

News

[Home](#) > [News](#) > Passover Programs Scheduled at Hebrew Institute



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By Robert Lebowitz
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The Hebrew Institute of Riverdale (HIR) is again offering a full program for Passover this year with its annual free community seders and a variety of talks given by prominent Jewish scholars.

Passover traditionally commemorates the exodus of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt about 3,500 years ago. It is celebrated with seders, or communal meals, on the first two nights of the holiday which recount the events of the exodus.

The HIR will be holding free community seders on April 5 at 8 PM and at April 6 at 8:45 PM, respectively. Rabbi Avi Weiss will lead the first seder and assistant Rabbi Adam Starr will preside over the second. Each seder includes a full Passover meal including hot chicken and plenty of matzah and lasts about an hour-and-a-half.

"People come from all over to attend the seders," said Rabbi Starr. "Some come because they have no other place to go, some come because they have financial difficulties that prevent them from making their own seder, and some come because they are just curious as to what a seder is."

Those interested in attending the seder should register at the synagogue by Thursday, April 1.

To enhance the meaning of Passover, the HIR is also offering a variety of stimulating lectures about the history and religious meaning of Passover. Rabbi Weiss will present his annual Shabbat HaGadol Discourse at 5:45 PM on Sunday, April 3. The sabbath preceding Passover is traditionally known as Shabbat HaGadol, or, the "Great Sabbath", and features a talk given by the synagogue rabbi. The discourse can address topics such as insights into the Passover holiday or a philosophical exposition.

Other scholars to speak during the course of the Passover holiday include former director of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Dr. Walter Reich, who will speak on the sustainability of Holocaust memory, noted Jewish Studies scholar Dr. Marty Lockshin, who will deliver a talk entitled, "Was Our Father Really a Wandering Aramean?" and Dr. Jeffrey Gurock, a professor of history at Yeshiva University, who will speak on the future of small Orthodox Jewish communities in America. Those interested in finding out when these talks will be presented should contact the synagogue office for a full Passover schedule.

In anticipation of the Passover holiday, the HIR has also been engaged in conducting "model seders" with members of the Jewish community who might ordinarily not have access to traditional Passover celebrations. In the past few weeks, Rabbi Starr has brought the model seder to senior citizens in the Atria, Riverdale Terrace, and the Fairfield Home.

Additionally, 200 senior citizens and 200 mentally disabled Jewish men and women packed the Hebrew Institute social hall to attend two different model seder programs this past Sunday.

Those interested in attending any of the HIR programs or in obtaining a schedule of events can call the synagogue office at (718) 796-4730 or simply log on to the HIR Web site at <http://www.hir.org>.

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