

Mitzvah of the Month, by Steve Richter

Passover commemorates the Jews' exodus from Egypt more than 3,000 years ago. It is one of the most celebrated of all Jewish holidays and has the most elaborate dietary rules. Passover is an eight-day holiday which begins on the 15th of Nisan. It's a holiday that requires preparation weeks before. Aside from the regular holiday obligations, we are commanded: "For seven days, leavening shall not be found in your houses . . . You shall not eat any leavening" (*Shemot* 12:19-20).

The most significant observance related to Passover involves the removal of *chametz* from our diets. This commemorates the fact that the Jews leaving Egypt were in a hurry and did not have enough time to let their bread rise. On the evening before Passover, the ceremony of *Bedikat Chametz* is performed. After the house has been cleaned, a symbolic search for the last remaining traces of leaven takes place by candlelight. Chametz includes anything made from the five major grains (wheat, rye, barley, oats and spelt) that have not been completely cooked within 18 minutes after coming into contact with water. Ashkenazi Jews also avoid rice, corn, peanuts, and legumes (beans) as if they were *chametz*. All of these items are commonly used to make bread; thus the use of them is prohibited to avoid any confusion.

Quinoa pronounced (keen-wah) has a light, fluffy texture when cooked, and its mild, slightly nutty flavor makes it an alternative to rice or couscous. Quinoa is kosher for Passover. It's easy to digest and naturally contains no gluten. It's also a good source of dietary fiber and iron. A favorite recipe in our home is cold quinoa salad (see below).

All *chametz* must be sold. A procedure was created for the "selling" of *chametz* where a Jewish person gives permission to his rabbi to "sell" his *chametz* to a non-Jewish person with the understanding that the sale is symbolic. Our rabbis are available to "sell" your *chametz*. See the form for selling your *chametz* in the Passover materials mailed from the OJC.

Cold Quinoa Salad (serves 4)

- 1 cup dry quinoa (follow cooking directions on package)
- ½ cup dried cranberries
½ cup shredded raw carrots
½ cup shredded raw butternut squash
½ cup chopped watercress
½ cup chopped red onion or scallion
½ cup sunflower seeds
- Mix: ¼ cup apple cider vinegar, ½ cup olive oil, ¼ cup honey. 1 tsp. raspberry or apple jelly and salt and pepper to taste.

Toss cooled quinoa with ingredients in no. 2. Add dressing in no. 3. Mix well and serve.