaned thoroughly. It must then be left to sit idle for 24 hours. After this it should be run through a hot cycle while empty using soap. If the racks cannot be cleaned completely, then separate Pesah racks should be purchased.

Refrigerator and Freezer: They should be emptied and cleaned thoroughly with soap and water or a usual kitchen cleaner.

Stovetops: They should be cleaned thoroughly with soap and water or a kitchen cleaner. The grates should then be dipped in boiling water. The element should then be turned on high for a few minutes.

Microwave: It should be cleaned thoroughly with soap or a kitchen cleaner. A glass of water should then be placed into it. The glass should be brought to a boil so one can see steam in the Microwave.

The Sink: The sink should be cleaned thoroughly and then boiling water should be poured into it covering the entire surface.

Countertops: They should be cleaned thoroughly and then boiling water should be poured on them if marble, metal, or granite. Countertops can also be covered with tin foil as a precaution. Consult a Rabbi for a different surface type.

Ovens: The Sephardic custom is to clean the oven very well. It is preferable to use a cleaning agent. The oven is left for 24 hours without being used. The oven is then turned on at its highest heat for one hour. It is then permitted to use it on Pesah. For self-cleaning ovens, the only step necessary is to run it through a self-cleaning cycle.

ADDITIONAL SEPHARDIC POSITIONS

Any item that it is clear without a reasonable doubt it was made without any hamets, is permissible on Pesah. Therefore, items like meat (not ground), honey, olive oil, eggs, etc. do not need a specific kosher for Pesah label, but must be bought before the beginning of the holiday.

Sepharadim are lenient when it comes to egg matzot. It is widely accepted in Sephardic communities to eat egg matzah even under normal circumstances. So too, there is absolutely no prohibition to wet matzot on Pesah, as opposed to some Ashkenazi communities.



PREPARING YOUR HOME FOR PASSOVER - CLEANING IN JUST A DAY!

Pesah cleaning doesn't have to be a full spring cleaning and it doesn't have to take from Purim just to get it all done. Here is a quick guide for Pesah cleaning which can be done with not a lot of fuss. It is incumbent upon us to clean before Pesah, but we are not required, nor is it recommended to arrive at the Seder exhausted. In order to change our attitudes, we must know the halakha (Jewish Law). There are so many Pesah preparations that are done unnecessarily, so it is important to understand what is necessity and what is voluntary.

Kitchen - *This room must be thoroughly cleaned and not one crumb of hamets left. Dishes, shelves, and drawers that will not be used on Pesah may be sealed, and need not be cleaned. There are those who are strict to clean even the things which are used for hamets, but one can be lenient on account of three reasons, each of which on their own would be enough: 1. We sell all the crumbs together with the sale of hamets. 2. The dishes are clean - no one puts a dirty dish away in the cabinet. 3. Even if there is "hamets dirt," it is definitely less than a "Kezayit."*

Food Pantry - *Do not clean, it is a waste of time. Seal, put sign or sticker not to use and include it in sale of hamets.*

Bathroom Cabinets - *These may contain hamets, such as wheat germ oil and alcohol derived from wheat. What a waste to clean it. Close and tape the cabinets and include it in the sale of hamets.*

Dining Room - *You do not have to clean everything, just the place where people eat, i.e. the chairs and the table. A note for chairs: if the chairs are clean, there is no need to clean them. If kids throw cereal or other things on them and they do not look clean, clean it with a wet rag.*

Dinning Room Table - *Simply Cover it with Tablecloths.*

Child's High Chair - *If it is plastic, it may be immersed in a tub with boiling water and cleaning agents. Clean the cracks with a stiff brush. It is unnecessary to take the chair apart, because whatever is in the cracks and holes is inedible.*

Couch - *Just make sure to check between the couch cushions and pillows for any hamets leftover by mistake.*

PREPARATION FOR PESAH SOME IMPORTANT ACTIONS

Sale of Hamets



1

Jews may not own hamets during Pesah. One way to avoid violating this prohibition is to sell your hamets to a non-Jew before the holiday. Because this sale is a highly complex matter of Jewish law, you should appoint a Rabbi with appropriate expertise as your agent. Before the holiday, sold hamets is put away in a closed off and clearly marked place. During the holiday, this hamets is the possession of the non-Jew who purchased it. Utensils used during the year for hamets that are not made kosher for Passover are stored away as well. Your hamets is purchased back after the holiday, and may be used again beginning about one hour after the conclusion of Pesah. Please check with the Rabbi who sells your hamets for exact times.

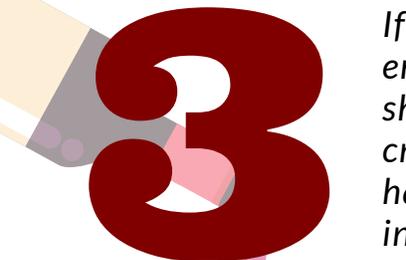
Fast of the First Born



2

Ta'anit Behorim, Fast of First Born Sons, commemorates their deliverance from death during the tenth plague in Egypt. It is customary for first-born sons to participate in the meal served in celebration of a mitzvah, such as a Brit Mila (circumcision) or Siyum (the completion of a tractate of the Talmud). Those attending these events on the eve of Passover celebrate with the partaking of refreshments and are then exempt from this fast.

Traveling for Pesah



3

If you are going away for Pesah and will not be at home during the entire holiday, you can be lenient and not clean for Pesah. You should sell all of the hamets in the house, including all of the crumbs, but not just the crumbs on their own, because that would have no Jewish legal value. It is possible, however, to sell the food in the cabinets and closets, including the "hamets dirt." If someone is staying in your house, you need to clean the rooms which will be used. The remaining unused rooms must be closed off with tape, and you must sell any hamets which is in them.

THE SEDER ESSENTIALS

There are a total of 14 stages of the Seder service, starting with the Kadesh, or blessing over the first cup of wine, and ending with Nirtzah, or the closing songs of the Seder services like Un Kavritiko and Kien Su Piense in Ladino. Of course, this interactive service requires some essential elements like the items of the Seder plate. Below is a short overview of what you need to make sure you fulfill all the requirements of the Seder.

THINGS YOU NEED
WINE (OR GRAPE JUICE)
MATZA
KARPAS
MAROR (BITTER HERB)
HAROSET
HARD BOILED EGG
SHANK BONE

Wine

- Red wine is preferred over white wine.

Matza

- For the Seder, it is preferable that special handmade "Matza Shemurah" be used.
- If one cannot obtain handmade Matzot, one may use machine made Matza Shemurah.
- For the Seder plate, there should be three Matzot. Remember the final amount of how many Matzot you will need will depend on how many people you will have at the Seder table.
- It is the Sephardic Custom that the three Matzot sit on the Seder plate with the rest of the items as opposed to on a separate tray or plate.

Karpas

- Our community's Sephardic custom is to use celery and dip it into a bowl of vinegar, as opposed to the Ashkenazi custom of using parsley and salt water

Maror (Bitter Herb)

- Our community's Sephardic custom is to use Romaine lettuce (lechugua)
- The Maror is eaten twice during the Seder



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Haroset

- Haroset is used to remind us of the mortar the Jews were forced to make in order to make bricks in Egypt.
- There is no standard recipe for Haroset and customs vary. In our Greek & Turkish Communities, they typically include ground dates, raisins, apples, walnuts, orange rind/juice, and wine.
- In the Sephardic community, the Haroset should be like a spreadable jam or paste on matza.

Egg (Huevo Haminado)

- On the festivals, there was a special sacrifice that was offered in the Temple. This sacrifice was known as the "Hagigah."
- Since today we no longer have a Temple to offer the "Hagigah," in its place we put an egg on the Seder plate to remind us of this sacrifice.

Shank Bone

- In Temple times, Pesah revolved around the Passover Sacrifice. Each family was commanded to slaughter a lamb and eat it roasted with Matza and Maror. This was known as the "Korban Pesah." Since we no longer can perform the commandment of the Pesah Sacrifice, we place a piece of meat on the Seder plate to remind us of the Pesah sacrifice. It is customary to use a shank bone, and one additional reason we use a shank bone is because it is also symbolic of G-d's outreaching hand.

Reclining for the Seder

- On this night we are to feel complete freedom. Our status is that of nobility feeling as our ancestors felt when they left Egypt. The Seder has a built in way for us to feel this freedom and sense of nobility, both through the foods we eat and the way we eat them. One such practice is reclining. This was a common method used by people of nobility when eating their meals. Because on this night we are free we recline at specific points in the Agadah: when we drink each of the four cups of wine, and when we eat the Matza and Afikomen.



Sephardic Thoughts for Pesah

Rabbi Devin Maimon Villareal

“Yonati b’hagvei hasela...”, “My dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the cover of the steps, let me see your appearance, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your appearance is comely” (Shir HaShirim 2:14). In many Sephardic communities, it is this verse that opens the traditional reading of Shir HaShirim during the first days of the Pesach holiday (some chant it after the seder, and others during the day in synagogue). Classical sources tell us that Shir HaShirim is read during Pesach because its romantic descriptions are actually poetic renderings of the Exodus from Egypt. (This is certainly clear from many midrashim on Shir HaShirim. Also see Sefer Abudraham, Tefilat Musaf u’Perusha). But what is it about this verse that makes it the one to initiate the reading of this remarkable book?

One possible reason stems from the fact that this verse, as understood by voices in the midrash and commentators such as ibn Ezra, refers to the moment in which the Jewish people stood at the edge of the Sea of Reeds, just before and as they began to pass through the parted waters. “My dove, in the clefts of the rock”, the midrash Shir HaShirim Rabba tells us, refers to Israelites being hidden by the splitting sea. “Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet” ibn Ezra explains, refers to when the Israelites sang the Songs of the Sea, Shirat HaYam. Thus, this verse from Shir HaShirim is understood as describing the culmination of the Exodus from Egypt, the passing through the Sea of Reeds.

If so, then the Sephardic custom of placing this verse at the beginning of the reading of Shir HaShirim, which itself takes place in many communities at some point during the first days of Pesach, delivers a powerful message: At the beginning of the telling of our great story, we must keep the end in mind. This takes on additional significance when we remember that while we symbolically move through the Exodus experience over the course of a week, our tradition teaches that the process of the plagues, leaving Egypt and passing through the Sea of Reeds took place over a course lasting longer than a year. During that time, there were moments when the future felt uncertain or unstable and yet, we know that the ultimate conclusion was one of the greatest acts of redemption the world has known.

The intonation of the Shir HaShirim, beginning with “Yonati/My dove” is similarly a reminder for all times. There are many moments in which the future feels uncertain. There are times in which it is difficult to see the path forward toward a brighter horizon. Yet, we never lose hope in getting there because we have done so before. And so, while we as individuals, communities and indeed a world, look at some of the uncertainties that face us, we must remember our unswerving belief in the possibility of redemption made possible by our own hopeful actions and by the Holy Blessed One, the God of Redemption. And if we need some help in cultivating that belief, we can start by singing, “Yonati/My dove...”

Sephardic Thoughts for Pesah

Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

This year we are here, next year in the Land of Israel. This year we are still slaves, next year may we be a free people.” This text appears in most Ashkenazi versions of the Passover Haggadah. In the Sephardic version, the second line is slightly different. It reads, “This year we are still slaves here in exile, next year may we be a free people in the Land of Israel.” Given the emphasis on “exile vs. Israel” in the Sephardic version, how did Sephardic rabbis in post-1948 Israel understand the Haggadah in light of the newly declared Jewish state?

In a pre-Passover address in April 1949, Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel, who was born in Jerusalem and served as Sephardic Chief Rabbi under Ottoman and British rule, recognized the paradox of saying we are still slaves in exile. Just 11 months earlier, on May 14, 1948, he was in “the room where it happened” when David Ben-Gurion said, “We hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Yisrael, to be known as the State of Israel.”

Now as the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the first Jewish State in close to 2,000 years, Rav Uziel said: “Throughout our lengthy exile, Passover infused us with the hope to be redeemed in our ancestral homeland. By the grace of God and the Israeli military, we are now happy to say: This year we are a free people in the Land of Israel.” By mimicking the Haggadah’s language to reflect the Jewish people’s new reality, Rav Uziel seemed to infer that the change in the Jewish people’s status warranted a change in the Haggadah’s text.

Rav Uziel’s successor to the Sephardic Chief Rabbinate was Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim. In 1958, Rav Nissim called Passover “the holiday that most deeply preserved the connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel.” He proclaimed the modern State of Israel as “the beginning of our redemption,” but said that we have “yet to cross the sea into complete freedom.” Different than Rav Uziel’s idealistic Israel of 1949, by 1958, Israel was a deeply divided society, especially along Sephardic-Ashkenazi ethnic lines. Given this reality, Rav Nissim used the metaphor of God “tearing apart” (*kara* in Hebrew) the sea, saying, “we cannot declare ourselves a fully free people on Passover until we ‘tear apart’ all of these divisions in our midst.”

In 1973, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef replaced Rav Nissim as Israel’s new Sephardic Chief Rabbi. By then a internationally renowned scholar of halakha (Jewish law), Rav Ovadia Yosef counted among his many published books a detailed commentary to the Passover Haggadah titled “Hazon Ovadia.” Reflecting upon the stanza in the song “Dayyenu” that states, “Had God given us the Torah but not brought us into the Land of Israel, that would have been enough (Dayyenu),” Rav Ovadia Yosef writes:

Sephardic Thoughts for Pesah

Rabbi Daniel Bouskila

“These words are directed against the secular Zionists who think you can build the Land of Israel without the Torah of Israel. The Torah precedes the Land of Israel in importance, because the Land of Israel without Torah is no better than living in the diaspora. Indeed, it is preferable to stay in the diaspora as an observant Jew rather than angering God by living a secular lifestyle in the Land of Israel.”

In a radical departure from his Sephardic predecessors, Rav Ovadia Yosef demystifies the existence of the modern State of Israel and posits that the secular orientation of Zionism actually angers God. Rav Ovadia Yosef’s creative reading of “Dayyenu” deems it preferable for the Jewish people to have stayed “in exile” as religiously observant Jews rather than being a “free people in the Land of Israel” in a Jewish state with a decidedly secular orientation.

Israel’s first three Sephardic Chief Rabbis inspire a new set of “Four Questions:”

1. *Are those of us living in exile still in “slavery?”*
2. *Does Jewish independence in Israel automatically mean Jewish emancipation?*
3. *Is a socially, religiously and politically divided Israel a true expression of freedom?*
4. *Can secularism and religiosity coexist in a Jewish state?*

While all representing different viewpoints, modern-day Israel’s first three Sephardic Chief Rabbis share in common a classic Sephardic trait: to make our Jewish texts relevant and meaningful to our contemporary existence.

Make your Seder relevant and meaningful by adding their questions to those already listed in the Agadah.

Moadim LeSimha!

Making Pesah Memories

Rubissa Sharona Hassan

1. *What is your earliest, sweetest Pesah memory?*
2. *Did it involve family? Grandparents, cousins, uncles and aunts gathered together.*
3. *Does it involve sound? The Laughter of the loved ones gathered together. Melodies and music. Mah nishtana.*
4. *Does it involve taste? Crunchy matza, sweet haroset, or a trademark dish of a family member?*
5. *Does it involve movement? Setting the table, leaning to the left - areskovdodos, hugs?*

These memories are yours. They are powerful and all-encompassing and uniquely yours. But they are not unique. For more than 3,000 years every generation of Jews has cherished old memories and created new ones for the next generation. Jewish families in every country gathered together for Seder. You are a priceless link in the chain.

When the Torah describes the observance of Pesah, the requirement of this chain is outright. (Shemot 12:14-15) "This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival to Hashem throughout the ages; you shall celebrate it as an institution for all time. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread..." The observance of Pesah will be forever, which is why 3000 years later, you are eating matza and listening to someone small sing 'Mah Nishtana' as we recount the Exodus from Egypt.

The Torah's description of the seven days is remarkable. This means it does not refer to the first Pesah, the actual Exodus from Egypt. In the rush to leave enslavement, no week-long convocation was celebrated. Instead, the Torah describes the festival which will take place the following year and every subsequent year. The first observance of Pesah was based upon memory! Each year since that time, and every year from now until our final redemption, we will spend a week reveling in the memory of our past.

I imagine that even in the first year, many memories are in a similar category to yours. Did they remember the feeling of reuniting with family in freedom? Was it sounds: the outcry of the Egyptians, the sea splitting or the Song of the Sea? Was it taste: the korban Pesah or the first matza? Was it movement: the walking out of Egypt or the dancing on the other side of the Red Sea?

Making Pesah Memories

Rubissa Sharona Hassan

The rabbinic tradition states, “In each and every generation one is obligated to see themselves as if they went out from Egypt, as it says (Shemot 13:8) And you shall tell you child on that day, saying: Because of this, Hashem did for me when I went out from Egypt.” The power of Jewish memory is that we are commanded to remember the past and transmit it to the next generation. From the first Pesah until today, we are delighting in our memories, sharing them, and creating new ones.

But how will this year be more memorable than last? If the text and traditions are consistent, how do we create engaging and indelible moments? More games and stories! The cards/table on the next page are one example. Coloring them before the Pesah sets the tone. During the seder, you could assign parts, add sound effects, or use them in a puppet show. Share a story about a gato (cat) or perro (dog).

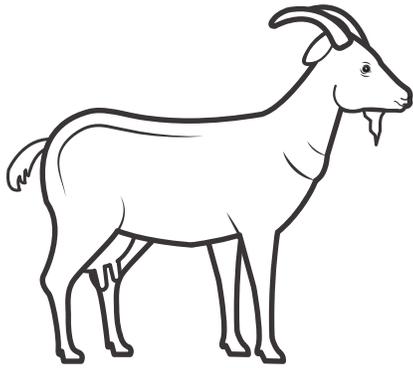
From your grandparents to your grandchildren, let’s use Pesah to create more memory links to keep the vibrant chain going.

Moadim LeSimha!

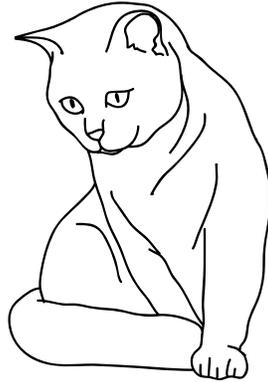
Had Gadya (Un Kavretiko) for Kids

By Rubissa Sharona Hassan

color, cut out, and assign



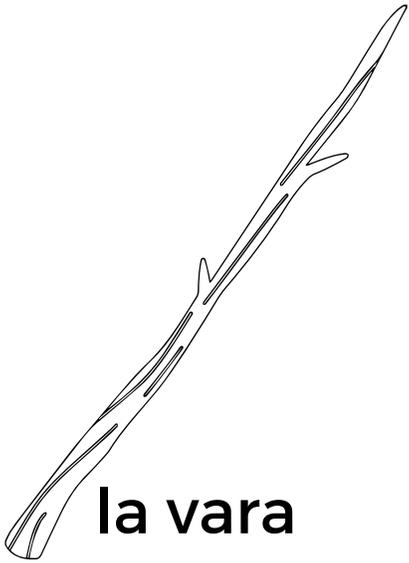
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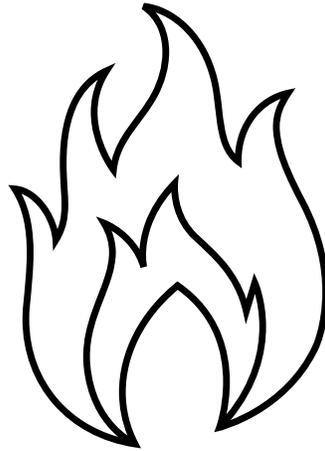
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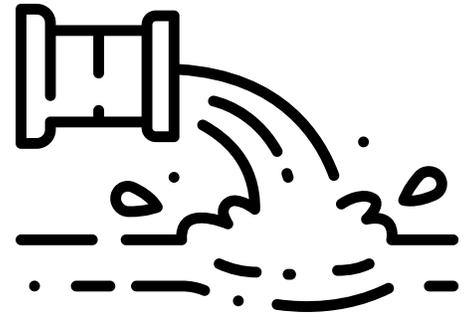
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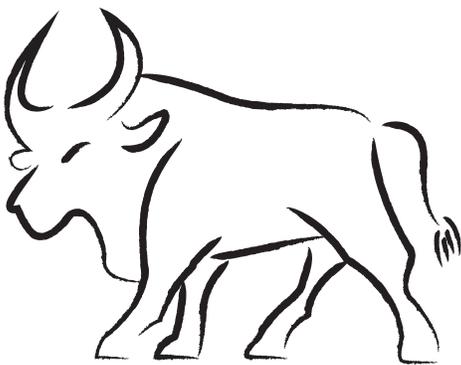
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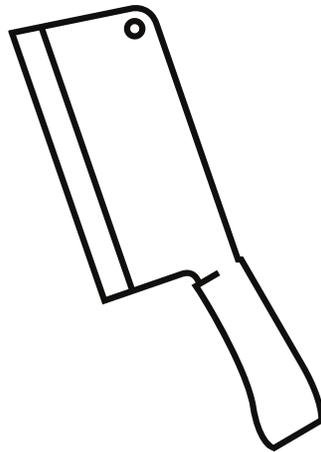
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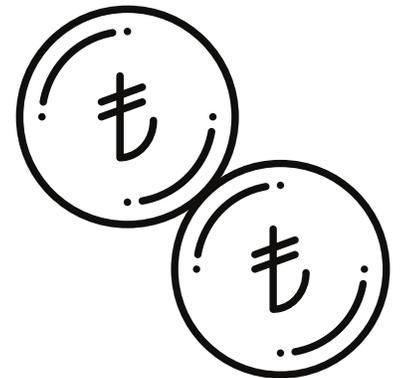
la agua



el buey



el shohet



dos lavanim



**Sephardic Jewish
Brotherhood of America**

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PESAH ALEGRE!
