

Eating the charoset was ruled not to be part of the religious ceremony...but Rabbi Levi argued that it should be, in memory of the apple trees (under which Israelite women gave birth to their children in Egypt)."

—TALMUD, PESACHIM 116A



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This Passover

look beyond
the obvious.

WHAT EXACTLY is the egg doing on the Seder plate? The roasted orb has been a guest of honor for generations, and hardly a word has been spoken in its direction. The matzah, the shank bone, the bitter herbs—they generate the buzz year after year. But do you have any idea what you would say about the egg?



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SOMETIMES you can find out more about life by looking in obscure and ignored places. So here are some of the things we've heard about the neglected egg:

"The egg is a symbol of life."

"The egg is like the Jews—the more time they spend in oppressive heat, the tougher they get."

"The egg is symbolic of the Temple sacrifice."

"The egg reminds us that God has no beginning and no end."

"The egg is the food of mourning."

"The egg is a symbol of springtime and rebirth."

Where do these explanations come from? It may come as a shock that none of these explanations of the egg appears in either the Bible or the Talmud. In fact, the only mention we have from ancient sources is from a rather creative word play. In Aramaic, the language of the Talmud, the word for "egg," *beya*, is the same word as the word for "please." In the Jerusalem Talmud, there is a suggestion that on Passover the egg be presented together with the shoulder bone, suggesting: "Please, God, lift us up from slavery!"

What this tells us is that all the explanations listed are relatively new. As Jews in Calcutta, Crakow, Chadera, Caracas and Cleveland have placed eggs on their Seder plates, they've creatively interpreted the meaning of these ovular delicacies. As a result, it has become deeply traditional to create new meanings for the foods eaten on Passover night.

STEP ONE

Ask the people at your Seder table to think for a moment about eggs. As you point to the egg, or pass it around, ask your guests to connect their thoughts on eggs to the Passover story.

Things they might say:

"Peeling an egg is done to free the egg from its shell-but this peeling is a difficult task, just like the peeling away of the slavery mentality of our ancestors."

or

"An egg, due to its shape, cannot stand without help. From this we learn that our ancestors needed help to stand up against Pharaoh."

They might speak of the egg itself or, for example, they might pair the egg with matzah or with the parsley and speak about how these foods are connected.

STEP TWO

Now ask people to suggest connections to any of the other foods your family shares: the coconut chicken or sponge cake, the figs or sesame candies.

Are there memories of specific family or friends to whom these foods connect you? Can you creatively relate these foods to the themes of the Passover Seder?

