The Passover meal has the effect of purifying the Israelites for their life to come under God's guidance. The purification occurs because the foods have not been altered by human culture: there was no boiling of the animal or fermenting with leaven (yeast), so the foods are suitable for sacrificial use. The lamb is to be an unblemished male, roasted whole, similar to the burnt offering described in Leviticus 1:1–3:

The Lord summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying: "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When any of you bring an offering of livestock to the Lord, you shall bring your offering from the herd or from the flock.

If the offering is a burnt-offering from the herd, you shall offer a male without blemish.

Verses 21–23 are almost a repeat of the earlier section, but this time from the mouth of Moses rather than God. Because of the repetition, scholars identify these verses as coming from the J source. In pre-Islamic Arabia, a newborn lamb was sacrificed in a similar way to that described in the Exodus account in order to ensure the safety of the flock. It is possible that the Passover blood rite was already being celebrated annually by the Israelites prior to its association with the event of the slaying of the firstborn in Egypt.

Contemporary Passover

Pesach reminds Jews of the time their ancestors were slaves in Egypt and how G-d acted on their behalf and saved them (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of the notion of G-d). Pesach is a celebration of freedom and commemorated by Jews all over the world.

In contemporary Judaism, Pesach (Passover) celebrates the time when G-d delivered the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. It is celebrated in the month of Nisan and is a Spring festival. Pesach is the first pilgrimage festival of the year and lasts for seven days. The first and last days of Pesach are holy days, when no work, apart from the preparation of food, can be done (Exodus 12:16). The preparations for Passover require great effort; it takes a number of days to prepare the home as all chametz must be removed from the house (Exodus 12:17–19).

The entire home, and in particular the kitchen, must be cleaned and made chametz-free. On the night before Passover, a search called bedikat chametz usually takes place and any chametz that is found is wrapped and burned the following day.

\[\text{Figure 1.10 A modern Passover celebration}\]
Not only must all _chametz_ be removed from the home, but any utensils or crockery that has come into contact with _chametz_ also must not be used during this time. Some households have an entire set of kitchenware that is used exclusively for Passover.

During the seven days of Pesach, _matzah_ (unleavened bread) is eaten. _Matzah_ is a grain product made of flour and water that is baked quickly. Not eating _chametz_ and eating _matzah_ instead is a reminder of the Jews' dependence on G-d.

The highlight of Pesach is the _Seder_ meal that is celebrated on the first night of the festival. Families gather together for the _Seder_ and it begins when the mother says the blessing and lights the candles. Often male members of the family attend an evening service in the synagogue, and when they return home, the _Seder_ begins. The _Seder_ revolves around the story of the Exodus and is expressed in a book called the _Haggadah_, which also includes accounts from Exodus and the _Mishnah_. The youngest child present at the _Seder_ asks, "Why is this night different from other nights?" This leads into four specific questions about the ritual:

- Why on this night do we eat unleavened bread?
- Why on this night do we eat bitter herbs?
- Why on this night do we dip our herbs?
- Why on this night do we recline?

The person leading the _Seder_, usually the father, answers these questions as he explains the various symbols.

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**Seder**
The meal that is celebrated on the first night of Pesach (Passover), from the Hebrew word for 'order'

**Mishnah**
An authoritative collection of exegetical material embodying the oral tradition of Jewish law and forming the first part of the Talmud
The Seder

The Seder follows a set order:
1. Recite the Kiddush (blessings over the wine to consecrate the festival).
2. Wash the hands, prior to partaking of the green herbs.
3. Partake of the green herbs.
4. Divide the matzah, so that afikomen (fourth piece of matzah) may be put away.
5. Read the Haggadah.
6. Wash the hands for the meal proper.
7. Recite a blessing over the matzah.
8. Recite a second blessing over the matzah.
9. Recite the blessing over bitter herbs.
10. Eat the hillel sandwich.
11. Serve the meal.
12. Eat the afikomen.
13. Say the grace after meals.
15. Pray that G-d will accept your Seder service with favour.

On the Seder table there will be highly symbolic food that is consumed at different times throughout the meal. A Seder plate will feature as the centrepiece of the table.

Descriptions vary slightly but include the following:
- karpas: green vegetable, usually parsley, which is dipped into salt water to remind people of the tears of the slaves
- charoset: a mixture of chopped walnuts, grated apple, wine and cinnamon reminiscent of the mortar used by the Hebrew slaves when they toiled in Egypt
- maror: bitter herbs, usually horseradish, that represents the bitterness of slavery
- beiitah: a roasted egg (hardboiled and then rolled over a pan), a reminder of the sacrifices offered in the Temple as well as the continuity of life
- zereah: a roasted shankbone that represents the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb
- lettuce: symbolises enslavement in Egypt. At first life appeared bearable, eventually it became forced and cruel labour. The leaves of the lettuce are not bitter but the stem is often bitter.

Figure 1.13 A Seder plate