

Chometz 101

A Basic Summary of Laws
In a Clear and Simple Style

By: Rabbi Yochanan Schnall
yschnall@jeprockland.org

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❖ Overview

The Torah forbids eating, owning and deriving any benefit from chometz on Pesach. In order to avoid violating these prohibitions, much time is spent leading up to Pesach to thoroughly search the home and all owned properties. Twenty-four hours before the Seder night there is a final search and by late-morning the next day, the prohibitions go into effect. By that time, all chometz must be either destroyed or sold to a non-Jew. Every one of these rules and concepts are detailed below.

❖ Defining Chometz

All edible products, which contain wheat, spelt, barley, oats or rye can be assumed to be chometz unless they are established as kosher for Passover.

- Byproducts of these grains such as malt or alcohol are also chometz.¹ Flour is most often chometz as well.
- Even an item that isn't intended to be food is considered chometz if it is edible and it contains one of the five grains.²
 - Many children's crafts (such as Play-do) are edible and may contain chometz ingredients.
 - Products containing denatured alcohol are often chometz. Although they are not meant for human consumption they are nonetheless edible³. Many types of perfumes, hairsprays, aftershaves and deodorants have this issue. (See **References** below.)

Inedible Chometz

- As a general rule, chometz that was once a food and has since spoiled must be removed and destroyed before Pesach.⁴
- Chometz that was never edible may be owned and used on Pesach⁵. Various glues, inks, soaps and shampoos are included in this category.
 - Nonetheless, many communities have the custom not to use these items during Pesach.

Kitniyos

Ashkenazic practice also forbids eating foods referred to as "Kitniyos". This includes rice, corn and legumes (such as peas). Kitniyos does not have to be destroyed or sold, but it does need to be put away in order to avoid eating it accidentally.⁶

Important Note:

We have been identifying what must be removed and destroyed as chometz. Regarding what may be eaten on Pesach however, one cannot merely rely on the ingredient label since many seemingly innocent ingredients may be produced from chometz or kitniyos. No processed foods should be eaten on Pesach unless they are established either as Kosher for Passover or as not requiring certification.

To that end, many certifying agencies have lists of what products are recommended for Pesach. Three prominent ones are www.oukosher.org www.star-k.org and www.crcweb.org

❖ Ridding the Home from Chometz

Items used with food

Utensils, appliances and surfaces that were in contact with chometz often have chometz absorbed inside of them. In addition to cleaning their surfaces, the absorbed chometz must also be purged before these can be used on Pesach.⁷ Some examples are: kitchen appliances, counters, sinks, pots, pans, tableware, flatware and cutlery.)

- The laws of purging absorbed chometz are beyond the scope of this pamphlet. Ask a rabbi to guide you in this regard. Do him (and yourself) a favor and don't push it off until the last minute.
- Many communities customarily cover surfaces that will be used with food on Pesach in addition to purging them. Some examples are counters, cabinets, sinks and tables.

- Food utilities, utensils, appliances and surfaces that will not be used on Pesach do not need to be purged. These should be cleaned and put away or covered so that they will not be accidentally used.

Areas where food will be prepared or eaten

It is prohibited to eat even the smallest amount of chometz on Pesach⁸. Therefore, rooms where food will be prepared or eaten must be thoroughly cleaned from even the smallest crumb. (Some examples of these areas are: the kitchen, dining room and their furniture and cabinets)

Areas where food will not be prepared or eaten

In areas where food will not be prepared or eaten during Pesach, the primary concern is possessing chometz. (Some examples of these areas are: bedrooms, offices, hallways, cars, storage areas, dressers, bookcases, desks, lockers or briefcases)

- The prohibition of owning chometz is limited to “significant chometz pieces” so searching these areas is less demanding.
“Significant pieces” are defined as follows:
 - Whole pieces (such as a cheerio or pretzel)
 - Pieces the size of a fluid ounce and larger (such as a piece of bread, cake or pretzel)
 - Chometz crumbs that are grouped together such as in a bowl, box, cabinet or appliance which collectively amount to a volume the size of one fluid ounce.
- Although there is no requirement to search for crumbs in these areas, if crumbs are noticed,⁹ they should be removed.

Inaccessible Areas

Areas that will remain inaccessible throughout Pesach do not require the same amount of examination as accessible areas.

- It is the accepted practice to search these areas as much as possible but this does not have priority over accessible areas. (Examples of such areas include behind and under large furniture items or appliances.)¹⁰
- If in these areas one is aware of chometz that is edible in a practical sense (such as a wafer in a package or a small bag of pretzels), it should be removed if at all possible.

Areas Where Chometz was Never Eaten or Stored

Areas where food is never brought throughout the year do not need to be searched and cleaned.

- The likelihood for such areas to exist depends on individual circumstances. For example, it is more likely to exist in a home that has no young children, than one with young children.

Checked Areas

Once an area has been checked and cleared from chometz, it retains its “chometz free” status unless there is reason to believe that chometz might have been brought into it again.

❖ Selling Chometz to a non-Jew

A permissible way to avoid having to destroy chometz is to sell it to a non-Jew. Because of the halachic complexities that this sale involves, it is done through a rabbi.

- If specific rooms or an entire home will remain unused throughout the holiday, these areas can be sold to a non-Jew and under specific circumstances, this can absolve the obligation to search them for chometz. This plan should be clarified with a rabbi.
- Areas that one intends to use during Pesach cannot be sold to the non-Jew. Any such areas would still need to be cleaned from chometz. In this circumstance just the chometz and its storage locations can be sold.

- For this sale, all chometz must be gathered together and partitioned off or placed in designated closets or cabinets.

❖ Finding/Receiving Chometz on Pesach

- If one finds chometz or receives it in the mail during Pesach the proper procedure depends on when it occurs. If it is Shabbos or the first or last two days of Yom Tov, the chometz is muktzah and may not be moved in a normal manner. It should either be covered over with another object or moved to a safe location without using one's hands (such as by kicking it).
- What to do with the chometz on Chol Hamoed (the intermediate days) depends on whether it was sold to a non-Jew.
 - If it was sold, any *found* chometz should be placed with the rest of the sold chometz. Regarding chometz that was unexpectedly *received*, one should investigate whether the contract that was used includes this type of occurrence. If it does, the item should be placed with the rest of the sold chometz.
 - If the contract did not include such a circumstance or the chometz was not sold altogether, it must be destroyed as soon as possible. Burning it is the ideal mode of destruction but any manner that renders it inedible may be used.

❖ Bedikas Chometz -The Final Chometz Search

On the evening before Pesach, there is a final search for chometz throughout the entire home and properties.¹¹ All the chometz 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 chometz-free and there are varying opinions of what bedikas chometz is to accomplish. Consult your rabbi for guidance in this matter.¹²

Timing

Bedikas chometz begins as soon as possible after nightfall¹³. (In North America, nightfall is fifty minutes after sunset.¹⁴) To ensure that the mitzvah is not forgotten or delayed, it is prohibited to begin a significant, absorbing activity starting twenty minutes after sunset¹⁵ until after the search has completed¹⁶. Some examples are studying, napping, eating or beginning a project.

Ten Pieces

It is customary to hide ten pieces of chometz in the areas that will be searched.¹⁷

- Each piece should be smaller than the volume of a fluid ounce¹⁸.
- Wrap the pieces well to avoid dropping crumbs.
- It is wise to write down where each piece is hidden in case a piece is not found during the search.
- It is also advisable to use flammable materials when wrapping the chometz (such as paper towels and masking tape). This promotes their burning the next day.

Procedure

1. All who will be assisting in the search should be present.
2. The blessing is recited. (It can be found in a siddur or hagadah.)
3. Once the blessing has been recited, the searchers must avoid all unnecessary speech or activity until after the search has completed.
4. As pieces of chometz are found, they are stored in a safe place to be destroyed the following morning.
5. At the conclusion of the search, recite a statement that establishes any overlooked chometz as ownerless. (The statement is printed in a siddur, machzor or hagadah after the blessing.)
 - This statement has much significance and it is important to recite it in a familiar language.¹⁹

Tools

Traditionally, three items are used for bedikas chometz: a candle, feather and spoon. The search is by the light of the candle and the feather is used to sweep whatever crumbs are found into the spoon.

- **Candle**²⁰
Using a candle for bedikas chometz is not as effective as an electric light but since the candle has much halachic significance, the search begins with it and it is then switched for a flashlight or a similar source of strong, direct light²¹.
- **Feather**²² and **Spoon**²³
The feather and spoon also have a halachic source. Many communities use them but they are not mandatory.
- **Representatives**
Although any responsible person can be enlisted to help with bedikas chometz²⁴, it is ideal that the search be performed by Jewish males over bar mitzvah²⁵.
- **Away for Pesach**
All who will be away for Pesach but are leaving their home within thirty days of the holiday (i.e. after Purim) are usually required to do bedikas chometz²⁶.
 - In this circumstance, any one of the following three options must be employed:
 - Search the evening before departing²⁷.
In this case, since the search is not during the usual time, the blessing is omitted²⁸. However the statement at the conclusion of the search must still be recited²⁹.
 - A representative can be appointed to do it at the usual time³⁰. The representative recites the blessing before the search as well as the declaration after it³¹. In addition, the homeowner also recites the declaration from his or her remote location³².
 - The entire home can be sold to a non-Jew. Note that this does not always exempt bedikas chometz so before employing this option, consult with a rabbi.
- **Forgot to do Bedikas Chometz**
One who forgot to do bedikas chometz should immediately consult a rabbi³³.

❖ Biur Chometz – Destroying the Chometz

- On the day before Pesach, after five-twelfths of the day has passed, it is forbidden to own or benefit from chometz. The website www.myzmanim.com provides these times for communities around the world.
- All owned chometz must be destroyed before this time. The ideal manner of destroying chometz is by burning it but if that is impractical, any of the following can 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.³⁴
 - A word to the wise: In order to burn the chometz efficiently, first remove it from any foil or plastics.

❖ Nullifying the Chometz

In addition to destroying or selling all known chometz, **every Jewish person over bar/bas mitzvah**³⁵ must declare his or her chometz as ownerless³⁶. This is accomplished by reciting a specific statement that can be found in a siddur, machzor or haggadahs. It begins with the words: *Kol chamira... – All leaven...*

- If one does not understand Aramaic, the statement must be recited in a familiar language³⁷.
 - If no text is available, one must simply state that he/she disowns all chometz or leaven that exists in his/her possession.
- **Note:** Two similar statements are printed in the siddur/machzor/haggadah – one for after searching for chometz and the second for after destroying chometz. The statement after destroying the chometz is the one which must be recited by all.

- This statement must be recited before five-twelfths of the day has passed. The website www.myzmanim.com provides these times for communities around the world.
- Unless one will run out of time, the statement should not be recited until after destroying the chometz.

❖ After Pesach

It is forbidden to benefit from any chometz that was owned by a Jew during Pesach. This prohibition remains in effect even after Pesach is over.³⁸

- This issue is particularly relevant to supermarkets or food distribution companies that are owned by non-religious Jews. When there is reason for concern, a rabbi should be consulted.
- The prohibition applies exclusively to foods. Items which are not intended for food but are edible such as play-do, are not included in this prohibition.³⁹ (It is however, forbidden to own or benefit from such items during Pesach)

אשירה לד' כי גמל עלי

I am indebted to my wife for all the patience and support she continues to have for me.

Thank you my dear reader, for without your interest this pamphlet would not exist.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to be a quick review of some pertinent laws relevant to this time of year.

It was formulated for those who do not have the opportunity or resources to study the laws in detail.

Many of these laws and sources are from the seforim: Halachos of Pesach by Rabbi Shimon D. Eider זצ"ל, Kol Dodi Laws of the Seder by Rabbi David Feinstein שליט"א בחג, שלית"א הלכות חג by Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Karp שליט"א

קונטרס שיעורי הלכה מתוך שיעורים של רב שמואל פעלדער

If you have any feedback, positive or negative, please share it with me at yschnall@jeprockland.org

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Nissan 5775

¹ Shulchan Aruch 442:1

² Shulchan Aruch 442:1

³ See Iggros Moshe Orach Chayim III #62

⁴ Shulchan Aruch 442:2

⁵ Shulchan Aruch 442:9,10; Mishna Berura 442:43

⁶ Rema 453:1; Mishna Berura 453:6

⁷ Shulchan Aruch and Rema 447:5

⁸ Rambam Yad Hachazakah Chometz Umatzah 1:7

⁹ Iggros Moshe Orach Chayim I #145, see Shiurei Halacha of Rabbi

Shmuel Felder

¹⁰ Similar to Shulchan Aruch 438:2, see Shiurei Halacha of Rabbi Shmuel

Felder

¹¹ Shulchan Aruch 431:1

¹² See Shiurei Halacha of Rabbi Shmuel Felder

¹³ Mishna Berura 431:1

¹⁴ Iggros Moshe volume 4 end of #62

¹⁵ Mishna Berura 431:5

¹⁶ Rema 431:2

¹⁷ Rema 432:2

¹⁸ Sha'arei Teshuvah 432:2

¹⁹ Rema 434:2

²⁰ Shulchan Aruch 433:1

²¹ See Shiurei Halacha of Rabbi Shmuel Felder

²² Mishna Berura 433:46

²³ See Halachos of Pesach VII E3

²⁴ Shulchan Aruch 432:2

²⁵ Mishna Berura 432:8

²⁶ Shulchan Aruch 436:1

²⁷ Shulchan Aruch 436:1

²⁸ Rema 436:1

²⁹ Mishna Berura 436:3

³⁰ Mishna Berura 436:1

³¹ Mishna Berura 436:1

³² Mishna Berura 436:3

³³ See Shulchan Aruch 435

³⁴ Shulchan Aruch, Rema 445:1

³⁵ Halachos of Pesach IX C 5

³⁶ Shulchan Aruch 434:2

³⁷ Rema 434:2

³⁸ Shulchan Aruch 448:3

³⁹ Shulchan Aruch 447:12