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the Evolution of Eucharist

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a citizen of the Commonwealth (Ephesians 2:19)

What has come to be known as the "Last Supper" was actually the celebration of a Hebrew Feast over a meal. As a Torah observant Hebrew, Yeshua was celebrating the Hebrew Feast of **Pesach** (changed to the English, Passover - **click on highlighted words to view content**). The use of bread and wine did not originate with the Messiah at the Last Supper. Hebrews had been celebrating *Pesach* in this manner for thousands of years. It is called a *seder* and is a full course meal. The religious traditions of both Judaistic and Christian orthodoxy say that it was unleavened bread served at this *seder* - but, when we look at what the words used actually say and mean - we find a different picture presented. The Greek word translated as the English "bread" in both [Matthew 26:26](#) and [Luke 22:19](#) is not **azymos**, translated as the English "unleavened bread" in [Matthew 26:17](#) - but **artos** which carries the meaning of "a small round loaf of ordinary bread." The word Yeshua used does not require unleavened bread. Nor is leaven always a symbol for sin and evil in the Bible. In the parable in [Matthew 13:33](#), for example, leaven seems to represent **the Kingdom of Heaven**. So the arguments against leavened bread are not very persuasive. It was at the serving of this bread to His disciples that Yeshua gave a new significance to the broken bread when He said, "**this is my body broken for you**" (speaking of what was to result from His Resurrection) with the admonition that as often as they partake of it (His Body), to do so remembering the manner of Life He shared with them.



...the celebration of a covenant relationship

On the heels of *Pesach* is the Feast of **Matzoth** (Unleavened Bread), in which no food with leaven is permitted. Leavening is a fermenting process in which yeast turns the food sour (hence, the association with **sin**). The rules of leavening apply to food prepared out of any of the five kinds of grain; barley, wheat, rye, oats, and spelt. Although wine is fermented, it doesn't enter into the category of leaven because it is not made from one of these five types. The unleavened bread (in Hebrew *matzah*), "striped and pierced" is called the "bread of affliction" and is used to call to remembrance the redemption, the salvation, of the children of Israel by YHVH out of the bondage of slavery to Egypt. This is what the Hebrew apostle *Sha'ul* (Paul) was referring to in ridding ourselves (the members of His Body) of the leaven of sin in their life because it only takes a little leaven to corrupt the whole loaf, the whole Body ([1Corinthians 5:6-8](#), [Galatians 5:9](#), [1Corinthians 10:15-17](#)). Today, in the Judaistic religion, the feasts of *Pesach* and *Matzoth* have converged into one eight day event - but it was not originally so.

During the *Pesach* seder (the meal itself), each participant drinks four cups of wine to recall the four expressions of redemption mentioned in ([Exodus 6:6-7](#)). YHVH instructs Moshe to tell the people of Israel, "*I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and I will rid you from under their bondage, I will redeem you with a stretched out arm and with great judgments: and I will take you to Me for a people and I will be to you Elohim.*" The four cups at the Seder represent these four expressions of redemption - bring, deliver, redeem and take. The first cup is called the cup of sanctification; the second, the cup of judgment; the third, the cup of redemption; and the fourth, the cup of the kingdom. We know Yeshua took the third cup because the gospels say "*after supper He took the cup*" and the cup of redemption (or salvation) is the one served after supper. At this point the people celebrating *Pesach* say (in part), "*I will take the chalice of salvation, and I will call upon the Name of **YaHoVeH**.*" It was at the serving of this cup that Yeshua said "**this is my blood of the covenant shed for you.**" At the fourth cup He said He would not drink of it again until He was together with them at the coming of the Father's Kingdom. The Kingdom of the Covenant of YHVH spoken of in [Romans 14:17](#) was fulfilled by the indwelling of *ruach hakodesh* (the holiness of spirit) in the hearts of His Body of the Faithful on **Yom Shavu'ot** (renamed "Pentecost").

The Hebrew phrase *ruach ha kodesh* (reading right to left is Hebrew for "the holiness of spirit") has been used inadvertently as a substitute for the English "Holy Spirit" appearing in their bibles. This is incorrect as there is no capitalization in Hebrew; thus, there is no personification, no third person "Holy Spirit". What is the holiness of spirit? Holiness is the Nature abiding in Spirit, Who is YHVH. The holiness of spirit is something that is **cultivated** within an individual by that individual. When Yeshua said to "be perfect even as your Father is perfect" in **Matthew 5:48**, He was not giving us something to do that was beyond our reach - nor was He telling us anything new. He was not giving us a "new" command but was mistranslated, He was actually quoting Leviticus 19:2 (found in *the Torah*) which says, "You shall **become holy**, as I, YHVH, your Elohim am holy". The Way to become holy is to keep YHVH's Words. The definition of a "saint" is also someone who is "set apart" - one who *becomes* holy by keeping the Words of YHVH. There are many "saints" recorded in the *Tanakh* (OT). The Hebrew word *kadosh* translated "saints" in the *Tanakh* and a variation of *kodesh*, is describing those who comprise **the family of YHVH** - those who abide within **His Kingdom**. Becoming holy is very different from what happened on **Yom Shavu'ot** when those who were waiting received the Breath of Life from YHVH. YHVH is not some unreachable, untouchable, unresponsive idol. His Words are not given to **frustrate** us, but are instructions to show us *how* to become holy - set apart to Him. The Words of YHVH tell us how to come into His Brilliant Presence of Light without being **consumed**.



...Early 3rd century catacomb love feast painting

How communion became what is practiced today was a slow process, evolving over thousands of years. A rather dominant part of original apostolic teaching that few would think of today is that it centered around a meal. That's right, as a natural continuation of the Last *Pesach Seder* - it was a meal! And, like that first seder, the food wasn't eaten during a formal seated gathering at a rectangular table, as shown in many religious art paintings, but with Yeshua and his apostles reclining on floor cushions, as was common at that time. Yet, within a century or so after the Resurrection, this important part of apostolic teaching totally disappeared. There is a well-known reference in Jude, where he refers to those who are "spots in your 'love feasts', while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves" (**Jude 1:12-13**). Here Jude uses the Greek word **agape** to refer to what is commonly known today as the "love feast" What is rather amazing is that nearly all biblical and patristic scholars, catholic and Protestant, liberal and conservative alike, are agreed on this singular matter - that the early church expression of Communion consisted of the "love feast" (**2Peter 2:13**). Even after the death of the apostles, the pre-Nicene Body of Believers continued to practice the Agape or love feast. In the early assemblies, communion (the meal) was presided over by the apostles, and later by people trained by the apostles (called "bishops" or "deacons" meaning "shepherds" or "servants", not **church hierarchy**). Also in the early assemblies, the people met in private homes. Buildings dedicated exclusively to worship were non-existent until the political conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in the 300s CE. The *agape* began as a meal at which not only bread and wine but all kinds of foods were brought from individual's homes, spread out communally as a meal which had the double purpose of satisfying hunger and thirst but, also giving expression to the sense of being One Body as Yeshua had spoken of at the last *Pesach Seder*. Over the centuries, it evolved into a separate event where, at the end of this feast, bread and wine were taken in strict accordance to the Messiah's words and after thanksgiving to YHVH, were eaten and drunk in remembrance of "the Christ" as a special means of communion with the Lord Himself and through Him with one another. The Eucharist thus became *related* to the *agape* as a Christian rite grafted upon it. The *agape* then began to precede and lead up to the Eucharist, eventually becoming quite distinct from it.

It has been strongly argued by scholars that in the early age the Lord's Supper was not distinguished from the *agape*, but that the *agape itself* from beginning to end was the Lord's Supper. While Paul makes it quite evident that bread and wine were the only elements of the memorial rite used by Yeshua ([1Corinthians 11:23-29](#)), the abuses which had come to prevail at the gatherings of the Corinthian church would have been impossible in the case of a meal consisting only of bread and wine (compare [1Corinthians 11:21](#), [1Corinthians 11:33](#)). Moreover, unless the Eucharist had been discriminated from the common meal at the beginning, it would be difficult to explain how at a later period the two could be found diverging from each other so completely. Thus, the Eucharist ritual became an event unto itself. Once meeting in church buildings began, communion moved to the church buildings as well - but by the 300's CE many generations had come and gone and something like the hierarchy of the Catholic Church was beginning to emerge. The words of the mass as we know it was also pretty much in place by then. (Note it wasn't "Roman Catholic" - at this point the "Catholic" church still meant "worldwide" and there were five large churches that were sort of the "leaders of the pack": Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Hippo. Hippo was overrun by invaders as its last bishop, the great theologian Augustine, lay dying, and its church is no more. The other four still survive to this day: the Jerusalem Church, the Coptic Catholic Church (Alexandria), the Eastern Orthodox Church (Constantinople) and the Roman Catholic Church. All four have essentially the same communion service, with only slight variations (although *they* do not consider them slight).

In the early gatherings, the apostles gave themselves to prayer and the deacons were chosen to help serve. The idea was that these folks were "the servants of the servants of God" (which is now one of the Pope's titles). Over time, humanity being what it is, these became treated as positions of *authority* rather than servitude, then positions of *power*, then positions of *state* (!) and by the Middle Ages these posts were actually being bought and sold. The priests and bishops became keepers of what had now become called "the sacraments", and if you didn't behave like they deemed appropriate, you would be excommunicated, that is, prevented from taking the sacraments, and yes they actually believed this meant "cut off from God". (What a thing to hold over somebody's head!). At some point, the doctrine of transubstantiation comes into play. This is a doctrine that evolved over time, and was not universally taught for at least the first 5 centuries or so. If you believe that the bread and wine actually become the physical body and blood of "Jesus", it is necessary to have a priest to say the proper words and perform the proper actions. This meant that communion had to be "guarded and set apart" thus further reinforcing the necessity of the ritual becoming elite. After the Protestant reformation, these last two points no longer become huge issues for Protestants, but you still have 1400 years of church tradition to deal with plus the Reformers took the scriptures quite seriously when they say that anyone who eats and drinks the sacrament unworthily eats and drinks judgment on themselves. So in all but the most "free" of Protestant denominations, only ordained clergy may do communion - sort of a spiritual safety net. Most Protestant churches, in some fashion or another, allow lay people to serve communion that has been blessed by ordained clergy.

Finally, the early disciples, taking their cue from "*This is the bread of affliction*" which was broken by Yeshua, saw communion as a celebration. It was a time to remember that YHWH through Yeshua broke the chains of our affliction, and brought us redemption and freedom. It was not, as so many assemblies today teach, a somber time to remember our sins and His death. While not ever wanting to forget His sacrifice, it would serve us well to recapture the early believer's approach to **Communion**.