

Each community, each family has its own wide-ranging Passover rituals and traditions, and these practices change with time. This is an outcome of Jewish tradition which encourages questioning, learning and growth.

Some of the best-known symbols of Passover can be found on the *seder* table, where the *seder* plate holds a place of honor. Among those items customarily included are a shank bone, to symbolize the “strong hand and outstretched arm” of the liberating God; a roasted egg, reminiscent of fruitfulness and continuity; a bitter herb, usually horseradish, as a reminder of the bitterness of slavery; a green-leafed vegetable, often parsley, a symbol of Springtime and rebirth; and *charoset*, a mixture commonly made of apples, nuts, cinnamon, etc., to recall the mortar used by the slaves to lay bricks. Also prominent on the table is *matzah*, sometimes called “the bread of affliction,” the unleavened bread eaten as a reminder of the Israelites’ hasty retreat from *Mitzraim* (Egypt), when there was no time for bread to rise. And no *seder* table would be complete without Elijah’s Cup, a goblet of wine which symbolically invites the prophet’s return to Earth, which in Jewish tradition signals the coming of the Messiah and a peaceful world.

Many Passover practices are meant to engage and delight children, and can be explored through reading and discussion. And if you haven’t done so, consider attending a *seder*, for we all, children and adults alike, learn by experience.

### 2008 PJ Library Passover titles (by age):

*What I Like About Passover* by Varda Livnev  
*Dinosaur on Passover* by Diane Levin Rauchwerger  
*It’s Seder Time!* by Latifa Berry Kropf  
*The Matzo Ball Boy* by Lisa Shulman  
*Mrs. Katz and Tush* by Patricia Polacco  
*Let My People Go!* by Tilda Balsley  
*Miriam’s Cup* by Fran Manushkin

### Other Passover titles for children 0 to 2:

*My First Passover Board Book* by Claire Lister  
*What do You See at Pesach?* by Bracha Goetz

### Passover titles for children aged 3 to 5:

*Sammy Spider’s First Passover* by Sylvia Rouss  
*My Very Own Haggadah* by Judyth Groner\*  
*Matzo Ball Fairy* by Carla Heysfeld

### Passover titles for children aged 6 to 8:

*Pearl’s Passover* by Jane Breskin Zalben  
*Passover Around the World* by Tami Lehman-Wilzig\*\*  
*Celebrate Passover* by Deborah Heiligman\*\*

### Passover titles for children aged 9 to 12:

*The Secret Seder* by Doreen Rappaport (Holocaust)  
*More Than Matzah* by Debbie Herman\*\*  
*Sblemiel Crooks* by Anna Olswanger  
*Wonders and Miracles* by Eric Kimmel\*\*  
*A Night to Remember* by Mishael Zion and Noam Zion\*

\* Haggadah

\*\* Nonfiction/ activity book

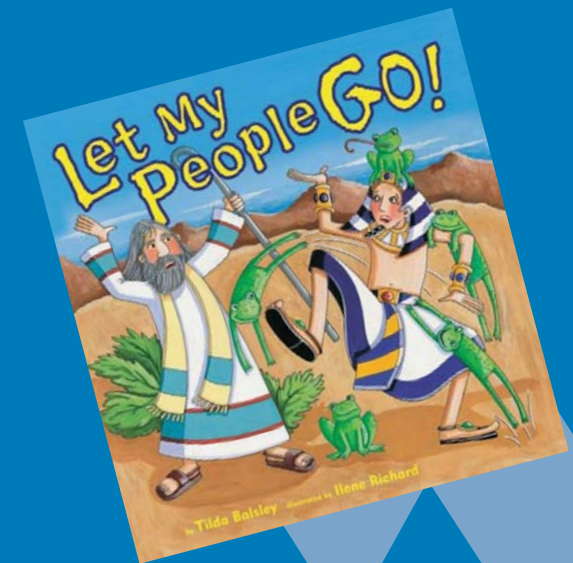
On the web:

Helpful primers for everything from preparing for Passover to making the seder fun for children are available at [MyJewishLearning.com](http://MyJewishLearning.com)

# Let My People Go!

By Tilda Balsley

Illustrated by Ilene Richard  
 Kar-Ben Publishing, Inc. 2008



## The Passover Experience

Picture this. You live in tumbledown quarters that could be taken from you at any moment, leaving your family out on the street. Your work is dictated to you: there is no choice or variety in what you do each day, the labor is backbreaking, the hours are grueling, and you have a mean-spirited overseer. Religion is dictated to you; it is not your own and has no meaning for you. You may not speak your mind in public: you have witnessed that to do so can bring terrible consequences. You learn to speak in whispers. The future is bleak. And what may be most difficult to consider is that your children are experiencing this alongside you. Something from Grimm's fairy tales, you ask, or the product of an overactive imagination? No. This is the story of the Jewish people who, like numerous peoples throughout history, have experienced the horrors of slavery. The Jews were held captive in Egypt for generations, only to be liberated by a Mighty Hand at the first Passover. Jewish tradition teaches that all Jews are to approach Passover as if they, too, were held captive and then set free, as if their very lives were at stake. Arguably among the most compelling words of the text used during Passover are these: "All people, in every generation, should see themselves as having experienced the Exodus from Egypt." If we can envision ourselves as slaves, then we can also imagine the sheer joy of finding ourselves in a place where our children sleep peacefully and our lives are our own. And because of this, could we help but muster great empathy for all those who find themselves "strangers in a strange land"?

## Passover's History and Observance

Known as **Pesach** in Hebrew, Passover begins on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of *Nissan* (generally in late March or April). Israeli Jews and some in the Diaspora (the lands of Jews outside Israel) celebrate this Spring holiday for seven days, while for many others it is an eight-day observance. The fascinating narrative of Passover is chronicled in Exodus, the second book of the *Torah* (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible).

Passover is both historical and agricultural in origin, and is known as *Chag HaAviv* (the Spring Festival) and *Zman Cheruteynu* (The Season of Our Freedom). Passover reminds us of the early Spring harvest in Canaan, now Israel. Rabbis and scholars also point to the pivotal events of Passover as strongly contributing to the eventual birth of the nation of Israel.

While synagogue attendance is common during Passover, what sets the holiday apart from others is its extensive home observance. In fact, the *seder* -- that "talking feast" which is the key event of Passover -- is commonly held to be the most widely-observed Jewish practice. With the aid of a *haggadah*, the text and commentary that provides participants with the ritual's script and order ("order" being the literal meaning of the word *seder*), Jews navigate the highly symbolic reenactment, again and again, for telling and re-telling the story fulfills the instruction in Exodus 13:8: "You shall tell your children on that day, saying, 'It is because of what God did for me when I went out of the land of Egypt.'"

## Jewish Concepts

*Let My People Go!* explores the ten plagues that were visited upon the Egyptian people as a result of Pharaoh's "hardened heart" and intransigence. One might reasonably ask how the "great" king of Egypt could allow his citizens to be the subject of these calamities, one after another, until his own child's death finally forced him to release his long-held Jewish slaves. This story of slavery just prior to the Passover and God's deliverance of the Jewish people introduces weighty concepts: the cruelty and narrow-mindedness of a sovereign, the question of avenging wrongs, and the tenacity often required to achieve justice.

### Using this Book at Home

When opening *Let My People Go!*, you will notice that the book may be used as a play: each character is given a different color print in the text. Try giving out the various parts to older children and adults, and either read or act out the story. Remember: using an assortment of voices will add pizzazz to the story! Even if your children are too young to read for themselves, they can become the voice of the chorus or the ones shouting "A plague! A plague!"; "No, no, no" or "Let my people go!"

A common pre-Passover activity is to create or purchase objects for use at the *seder* which bring to mind each of the plagues. Ping pong balls become hail, while water dyed with red food coloring can symbolize the Nile River stained by blood. Get creative with your children by putting together your own series of "plague memorabilia."