

The Days Before Pesach

By:

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Taanis B'chorim – Fast of the Firstborn

Technically speaking, all firstborn males, whether firstborn to his father or firstborn to his mother, beginning at the age of *bar mitzvah*, have a requirement to fast on the day prior to Pesach.¹ This year, since it will fall on Shabbos, the fast is scheduled for the previous Thursday (March 25, 2021). Traditionally, the fast is curtailed by participating in a *siyum*,² a celebration that marks the completion of a *Sefer* of *Tanach* that was studied in-depth with the *Rishonim*, a *masechta* of *Gemara*, or a *Seder* of *Mishnayos*,³ or by attending a *seudas mitzvah*, such as a *bris milah* or *pidyon haben*.

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.⁴ Firstborn males who are under the age of *bar mitzvah* do not fast and would not be required to attend the *siyum*, but their fathers should fast on their behalf.⁵ (A father is not required to fast for a firstborn son who is younger than thirty days old.)

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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. *Bedikah* and *Bitul Chametz* (the search for and nullification of *chametz*)
3. *Biur Chametz* (destruction of *chametz*)

Mechiras Chametz

One who cannot dispose of all of his or her *chametz* before Pesach must authorize his Rabbi, in advance, to sell it to a non-Jew on his 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. It is important to list one's home address as well as one's office address when selling *chametz* through the Rabbi.

After the conclusion of the Pesach, the Rabbi purchases the *chametz* back from the non-Jew. **One must be careful to wait at least one hour after Pesach before using this *chametz*, to give the Rabbi time to complete the re-purchase of the *chametz* and restore its ownership to the Jewish owner.**

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!

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 that the prohibition will begin 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

In a regular year, *bedikas chametz* is performed twenty-four hours before the *Seder* night. This year however, since this would fall on Friday night, *bedikas chametz* is instead pushed back a day to Thursday night, which falls on March 25, 2021.

The purpose of *bedikas chametz* is to conduct a final search for *chametz* throughout the entire home and properties.⁶ 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 the cleaning is a preparation for this final thorough search, 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.⁷

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Timing

Bedikas chametz begins as soon as possible after nightfall⁸ on Thursday, March 25, 2021. To ensure that the *mitzvah* is not forgotten or delayed, it is prohibited to begin a significant, absorbing activity starting twenty minutes after sunset⁹ until after the search has been completed.¹⁰ Some examples of this are studying, napping, eating, or beginning a project.

Preparation

It is customary to ask a family member to hide ten pieces of *chametz* in the areas that will be searched;¹¹ each piece should be smaller than the volume of a fluid ounce.¹² It is advisable to wrap the pieces well to avoid dropping crumbs, as well as to wrap them in safely flammable materials, e.g., folded in a paper towel and sealed with masking tape (as opposed to using 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.

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* over searching for the *chametz* is recited

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 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. The *bracha*, as well as the statement, may also be found in a *siddur* or *haggadah*.

Tools

Traditionally, three items are used for *bedikas chametz*: a candle, a feather, and a (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. Using a candle¹³ for *bedikas chametz* is not as effective as an electric light, but since the candle has much *halachic* significance, the search traditionally begins with it. The candle is then substituted for a flashlight or a similar source of strong, direct light.¹⁴ The feather¹⁵ and spoon¹⁶ are also sourced in *halacha*, but if one finds them to be impractical, they do not need to be used at all.

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*.¹⁷ In this circumstance, any one of the following three options must be employed:

- Search during the evening before departing.¹⁸ When the search is not the evening of *bedikas chametz* – which this year is March 25, 2021 – the *bracha* is omitted.¹⁹ However, the statement at the conclusion of the search must still be recited.²⁰
- A representative may be appointed to search during the standard time of *bedikas chametz*.²¹ The *bracha* before the search is recited by the representative. The statement after the search is recited by both the representative²² and the homeowner at his or her remote location.²³
- 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.²⁴

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.²⁵ The challenge this year is that this particular morning falls on Shabbos, when it will be forbidden to employ the usual methods of destruction. For this reason, we are instructed to destroy the *chametz* on Friday, leaving only what one anticipates will be eaten before the *z'man habiur* of Shabbos morning.

Although Friday is not the actual morning before Pesach, the burning should nonetheless take place before what would normally be considered *sof zeman biur chometz*.²⁶ The ideal manner of destroying *chametz* is by burning it. If that is impractical, any of the following may also be employed:²⁷ 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. As mentioned previously, in order to burn the *chametz* efficiently and safely, it is advisable to first remove it from any foil or plastics.

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*²⁸ must declare his or her *chametz* as ownerless.²⁹ This statement, referred to as *kol chamira* can be found in a any *siddur*, *machzor*, or *haggadah*.

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.

IMPORTANT NOTE: During a regular year, this declaration is recited at the same time we burn our *chametz* and is naturally associated with it. This year however, the *chametz* burning is pushed back a day to Friday, while the statement is recited on Shabbos morning. Therefore, it will not have its usual association, and one must be especially vigilant to remember to recite it. As always, it must be recited before *sof z'man biur chametz*.

If one is destroying all the *chametz* in his or her possession on Friday and relying on other means to fulfill the Shabbos meals, *Kol Chamira* is said after *biur chametz* on Friday. Of course, if this was forgotten on Friday morning, it may still be recited up to *sof z'man biur chametz* on Shabbos morning.

It is extremely important that this statement is understood. One who does not understand it in its original Aramaic must recite it in whatever language is familiar to him or her.³⁰ 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.

Preparing for the Seder

Since this year, Erev Pesach is Shabbos, several preparations that are usually reserved for Erev Pesach must instead be done before Shabbos.

The zeroa, hard-boiled egg, salt water, charoses, and marror should be prepared before Shabbos. If these were not prepared in advance, they may be prepared after Shabbos is over with the following conditions. Only portions that will be used during the first Seder may be prepared, and all grinding must be done in an unusual manner such as using the hand-grater upside-down or onto the counter instead of onto a plate. (The zeroa cannot be eaten the Seder night, since it must be eaten the same day of Yom Tov that it was prepared, it will have to be eaten during the daytime).

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Food Restrictions

On Shabbos, March 27th, it is forbidden to eat *matzah* the entire day starting from dawn until the Seder.³¹ Note that baked foods containing *matzah* meal are also forbidden, but cooked foods made from *matzah* meal (such as *kneidlach*) remain permitted.³² In addition, during the late afternoon (after $\frac{3}{4}$ of the day), it is forbidden to eat any satisfying volume of **any** food so that one has an appetite for the *Seder*.³³

Sof z'man achilas chametz is the end of the time when one may eat *chametz* before Pesach. Once this time has passed, it is forbidden to eat *chametz* in any form.³⁴

Shabbos Meals

There is an obligation to eat three meals on Shabbos – one Friday night and the remaining two during Shabbos day.

Hamotze

At least for the first two meals, *Hamotze* is made over two whole loaves of bread or *matzah*. As mentioned above, regular *matzah* may not be eaten during this time, so the options are either to eat egg *matzah*, or to have small portions of *chometz* that does not create crumbs such as egg *challah* rolls or fresh *pitahs*.

If egg *matzah* is eaten, approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of a sheet must be eaten by each individual above *bar/bas mitzvah* to fulfill the *mitzvah* of eating the Shabbos meal.

If *chometz* is eaten, the minimum amount of 2 fluid ounces – about half a small roll is necessary. It is appropriate to eat the *chometz* on a disposable plastic tablecloth, and over a smooth floor that can be easily swept (with a *chometzdike* broom). Immediately afterwards, all crumbs are gathered/swept up and either flushed down the toilet or thrown away in a public owned garbage. After eating the *chometz*, one wipes him/herself off well dispose the *chometz* and resume the meal. As an added precaution, some families prefer to avoid eating the meal in the usual dining area. **All *chometz* must be concluded before *Sof z'man achilas chametz*.**

Hot Foods

There is also a *mitzvah* to eat hot foods on Shabbos. The hot foods should not contain *chometz* since utensils used for cooking/baking will likely have *chometz* residue and will present a challenge to clean them properly. (On Shabbos, utensils may not be washed if they are no longer needed for Shabbos use.)

Transferring hot food from a *Pesachdike* utensil into a *chometzdike* one can ruin the status of the *Pesachdike* utensil according to some opinions. Therefore, disposable serving utensils should be used. If that is not an option, the utensils used should be *Pesachdike* ones (obviously keeping them very far away from any *chometz*).

Shalosh Seudos

Regarding *Shalosh Seudos*, there are three options, proteins and/or fruits and vegetables, egg *matzah*, or *chometz*. If one is eating *chometz*, in addition to the precautions described above, there is an additional challenge of completing it before *Sof z'man achilas chametz*. One option is to split the morning meal into two: Recite *Kiddush*, making *hamotzee*, eating part of the meal, then *bentch* and leave the table for a short break. Wash again and eat the remainder of the meal as *Shalosh Seudos*.

Even if egg *matzah*, or proteins/fruit/vegetables, are eaten *Shalosh Seudos* still must be completed before $\frac{3}{4}$ of the day has passed so that one will have an appetite for the Seder.

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Preparing for the Seder Part II

On Shabbos, it is forbidden to do any activity that is clearly in preparation for another day. Therefore, one may not set the table, or prepare foods for the Seder. It is permitted however to do benign activities such as a general cleaning up, or taking a nap, as long as it is not mentioned that it is for another day.

Quick Reference Calendar (March 25-27, 2021)

Thursday Morning:

Taanis Bechorim

Thursday Evening:

Bedikas Chametz

Friday Morning:

Destroy Chametz

(Recite kol chamira if you are not saving any chometz for Shabbos)

Friday Afternoon:

Make sure items needed for Seder are all prepared (including zeroa, egg, charoses, salt water, any advanced measuring and portioning of matzah and marror)

Friday Evening:

Eat first Shabbos meal

Shabbos Morning:

Eat first meal

(Eat Second meal if it is chometzdike)

SAY KOL Chamira!

Shabbos Early Afternoon:

Eat second meal (if it is NOT including chometz)

Shabbos Afternoon:

Discernable preparing for the Seder is not allowed (for example: no setting the table, or preparing foods, but cleaning up or taking a nap is permitted as long as one doesn't say that it is for Pesach)

Motzei Shabbos:

Start Seder as soon as possible

(Possibly) Unfamiliar Terms used in this guide:

Bedikas chametz is the search for *chametz*

Bitul chametz is the nullification of *chametz*

Biur chametz is the destruction of *chametz*

Mechiras chametz is the sale of *chametz* to a non-Jew

Sof z'man achilas chametz is the time after which eating *chametz* becomes forbidden

Sof z'man biur chametz is the time after which owning *chametz* becomes forbidden

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¹ *Shulchan Aruch* 470:1

² *Mishna Berura* 470:10

³ *Iggros Moshe Orach Chayim* volume 1 #157

⁴ *Mishna Berura* 470:2

⁵ *Rema* 470:2

⁶ *Shulchan Aruch* 431:1

⁷ See *Shiurei Halacha* of Rabbi Shmuel Felder

⁸ *Mishna Berura* 431:1

⁹ *Mishna Berura* 431:5

¹⁰ *Rema* 431:2

¹¹ *Rema* 432:2

¹² *Sha'arei Teshuvah* 432:2

¹³ *Shulchan Aruch* 433:1

¹⁴ See *Shiurei Halacha* of Rabbi Shmuel Felder

¹⁵ *Mishna Berura* 433:46

¹⁶ See *Halachos of Pesach* VII E3

¹⁷ *Shulchan Aruch* 436:1

¹⁸ *Shulchan Aruch* 436:1

¹⁹ *Rema* 436:1

²⁰ *Mishna Berura* 436:3

²¹ *Mishna Berura* 436:1

²² *Mishna Berura* 436:1

²³ *Mishna Berura* 436:3

²⁴ See *Shulchan Aruch* 435

²⁵ This is when five-twelfths of the day have elapsed.

²⁶ MB 444:9

²⁷ *Shulchan Aruch, Rema* 445:1

²⁸ *Halachos of Pesach* IX C 5

²⁹ *Shulchan Aruch* 434:2

³⁰ *Rema* 434:2

³¹ *Rema* 471:2

³² *Mishna Berura* 471:20; see *Sha'ar Hatziyun* 444:1

³³ *Shulchan Aruch* 471:1, *Mishna Berura* ad loc.

³⁴ *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim* 603:1