

Preparing for Pesach

Removing Chametz

The central law of Passover is the requirement to remove all traces of *chametz* from our homes and our lives. The tremendous care with which we are told to clear our homes for Pesach is directly tied to this attempt to rid ourselves of *chametz*. The quite stringent laws of *kashrut* for Passover, more exacting than the dietary restrictions during the rest of the year, are designed to eliminate even the slightest possibility that a product containing the minutest trace of *chametz* would be used during Passover.

Chametz is defined as food containing any amount of leavened product derived from five types of grain: wheat, barley, oats, spelt and rye. "Leavened" refers to the process of fermentation which results when flour from these grains is mixed with water and allowed to sit 18 minutes or longer.

Matzah (unleavened bread) is bread made with flour ground from these same grains (usually wheat) that has been kept absolutely dry until mixed with water and then baked before this 18 minute point of fermentation or leavening. The hurried nature of baking *matzah* is what reminds us of the hurried flight of the Israelites from Egypt during the Exodus.

After cleaning our houses of chametz, there are four steps we take in the overall process known as *Bedikat Chametz*:

1. *Bedikat Chametz* - The search for *Chametz*
2. *Bittul Chametz* - Nullifying *Chametz*
3. *Mekhirat Chametz* - Selling *Chametz*
4. *Bi'ur Chametz* - Burning *Chametz*

Bedikat Chametz - Search for Chametz

Although the house has been thoroughly cleaned, a final search for traces of *chametz* is conducted. This search itself is symbolic of the searching of our hearts to rid ourselves of the *yetzer ha-ra* (the evil inclination). The night before Pesach, immediately after sundown, we perform one last symbolic search for *chametz*. A candle (*ner*) is used because "the soul of a human is a candle (*ner*) of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts" (Proverbs 20:27). We search for and remove this *chametz*, freeing us to fully celebrate our freedom. The following blessing is recited:

Barukh ata Adonai Elohainu melekh ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al biur chametz.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Who has commanded us concerning the destruction of the *chametz*.

The candle, feather and wooden spoon are used to light the dark corners and sweep up any

crumbs we might find. Since the house has already been cleaned and it is unlikely to find any crumbs, we intentionally place some chametz in a place that we will "find" in order to avoid saying a blessing in vain.

Bittul Chametz - Nullifying Chametz

Immediately following the search for *chametz*, a formula is recited which effectively nullifies any *chametz*, which may not have been found during the search. This is a kind of insurance policy that ensures that any *chametz* that inadvertently escaped detection is considered "ownerless and as the dust of the earth." The wording is as follows and can be said in English (or any language with which the person is familiar).

"All leaven and all chametz which is in my possession, which I have not seen or destroyed, nor have knowledge of shall be null, void, ownerless, and as the dust of the earth."

Mekhirat Chametz - Selling Chametz

The great lengths to which the rabbis were prepared to go to remove *chametz* from our lives went far beyond prohibiting the eating of *chametz* and the retention of *chametz* in the house, We are not even allowed to own any *chametz* during Passover! This means that it is not sufficient to lock up your *chametz* in a closet for the week. We must actually sell our *chametz* to a non-Jew who retains ownership of it until we can purchase it back after Pesach. By completing the form in this packet you can give Rabbi Suson the authority to sell all *chametz* in your possession on the day before Passover.

Bi'ur Chametz - Total Destruction of Chametz

The morning before Pesach, after breakfast, all *chametz* that has been "found" during the search, plus any leftover *chametz* from breakfast is collected and burned in a can or on the barbeque. As the *chametz* burns, recite the *Bi'ur Chametz* formula in Aramaic, English or in any language with which the person is familiar). The formula is similar to the one recited for nullifying the *chametz*:

"All leaven or chametz that is in my possession that I have seen or not seen, destroyed or not destroyed, let it be null and void and as dust of the earth."