

The Days Before Pesach



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In many homes, Pesach preparations start months before Pesach, and the days just before Pesach are inevitably some of the busiest days of the year. This article is a refresher for the things that may be forgotten year-to-year, hopefully making these days just a bit less frantic.

Proper Disposal of *Chametz*

Every Jew is obligated to celebrate the entire holiday of Pesach without owning or benefiting from *chametz*. There are three components to ensuring that this obligation is fulfilled which will be elaborated upon below:

1. *Mechiras Chametz* (sale of *chametz*)
2. *Bedikas Chametz* and *Bitul Chametz* (the search for and nullification of *chametz*)
3. *Biur Chametz* (destruction of *chametz*)

Mechiras Chametz

Those who cannot dispose of all of their *chametz* before Pesach must authorize a Rabbi in advance to sell it to a non-Jew on their behalf. This transaction is completely legal, giving the non-Jew all rights of ownership over the *chametz* that has been sold to him or her. When selling *chametz* through the Rabbi, it is important to detail the location where the *chametz* will be. This often includes one's home address as well as one's office address.

All *chametz* that is to be sold should be placed in a designated cabinet, room, or section of the house, along with *chametz* dishes and utensils, until after Pesach. This area should be locked or closed off so that access to it will be difficult. One should be sure not to leave any items there which may be needed during Pesach!

After the conclusion of the festival, the Rabbi purchases the

chametz back from the non-Jew. **Before using the *chametz* after Pesach, one must be careful to first give the Rabbi time to complete the re-purchase. If the Rabbi has not informed you of a specific time duration, an hour is usually sufficient for this.**

If one will be traveling to a time zone where Pesach begins earlier than in his or her hometown, there is an additional concern that the Rabbi back home will not yet have sold the *chametz* to the non-Jew by the time the prohibition begins where the traveler is located. In this case, a separate sale of *chametz* is arranged earlier in the home community for these travelers. Alternatively, the *chametz* may be transferred as a gift to someone else who will be remaining in the community, and the recipient of the gift arranges the sale of this *chametz*. These options should only be done under the guidance of a competent Rabbi to ensure their *halachic* validity. Any other questions regarding the laws of pre-Pesach travel should be addressed to the Rabbi as well.

Bedikas Chametz -The Final *Chametz* Search

Bedikas chametz is performed twenty-four hours before the *Seder* night. It is a final search for *chametz* throughout the entire home and properties. All *chametz* that is found is stored in a secure location and either destroyed the next morning or sold to a non-Jew. Today, most families have already spent days or weeks establishing that their homes are *chametz*-free, and there are varying opinions as to what *bedikas chametz* is meant to accomplish. Some maintain that, nonetheless, this search must be a thorough one, while others are of the opinion that today the search serves as a more basic review to ensure that all the areas were cleaned properly.

Timing

Bedikas chametz begins as soon as possible after nightfall on Tuesday, April 4, 2023 (after 8:02 PM in the Chicago area). To ensure that the *mitzvah* is not forgotten or delayed, it is prohibited to begin a significant, absorbing activity starting twenty minutes after sunset until after the search has been completed. Some

examples of this are studying, napping, eating, or beginning a project.

Preparation

It is customary to hide ten pieces of *chametz* in the areas that will be searched. Each piece must be smaller than the volume of a fluid ounce, and it is advisable that they are wrapped well in standard flammable materials (e.g., folded in a paper towel and sealed with masking tape, as opposed to plastic or foil). In addition, the location of where each piece is hidden should be recorded, in case a piece is not found during the search.

Tools

Traditionally, three items are used for *bedikas chametz*: a candle, feather, and wooden spoon. The search is by the light of the candle, and the feather is used to sweep whatever crumbs are found into the spoon. Although using a candle for *bedikas chametz* is not as effective as an electric light, since it has much *halachic* significance, we traditionally begin the search with it. The candle is then substituted for a flashlight or a similar source of strong, direct light. The feather and spoon are also sourced in *halacha*, but if one finds them to be impractical, they do not need to be used.

Procedure

Although any responsible person may be enlisted to help with *bedikas chametz*, it is ideal that the search be performed by Jewish males over the age of *bar mitzvah*. Everyone who will be assisting in the search should be present when the *bracha* (blessing) over searching for the *chametz* is recited:

ברוך אתה ד' אלקינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וציוונו על בעור חמץ
“*Ba-ruch a-ta Hashem elo-keinu me-lech ha-o-lam asher kid’shanu b’mitz-vosav v’tzi-vanu al bi-ur chametz*”

Once the *bracha* has been recited, the searchers must avoid all unnecessary speech or activity until after the search has been completed. All *chametz* that is found is then stored in a safe place to be destroyed the following morning. At the conclusion of the search, a specific statement is recited in which one states his/her desire to render any overlooked *chametz* as ownerless.

כל חמירא וחמיעה דאכא ברשותי דלא חמיתה ודלא בערתה ודלא ידענא לה
לבטל ולהוי הפקר כעפרא דארעא

“Any *chametz* or leaven that is in my possession, which I have not seen, have not removed, and do not know about, should be nullified and become ownerless, like dust of the earth.”

Away for Pesach

Those who will be away for Pesach but are leaving their home within thirty days of the holiday (i.e., after Purim) are required to do *bedikas chametz*. In this circumstance, any one of the following three options must be employed:

1. Search during the evening before departing. When the search is not the evening of *bedikas chametz*, the *bracha* is omitted. However, the statement at the conclusion of the search must still be recited.
2. A representative may be appointed to search during the standard time of *bedikas chametz*. The *bracha* before the search is recited by the representative. The statement after the search is recited by both the representative and the homeowner at his or her remote location.
3. The entire home may be sold to a non-Jew. Note that this does not necessarily exempt *bedikas chametz*, so before employing this option, consult with your Rabbi.

Forgot to Check?

One who forgot to do *bedikas chametz* should consult a Rabbi immediately.

Biur Chametz – Destroying the Chametz

Every year, all *chametz* left in a person’s possession must be destroyed before *sof z’man biur chametz* – the concluding time for destroying *chametz* – on the morning before Pesach begins. The burning is to take place before the end of the 5th *halachic* hour (11:37 AM in the Chicago area). The ideal manner of destroying *chametz* is by burning it. If that is impractical, any of the following may also be employed: pouring inedible detergent (such as bleach) over it, crumbling it up and flushing it down the toilet, or throwing it away in a publicly-owned garbage can or Dumpster. In order to burn the *chametz* efficiently and safely, it is advisable to first remove it from any non-flammable packaging (such as foil or plastic).

As a community service, the following organizations will hold public *biur chametz* on Wednesday, April 5, 2023 from 8 am to 11 am: The Agudah will be in the southeastern parking lot of the Lincolnwood Village Mall, and F.R.E.E. of Chicago – The Bellows Center will be in their parking lot at 2935 W. Devon Ave. in Chicago.

Bitul Chametz – Nullifying the Chametz

In addition to destroying or selling all known *chametz*, every Jewish person over the age of *bar* or *bas mitzvah* must declare his or her *chametz* as ownerless. This declaration is recited at the same time we burn our *chametz*, and it must be recited before *sof z'man biur chametz*, which, this year, is at 11:37 AM in the Chicago area.

Bitul chametz is accomplished by reciting the following statement:

כל חמירא וחמיעא דאכא ברשותי, דחזתה ודלא חזתה, דבערתה ודלא בערתה, לבטל ולהוי הפקר כעפרא דארעא

“Any *chametz* or leaven that is in my possession, whether I have recognized it or not, whether I have seen it or not, whether I have removed it or not, should be nullified and become ownerless, like dust of the earth.

It is extremely important that this statement is understood. One who does not understand it in its original Aramaic recites its translation in a familiar language instead. If no translation is available, one must simply state that he or she disowns all *chametz* or leaven that exists in his or her possession.

NOTE: Be careful not to get this confused with the similar statement that is said after the search for *chametz*. The instructions in the *siddur/machzor/haggadah* should indicate that this is the statement for after the chametz is destroyed.

Additional Halachos

Work Restrictions

Performing skilled activity becomes restricted after mid-day, which in is 12:53 PM in the Chicago area. As a result, a Jewish person may no longer launder clothes, give a haircut, shave, or cut nails after this time. One who forgot to take care of these items or one who must remain at the place of his or her employment after mid-day, should consult a Rabbi.

Other than the above instances, all work that is necessary for Yom Tov is permitted and may be performed for others as long as it is done for free.

These limitations do not apply to non-Jews, and a Jewish person may hire a non-Jew to do any work including laundry, or a haircut, throughout the day.

Food Restrictions

Throughout the day before the *Seder*, it is forbidden to eat *matzah*. Note that baked foods containing *matzah* meal are also forbidden, but cooked foods made from *matzah* meal (such as *kneidlach*) remain permitted. In addition, during the late afternoon, it is forbidden to eat a satisfying volume of **any** food so that one has an appetite for the *Seder*.

Sof z'man achilas chametz is the cut-off time for eating *chametz* before Pesach and once this time has passed, it is forbidden to eat *chametz* in any form. This year, *sof z'man achilas chametz* is 10:20 AM in the Chicago area.

Taanis B'chorim – Fast of the Firstborn

Technically speaking, all firstborn males over *bar mitzvah*, whether firstborn to his father and/or mother, have a requirement to fast on the day prior to Pesach. Traditionally, the fast is curtailed by participating in a *siyum*, a celebration that marks the completion of a *sefer* of *Tanach* that was studied in-depth with the *Rishonim* (primary commentaries), a tractate of *Gemara*, or a *Seder* of *Mishnah*, or by attending a *seudas mitzvah* (meal held in honor of the fulfillment of a *mitzvah*), such as a *bris milah* (ritual circumcision) or *pidyon haben* (redemption of the firstborn).

Note that in contrast to many other areas of *halacha*, even an oldest son who was born after a miscarriage or stillbirth is included in this fast. Firstborn males who are under *bar mitzvah* do not fast and are thus not required to attend a *siyum*, but their fathers should do so on their behalf. (A father is not required to fast for a firstborn son who is younger than thirty days old.)

General Food Preparations

Whenever buying and preparing meat for Pesach, one must be careful not to refer to it as “for Pesach” since this statement resembles the designation of an actual *korban*. (Violating this does not affect a food’s permitted status.)

In addition, when preparing for the main *Seder* meal, be aware that the custom is not to eat roasted meat or fowl during the *Seder* night. Many communities also do not dip foods other than those prescribed in the *haggadah*.

General Preparations

There is a particular *mitzvah* to shower or bathe in honor of Yom Tov and in many communities, men and boys also go to the *mikvah*. It is also praiseworthy to study the laws of the *Korban Pesach* on Erev Pesach since this carries the significance of bringing the *korban*. May we merit to actually bring it this year, with the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash*!