

# Matzoh — Making In Mea Shearim



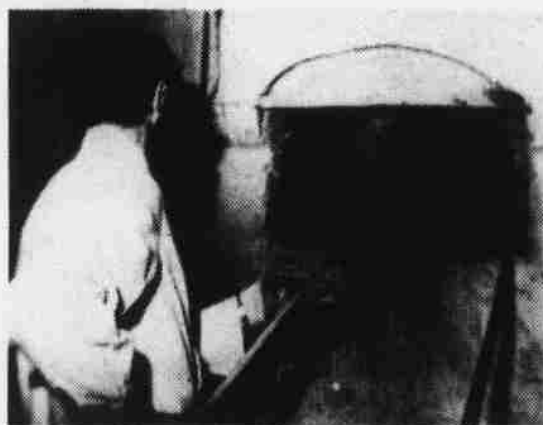
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The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep;  
seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, as I commanded thee.



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By Gerald S. Nagel — Photos by Joel Fishman — UJA Press Service

Mea Shearim, an Orthodox area of Jerusalem, is one of many places where Passover matzoh is prepared according to strict requirements of halacha (Jewish law).

In these photos, bakers and their apprentices are shown preparing shmura matzohs. This is matzoh that is made only by hand and it is watched (shmura means guarded) from the moment the wheat stalk is cut until after the matzoh has been baked. This is to ensure that no water prematurely touches the flour or the mixture could begin to develop into bread. The matzoh is made of two ingredients, from flour and from water drawn from a well the night before baking.

Any Passover matzoh may be eaten during the eight days of Passover in the diaspora (seven days in Israel), but shmura matzoh is prepared especially for use at the seder. During the baking process, preparers say aloud, "These matzohs are for the sake of fulfilling the commandment concerning matzoh."

Neither bread nor matzoh may be eaten after 9 a.m. on the day of the first seder.

(Photo 1)

The baker weighs the flour to ensure the proper mixture, for taste.

(Photo 2)

The flour comes into its first contact with the water in a small room, with the flour handed to the apprentice from the window to his right and the water handed to him from the window to his left.

(Photo 3)

The mixture is kneaded, cut into smaller pieces, then rekneaded into final shape.

(Photo 4)

The thin dough is perforated, placed on a wooden rod that will be carefully towed or sandpapered after each use, and inserted into an oven where it will remain for no longer than 18 minutes.

(Photo 5)

The baked matzoh is stacked on open racks to cool before being packaged. The mitzvah preparation has been accomplished, but the mitzvah will only be fulfilled when you eat it at the seder table. B'teyavon — hearty appetite!

## Passover Plate

By Dr. David Geffen

The earliest reference to the ornamental plate that decorates the Passover Seder table is to be found in the Mishna Pesachin. There it is called in Hebrew, Ke'arah and the various symbolic foods relating to Passover which are to be placed upon it are also mentioned.

While the Haggadah was illustrated by illumination in the Middle Ages, decorations for the Passover plate are not known until the early Renaissance period. Interestingly enough in the Haggadah illuminations the Ashkenazi version of the Passover plate is depicted as round and the Sephardic and Italian versions as a woven basket.

Various materials have been used for the Passover plate including porcelain, stoneware, pewter, wood, silver and in more recent times plastic. The plates contain a variety of pictures relating to the exodus from Egypt, the Seder meal itself and the four sons. These illustrations added an additional dimension to the educational value of the Seder table, and the artist's work made the setting even more festive.

Ceramic plates for Passover are known from the 1500's. They were made initially in Spain and later in Italy. The Delft seder dish from the 1600's is considered a classic in its own right. A 20th century English bone china seder plate with individual dishes for each of the Passover seder symbols is no less outstanding.

Even the Jewish community in 19th century Palestine left us a poignant reminder of its joyful celebration of Passover — a glazed ceramic seder plate which can be found today in the Wolfson Museum in Jerusalem. The aspects of the Passover story are depicted but most important is the word 'Yerushalayim' (Jerusalem) on the face of the plate. This plate was a dramatic reminder for all those who used it of the concluding words in the Seder: "Next Year in Jerusalem".

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