

FAQs



Frequently Asked Questions

This year puts all of us in an extraordinary position in regard to a number of practices, which opens the door to possible leniencies regarding *halakhic* requirements that would be too taxing or, in some cases, impossible to fulfil. Here are the most common questions – if you have any more, please reach out to Rabbi Lerner (rabbilerner@yije.org).

1. Tevilat Keilim

Question:

I've bought new pots or pans for Pesach this year, and many of the *mikva'ot* for *keilim* are closed, what should I be doing?

Answer:

1. If you are able to get to a natural body of water while ensuring your safety and maintaining social-distancing measures—immersing items in a bay or oceans (or a lake, pushing the items below the top few inches of water) works.
2. The most practical recommendation for this year, as advised by R' Herschel Schachter, is to render your new objects halakhically 'ownerless' (*hefker*). To do this one ideally needs an audience of three people from the local area (two of whom are kosher witnesses) to observe the gesture of dis-possession (doing so over Zoom, or even via an email, works for these purposes). One should have in mind not to re-acquire the items when using them. Once immersing the items in a mikvah becomes a possibility, one should ideally mentally re-acquire these items and take them for immersion without making a *bracha*. I will make our nightly 9.15pm Zoom *Ma'ariv* an opportunity for anyone wishing to declare any items *hefker*.
3. If you have not yet purchased these new utensils but plan to do so, and you are able to use a credit card at the time of purchase—have in mind when swiping the card that you do not yet wish to acquire ownership of the utensil. This again will exempt you from immersion at present because you are only borrowing it for now.

2. Mekhirat Chametz

Question:

Under circumstances of social-distancing measures, how can I authorize my Rabbi to sell my chametz?

Answers:

1. Unlike the actual sale of *chametz* to the non-Jew, the process of appointing one's Rabbi as an agent need not be performed in person—the Rabbi's lifting of the pen (or other object) is less an official '*kenyan*' than a customary gesture to concretize genuine intent, which can be compensated for with an affirmation of extra wording in the document of appointment. Rabbi Lerner has set up an online form ([click here](#)) to fill-in—with the assistance of the CRC (Chicago Rabbinical Council), which includes extra wording to ensure serious intent. If you are unable to access an online form, please contact the Rabbi and he will ensure your inclusion in the sale remotely.

2. There are some who have the custom not to sell “*chametz gamur*” (“Real leaven” – foodstuffs that are pure chametz, as opposed to merely having chametz among the ingredients), but to remove it all from their homes. This year, Rav Schachter has ruled that, if one is concerned about maintaining stock, one can neglect this custom and there is no need for a formal *hatarat nedarim* (annulment of vows—as there is usually when giving up a long-held custom), as this is not a breach of the commitment to the custom, but rather a unique circumstance not included under the terms of the initial commitment.

3. Bedikat Chametz

Question:

Should one daven *Ma'ariv* before or after doing the bedikah?

Answer:

Fundamentally, either is fine. This year we will hold a special 8pm communal Zoom *Ma'ariv*, in order to daven together and set the tone and then do our own searches in our own homes.

4. Biur Chametz

Question:

There will be no public burnings this year—what should I do to destroy the designated chametz?

Answer:

One is encouraged not to make fires in one's backyard, unless one has controlled way of doing it. The best suggestion is to flush small amounts of broken up *chametz* down the toilet.

5. Ta'anit Bekhorot

Question:

I am a *bechor*—how could I absolve myself from the *Ta'anit* on *Erev Pesach* this year?

Answer:

1. One has two options. **First**, one can chose to study a short tractate of Talmud and make a *siyyum* on one's own—a number of teachers have made a series of accessible shiurim on *Masechet Tamid* (the shortest tractate) available for this purpose for this year. [Click here](#) for a single 3 and a half hours shiur that completes the *masechta* from Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (Rosh Kollel of the Toronto YU Torah-Mitzion Kollel). **Second**, one can participate in a ‘Zoom’ *siyyum*—this year presenting extenuating circumstances, Rav Schachter has ruled that participation would exempt one from fasting. YIJE will be offering two ‘Zoom’ *siyyumim* on the morning of April 8th, one at **8am** and another at **9am**.
2. If one is unable to participate in *siyyum* (of one's own or virtual), the recommendation is not to fast this year in any event—so as to maintain the best possible health.

6. Yom Tov Preparations

Question:

I usually make an extra effort to purchase new clothes and get a haircut before Yom Tov—should I endeavor to do the same this year?

Answer:

1. The best preparation for *Yom tov* this year is to ensure social-distancing as a form of *pikuach nefesh*—purchase only the minimum that you need for *Yom Tov*. Please God, we will celebrate together in the not too distant future and have an opportunity to express our gratitude to *HaShem*.
2. Do not get a haircut now (unless someone in your household can do it for you), and if the situation improves by then, it is likely that rabbinic consensus will permit haircuts during *sefirah*.

7. Seder-Night

Questions:

The health and halakhic guidance has been to hold seder wherever one is living without any guests, friends or family (see next page). I've heard that some are permitting the use of Zoom for the seder, is that true?

Answer:

- It is true that a small group of rabbis in Israel published a letter suggesting that this year it would be permissible to use Zoom for the seder to avoid a sense of loneliness. That view has not been endorsed by the majority of mainstream halakhists (and a number of the authors have since clarified their position)—while of course, in cases of *pikuach nefesh* we permit the use of electricity on *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*, that would apply to cases of isolation only if there is a realistic risk of someone taking their own life. If you know of anyone in that circumstance, please reach out to me immediately.
- For many, many people, the *Sederam* will feel quieter and more solitary than usual, and we suggest two ways of trying to compensate: (1) find ways to have pre-seder virtual get-togethers with friends and family, and (2) make the *sederim* nights of personal discovery and study—read the *hagaddah* in new ways and share your ideas once *Yom Tov* is over. Ask your family or friends to send ideas or pictures, or *Divrei Torah* or stories in advance for you to print and have at the table can also be a deeply meaningful way to feel the presence of others even in their absence.
- In this spirit, we, as a community, are inviting everyone to send submit small stories, thoughts, poems, pictures, ideas to build a packet that we can send round in advance for everyone to have at their seder tables. Send submissions to:

hug-gaddah@yije.org

JOINT STATEMENT TO THE ORTHODOX COMMUNITY REGARDING PESACH

Rabbinic leaders and organizations across the Orthodox spectrum have, individually, declared the health threat presented by COVID-19 a mortal threat (sakanas nefashos). We, leaders of major American Orthodox Jewish organizations, join together again to further clarify our shared and firm guidance for our communities.

We have heretofore urged not only full compliance with all health guidance issued by federal, state and local governments, but have gone beyond those pronouncements in urging our communities to remain at home and avoid, to the maximum extent feasible, any outside interactions.

With regard to the upcoming Pesach holiday, we note specifically the following critical mandates, shared in consultation with leading Infectious Disease and Public Health experts:

1. We are accustomed to honoring Pesach to the fullest degree, including taking haircuts, purchasing new clothing and tableware, and preparing the fullest menus. This year's public health crisis mandates us to significantly limit all of the above. Our responsibility is to refrain from any NON-ESSENTIAL outside interactions, including especially in-store shopping. If there is a need for truly ESSENTIAL purchases, send one family member only – who is neither ill, vulnerable, nor of known exposure to COVID-19 – as rarely and as briefly as possible. Stores serving the community should shift to home delivery or drive-by parking lot pick-up of pre-orders, and – to the extent this is not possible – must take substantive steps to minimize crowding, maintain hygiene, and maximize social distancing.

We will truly honor Pesach by limiting our purchases to the truly ESSENTIAL, ensuring that all of us – especially the vulnerable – are able to celebrate Pesach in good health. We must STAY HOME; SAVE LIVES.

2. The Pesach plans of many have been completely upended. This creates severe difficulty for so many. We are deeply sympathetic to this enormous difficulty. Nevertheless, public health demands strict adherence to the current guidance. **Travel to other cities must be cancelled, whether to vacation venues (Florida, etc.) or to family.** Everyone must plan to celebrate Pesach where they are currently.

Individuals living alone or those absolutely unable to prepare for Pesach may choose to self-quarantine for 14 days, and then – if asymptomatic – may join with a welcoming local family that is similarly asymptomatic and that has been disciplined in staying home and limiting their interactions outside the home to the absolute minimum as described above. These guests may join one family only for the duration, without additional company, and must carefully observe the mandated standards of scrupulous hygiene and social distancing. The elderly and high risk must seek medical advice before considering this.

STAY HOME; SAVE LIVES

We urge one and all – while strictly maintaining the prescribed guidelines – to look out for each other by reaching out to and providing for each other, especially those living alone.

We hope and pray that our sincere Tefillos (prayers) and Chassadim (acts of kindness) will move Hashem to swiftly remove this plague from the world and bless us all with health, peace and tranquility.



Rabbi Chaim David Zwiebel, Executive Vice President, Agudath Israel of America
Rabbi Mendy Miroznick, Executive Vice-President, Igud HaRabbanim – Rabbinical Alliance of America
Rabbi Shmuel Blech, Chairman, Rabbi Moshe Zev Weisberg, Co-Chair, the Lakewood Vaad
Farley Weiss, President, National Council of Young Israel
Moishe Bane, President, Allen Fagin, Executive Vice President, the Orthodox Union
Rabbi Daniel Korobkin, President, Rabbi Mark Dratch, Executive Vice President, Rabbinical Council of America