

Brief Guide to the Halachos of Pesach

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I. THE SEARCH FOR CHOMETZ

1. The earliest (and preferred) time to search for *chometz* is at **8:40pm** on Sunday evening, April 9. Starting a half-hour before this time, one should refrain from starting a full meal, doing any engaging work, or studying until the search is completed.
2. The search may be conducted by candlelight or with a flashlight.
3. A *beracha* (blessing) is recited prior to the search [Artscroll page 654]: “*Baruch Ata Hashem, Elokeinu Melech Ha’olam, Asher Kidishanu Bmitzvosav V’Tzivanu, Al Biur Chometz.*”
The head of the household recites the *beracha* and thus covers all members of the family engaged in the search. Only one *beracha* is necessary even if one intends to search more than one house on this evening.
4. All places in the house should be searched, except those where one is absolutely sure that no *chometz* was used during the year. Those with small children should be careful to check anywhere that a child could have reached. One must also search his car.
5. If getting to all these areas poses difficulty, one may clean and pre-search some areas (without a *beracha*) on preceding nights.
6. The obligation to search also applies to any property one has rented, provided it was rented prior to the night of the 14th of Nisan (Sunday night, April 9).
7. It is customary to place 10 pieces of bread in different areas of the house before the search. However, one should attempt to search all the premises carefully. It is recommended to place small bits of bread on tissues or pieces of foil so no crumbs spread around the house.
8. **After the Search.** This *chometz* found during the search is kept in a safe place until Monday morning when it will be burned (see below).
9. After the search one verbally annuls the *chometz*, a process known as “*bitul chometz.*” This verbal nullification relinquishes ownership over any *chometz* which may be in one’s property of which one is unaware. The original Aramaic text of the *bitul* is found in most siddurim [Artscroll siddur page 654] and Haggados. As this is a legal statement, it is imperative that one understands what he is saying in order for the nullification to be effective. Therefore, one who does not understand the Aramaic text should recite it in English. The text is as follows:
“Any chometz or leaven that is in my possession which I have not seen, have not removed, and do not know about, should be annulled and become ownerless, like the dust of the earth.”
10. One who is leaving his home for Pesach within the 30-day period before the 14th of Nisan / Sunday, April 9 (i.e., after Purim), is required to search for *chometz* on the night prior to his departure. This search is conducted in the same fashion as the one normally done on the eve of the 14th of Nisan. However, the blessing “*al biur chometz*” is not recited. The *bitul* (nullification) is recited after the search. The *chometz* which one finds may be discarded in any manner. It does not have to be taken to the place where one will spend Pesach to be burned. (The second *bitul* will be recited Erev Pesach wherever one may be – see below).
11. One who is leaving his home for the entire Pesach and finds it too difficult to clean and search his home has the option of making special arrangements with Rabbi Feldman to have all of his *chometz* sold to a non-Jew prior to the 14th of Nissan (Sunday night). However, in order not to

abstain from observing the search for *chometz*, it is suggested to leave out one room in which a search will be made on the night prior to departing.

II. THE SALE OF CHOMETZ

1. It is forbidden to own, see, or keep *chometz* in one's possession during Pesach. However, this prohibition only applies to one's own *chometz* and not *chometz* that belongs to someone else. For this reason, the custom is to sell their *chometz* to a non-Jew, thereby circumventing the prohibition of owning *chometz*. This *chometz* should be stored carefully in an area that will be closed-off for Pesach.
2. It is important to understand the procedure of selling *chometz*. Rabbi Feldman is appointed as an agent of the seller of the *chometz* (the Jew) to sell it to a non-Jew. The Jew is not only selling the *chometz* in his possession, but he is also subleasing the place on which the *chometz* is located to the non-Jew. The non-Jew is allowed free access to the *chometz* he purchases. For this reason, Rabbi Feldman must know where a key is located to the property where the *chometz* is being kept.
3. Those going away for Pesach should make sure that their *chometz* is sold prior to the onset of Pesach in their time zone. Clarify this with Rabbi Feldman, or have the *chometz* sold through a Rabbi in that area.
4. If *chometz* is found in one's home during Pesach, it should immediately be put away with the rest of one's sold *chometz*. If it is found on Yom Tov or Shabbos, handling it is prohibited, since it is *muktzeh*. Cover the *chometz* with a vessel until the conclusion of Shabbos or Yom Tov, and put it away then.
5. A Jew is prohibited from deriving any benefit after Pesach from *chometz* which was owned by a Jew during Pesach. Therefore, care should be taken not to obtain *chometz* after Pesach from someone who has not sold his *chometz* properly prior to Pesach. (This prohibition does not extend to *kitniyos*.) See VIII-1 below for a list of local stores.

III. THE MORNING OF EREV PESACH

1. *Chometz* may be eaten until **11:30** on Monday, April 10.
2. **Burning Chometz**: It is a positive Biblical Commandment to destroy all *chometz* on Erev Pesach (Monday morning). In order to fulfill the mitzvah in an ideal manner, a portion of *chometz* is set aside and burned Friday morning. If one is unable to burn it, the *chometz* may be disposed of by converting the *chometz* into crumbs and throwing it into a river or by flushing them down the toilet.
3. Any leftover *chometz*, except for the *chometz* which is to be stored away and sold, should be burned by **12:34pm** on Monday, April 10.
4. The reason for this deadline is due to a Rabbinic prohibition against deriving any benefit from *chometz* after the end of the 5th hour of the day. (The Biblical prohibition of deriving benefit begins approximately one hour later.) This prohibition of deriving benefit in effect removes a

Jew's status of ownership according to Jewish Law. As such, after this time one could no longer fulfill the mitzvah of destroying *chometz* since it is no longer his to destroy. Similarly, after this time one could no longer sell his leftover *chometz* to a non-Jew.

5. Following the burning, a second nullification is then recited. The translation is as follows:

“Any *chometz* 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 annulled and become ownerless, like dust of the earth.”

The nullification must also be completed by 12:30pm, for the above mentioned reason.

6. **Seder Preparations:** For those who use romaine lettuce for maror (bitter herbs), it is absolutely necessary to examine the lettuce to make sure that there are no worms or bugs on the leaves. The checking should be done before Yom Tov so that the Seder can begin as early as possible. It is forbidden to prepare on the first day of Yom Tov for the second day of Yom Tov. One must wait until nightfall to begin any such preparations, including checking lettuce if necessary.
7. The *charoses* (the mixture of apples, nuts, cinnamon and wine) should also be prepared before Yom Tov. Once Yom Tov begins one is not permitted to grate the nuts in the typical way.
8. The salt water may be prepared at night after Yom Tov begins, but it is advisable to make it before Yom Tov so that one can begin the Seder as early as possible.
9. **Eating on Erev Pesach.** In order to fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah at the Seder with a healthy appetite, several restrictions were put into place on *Erev Pesach* (Monday, April 10).
10. It is prohibited to eat the type of Matzah that one could use to fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah at the Seder. Egg matzah, which cannot be used at the Seder, may be eaten on Erev Pesach, but only until 11:30am.
11. Children (around age 5 or 6) who can be told about the importance and significance of the Exodus from Egypt are not permitted to be given *matzah* the whole day. It is permitted to give younger children *matzah* on Erev Pesach.
12. One may eat cooked food made from Pesach matza meal (e.g. kneidlach) until approximately **4:45pm**. However, one may not eat baked foods made from matza meal (cookies or cake) the entire day.
13. After **4:45pm**, it is still permissible to eat fruit, meat, fish, eggs, and vegetables. However, one should not eat in large amounts that would spoil one's appetite for matzah later that night.

IV. THE FAST OF THE FIRSTBORN

1. The fast of the *bechor* (first born) on Erev Pesach (Monday morning) commemorates the tenth plague – *makas bechoros* – specifically highlighting the proximity to death of the Jewish first born and their survival on the night of the Exodus. Although this fast is not Rabbinically legislated, it is obligatory by longstanding custom.
2. Both the first born of a mother and the first born of a father are required to fast. Women are not required to fast.

3. A *bechor* below 13 years of age is not required to fast. However, his father (although he himself is not a *bechor*) must fast in his place.
4. Participating in a festive occasion celebrating a *mitzvah* releases a *bechor* from the need to fast. The custom developed for a *bechor* to conclude, or participate in the conclusion of, a Talmudic tractate (known as a *siyum*) so as to be released from fasting. All minyanim at Beth Jacob on Erev Pesach will have a Siyum and breakfast after davening. Similarly, a *bechor* may attend a *bris* or *pidyon haben* and participate in the festive meal, thereby fulfilling this obligation.
5. If a *bechor* was unable to witness and participate in a festive meal, he must fast on Erev Pesach until nightfall. Nevertheless, if one becomes ill or weak (e.g. intense headaches), the fast may be broken.

V. SELECTED HALACHOS OF THE SEDER

1. One of the central Mitvos and themes of the Seder night is to share with our children the story of how Hashem took us out of Egypt and what that means to us. It is the night when we pass down our proud, unbroken tradition to our children and reinvigorate ourselves with our beliefs in Hashem and His Torah. A great many Halachos and customs of the Seder are in place to keep us focused on our children and keeping them engaged and involved throughout the night. Their role in the night does not begin and end with the recitation of the Four Questions. Therefore one should begin the Seder immediately upon coming home in order to involve our children in as much of the Seder as possible before they tire and fall asleep.
2. The obligation of the reading of the Haggadah, drinking of the four cups of wine, and eating of the *matzah* and bitter herbs are equally incumbent on women as they are on men.
3. In each and every generation a person is required to act as if he himself had just been freed from Egyptian bondage. Therefore, in the manner of free men and royalty, we recline on our left sides when eating and drinking at the Seder.
4. While preferable to recline throughout the meal, the requirement to recline is limited to the four cups of wine and the *matzah* (during “Motzei Matzah,” “Korech,” and the Afikomen). Some have a custom to recline for “karpas” as well. Many women have the custom not to recline.
5. If one forgot to recline: (a) after the first, third, or fourth cups of wine, he should not drink another cup; (b) after the second cup, he should drink another cup while reclining, but does not make another bracha; (c) after the *matzah* of “motzei matzah,” he must eat again (without a bracha) while reclining; (d) after “korech,” he does not need to eat again; (e) after the afikomen, if he has not yet bentched, he should eat again (if it is not too difficult), but if he has already bentched (or washed mayim achronim), he should not eat again.
6. It is mandatory that the participants in the Seder understand the flow of the Haggadah. Thus, the one who is conducting the Seder should explain at frequent intervals the sections previously recited for those who are not familiar with the Hebrew, or have the Haggadah recited in English.
7. Ideally, red wine should be used for the four cups. Even someone who does not usually enjoy wine should drink wine at the Seder, as it represents an expression of freedom. The wine may be diluted with grape juice. If drinking wine is too difficult, or will cause one to become drowsy, grape juice certainly may be used.

The cup should hold about 3 oz of wine / grape juice. Ideally one should drink a full 3 oz. There is an opinion that one should drink more than half of the contents of the cup, whatever the size. If it is too difficult to drink more, one should drink a little more than 1.5 oz for each cup.

8. Ideally, the *matzah* for the Seder from which one will eat to fulfill the *mitzvah* should be “*shemurah*,” made from wheat watched for fermentation from the time of its cutting. Following the first two days of Yom Tov, any *matzah* with a Kosher for Passover certification may be eaten.
9. A rabbi should be consulted if one’s health does not permit eating *matzah* in its ordinary form.
10. One should try to consume roughly a third or a half of a hand matza (depending on size and consistency) or one half or two-thirds of a machine matza within 2-3 minutes. However, if one is unable to do so, one has still fulfilled the obligation if it was consumed within 9 minutes.
11. The most recommended type of bitter herbs are romaine lettuce stalks. Since worms or bugs are often found within these stalks, the lettuce should be soaked and checked carefully before the Seder. For the *mitzvah* of Maror, one should consume one large leaf (about 8 x 10 inches) or two stalks of lettuce within 3 minutes. If it takes 9 minutes, one has still fulfilled the obligation.

Some have the custom to use horseradish for Maror. About 1 oz should be consumed within 3 minutes. If it takes 9 minutes, one has still fulfilled the obligation.
12. The *afikomen* should preferably be eaten before Chatzos (halachic midnight) at **1:38am**. After eating the *afikomen* one may not eat any food or drink flavored beverages for the rest of the night (except for the remaining two cups of wine). If one is unable to eat the *afikomen* before “mid-night” it may still be consumed until dawn.

VI. AFTER PESACH

1. Yom Tov ends on Tuesday night, April 18, at **8:46pm**. Any *chometz* sold through Rabbi Feldman can be eaten after **9:15pm**. Publix and Kroger are both owned by non-Jews and *chometz* may be purchased from them immediately after Yom Tov.