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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner on...

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How to do your Pesach Cleaning Cheerfully in Less than One Day

Going away for Pesach

If you are going away for Pesach and will not be at home during the entire holiday, you can be lenient and not clean for Pesach. You should sell all of the chametz (leaven) in the house, including all of the crumbs -- but not just the crumbs on their own, because that would have no halachic value. It is possible, however, to sell the food in the cabinets and closets including the "chametz dirt." If someone is staying in your house, you need to clean the rooms which will be used. The remaining unused rooms must be closed off with tape, and you must sell any chametz which is in them.

There is still the question of how to fulfill the mitzvah of Bedikat Chametz (the search for leaven). If you arrive at your Pesach destination by the fourteenth of Nisan, perform the search there. If you arrive on the morning of the fourteenth, you should clean well and check a small room, i.e. the entrance way and not sell the chametz in that room. You must also perform the search for chametz, with a blessing, in the rooms in which you will live during Pesach - if no one else has done so.

Chametz smaller than a "kezayit" (the volume of an olive)

Chametz which is less than a "kezayit" may obviously not be eaten, but it is not included in the Torah prohibition of "Bal Yeira'eh" and "Bal Yimatze" (Chametz may not be seen or found on Pesach – Shemot 12:19, 13:7) (Responsa Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 1:145). Regarding the Mishnah Berurah's statement (Sha'ar Ha-Tziun 451:6) that chametz which can be seen is included in the prohibition of "chametz she-avar alav Ha-Pesach" (using

chametz that has spent Pesach in a Jew's possession) -- the fact is that if it was included in the sale of chametz, there is no problem (see Mishnah Berurah 142:33 and Chazon Ish, Orach Chaim 117:15). A "kezayit" is 27 cubic centimeters - 3 centimeter square or a little over an inch square. Usually, only rooms in which children are allowed to bring sandwiches or cookies are likely to contain such big pieces of chametz. A room in which people do not walk around with food does not need to be cleaned at all. Incidentally, you must take care not to hide pieces of chametz which are larger than a "kezayit" before "Bedikat Chametz," in case one of the pieces should get lost. If you do not find them, you will not need to bother much to hunt for them, and you can rely on the "bittul chametz" (declaring chametz ownerless) that you do after the search (Responsa Yechaveh Da'at 5:149).

Bedikat Chametz

Only search for chametz in places in which there is a reasonable chance of finding it. It is nearly impossible for chametz which is an inch square to be hidden inside a book! If there is a chance that the book has chametz in it, then it must be thoroughly checked. Most books, however, do not need to be cleaned or checked. Cleaning and checking a sample is sufficient. It is customary not to place books that have not been checked for chametz on the table during Pesach. Everybody knows their kids' habits. Peek, and open here and there. Regarding crumbs in the corners of the house: 1. They are not a "kezayit." 2. They are inedible to a dog. If there is bread behind a cabinet in an unreachable place, nobody will get to it on Pesach and it is as if it is buried -- just as you do not have to search under stones or under the house's foundations, since nobody will take chametz from there. By the way, start "Bedikat Chametz" in a place where chametz was used, so the blessing will apply to it.

Educating Children

If you want to do a spring cleaning, this is certainly possible, but not before Pesach – this is not the appropriate time. Pesach vacation is for taking trips, playing with the kids, being happy, dancing and preparing stories for the Seder. A woman works hard all year long: "They enslaved the Jewish women with back-breaking work" (play on Shemot 1:13). If the husband is on vacation too, this may be a good time to leave him with the kids, and give the wife a vacation! That is what vacation is for – not for working like a donkey and scraping floors. You can take trips, enjoy yourself, and arrive at the Seder rested in order to make a beautiful Seder and inspire the children. If a woman wants to work like a donkey, and be a kind of slave, she is permitted to do so, but it is not good educationally. She should be free in order to play with the kids. We left the slavery of Egypt, and it was not to enter into our own slavery! We do not have anything against house cleaning, but you should spread it out over the course of the year – each few months clean another room. This is not the time for projects

of cleaning and arranging. In any event, when the Seder arrives there will still be disorder and cleaning that has not been completed.

If a woman is happy with suffering, she is allowed and it subtracts from the suffering of "Gehinom" (purgatory): Any suffering in this world is deducted from the suffering of "Gehinom." If someone desires, this it is legitimate, but not before Pesach. The month of Nissan is a happy month.

Husband's help

Question: Does a husband have to help his wife?

Answer: A husband does not have to help his wife nor does a wife have to help her husband. Rather, the two of them have to clean together since this is a shared home, and it is a shared life as well.

Children's Clothes

There may be cookies in your kids' pockets. Even the crumbs must be removed, since a child may put his hand into his pocket and then into his mouth. You only have to check the clothes you will be wearing that season. It is unnecessary to check any clothes that are put away and will not be worn now, such as winter clothes.

Question: It is possible to simply clean them by washing them in a washing machine?

Answer: Running the clothes through a washing machine will not necessarily get rid of all of the crumbs. The clothes must be checked.

Toys

Toys must also be checked. However, you may put some or all of the toys away, and buy new toys as a present for the holiday! This serves a double purpose of saving work and making the children happy.

Bathroom Cabinets

These may contain chametz, such as wheat germ oil and alcohol derived from wheat. What a waste to clean it. Close and tape the cabinets and include it in the sale of chametz.

Couches

You have to check between the pillows. It is an interesting experience to find lost objects.

Books

There is no need to clean them, just do not put them on the table on which you eat. The custom is not to check books for the crumbs that remain in them, but to rely of the nullification (Haggadah Chazon Ovadiah of Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef, p. 21). Clean the books which you will want to read at the table on Pesach, or clean a few books for Pesach.

Dining Room

You do not have to clean everything, just the place where people eat, i.e. the chairs and the table.

Chairs: If the chairs are clean, there is no need to clean them. If the kids throw cereal or other things on them and they do not look clean, clean it with a wet rag.

Table: There are two options: 1. Kashering with boiling water. 2. Covering with several layers of plastic and cloth tablecloths.

High Chair

If it is plastic, it may be immersed in a tub with boiling water and cleaning agents. Clean the cracks with a stiff brush. It is unnecessary to take the chair apart, because whatever is in the cracks and holes is inedible to a dog.

Kitchen

This room must be thoroughly cleaned and not one crumb of chametz left. A crumb is not nullified even in a thousand times its volume.

Dishwasher

It is preferable not to kasher a dishwasher. You can do the dishes by hand as in previous generations. It is also possible to use disposable dishes.

Question: Is it at all possible to clean a dishwasher?

Answer: It is possible, but it is a lot of work; there are a lot of rubber parts and connections.

Oven

If you do not have a self-cleaning oven, it is best not to kasher it. Seal the oven and buy baked goods or buy a "wonder-pot" which allows you to bake on a stove.

Stove

Grates: Clean and cover the grates with as much aluminum foil as possible. Use aluminum foil that is thick enough not to tear, but thin enough to bend and shape. What a waste of time and effort! The best thing is to use special Pesach burners.

Burners: There is no need to clean them; they get burned up in the course of use. Bottom Pan (where everything falls): In general, if some food falls into it, we do not pick it up, and it is considered "treif;" nevertheless, put aluminum foil on it.

Knobs: Wipe them clean.

Refrigerator

Clean it, but it does not have to be a lot of work. Of course, defrost the freezer (if you have an older model which does not defrost automatically) and clean it. It is best to eat up all chametz before Pesach, but if expensive chametz food products are left over, i.e. frozen foods, they may be wrapped up well, labeled "chametz," stored in the back of the freezer/refrigerator and included in the list of chametz sold before Pesach.

If you have an old refrigerator with cracks or crevices in the door which is difficult to clean, do not use its inner shelves, but cover them with plastic. Similarly, you must clean the door's rubber part well. If it is old, sometimes it is easier to replace it.

Food Pantry

Do not clean. It is a waste of time. Seal, put sign or sticker not to use and include it in sale of chametz.

Cabinets of dishes, utensils, pots and pans

Dishes, shelves, and drawers that will not be used on Pesach may be sealed, and need not be cleaned. There are those who are strict to clean even the things which are used for chametz, but one can be lenient on account of three reasons, each of which would be enough:

1. We sell all the crumbs together with the sale of chametz.
2. The dishes are clean -- nobody puts a dirty dish away in the cabinet.
3. Even if there is "chametz dirt," it is definitely less than a "kezayit."

By the way, sometimes it is easier to paint than to clean. You can paint the corner of the kitchen where food flies using a water-based paint and the gas grates using aluminum paint.

Microwave

It can be kashered by not using it for twenty-four hours, cleaning it for five minutes and boiling water in it for half an hour. All food cooked or baked in it on Pesach should be placed in a covered utensil.

Counters

It is possible to cover them with thick aluminum foil, and then there is no need to kasher them at all; just wipe them with a rag. Sometimes it is complicated to cover, and then one can kasher it. Where there are holes, pour floor bleach in them and then pour water from an electric kettle which is still boiling. It is good for two people to do this: One to pour and the other to unplug.

Sink

Regarding the kitchen sink, there are a few solutions:

1. Do not put anything into the sink on Pesach, and wash the dishes in the air. This, however, is unrealistic.
2. Put a plastic bin inside. Just make sure there is still a direct flow down the drain.
3. Thoroughly clean and kasher the sink like the counters.

Toaster

It is impossible to clean a toaster, but there is no need. Put it in the cabinet of sold chametz.

Mixer

You have to do "Hagalah" (kashering by dropping into boiling water) for the bowl and blades. As for the body of the mixer, wrap it in plastic -- making sure not to block the air holes. The best thing is to buy a cheap hand-mixer for Pesach.

Kashering dishes

This is a tremendous amount of work. It is preferable to buy new dishes. True, it is expensive, so buy a few things each year. As for pots, it is possible to buy cheap aluminum ones which are okay for just seven days. There are cheap plastic plates as well as cheap cutlery.

Car

You have to clean it. Take out the mats and gather the "chametz dirt" – there is no need for a vacuum cleaner -- and clean the compartments and containers. There is no need to pour water or dismantle the seats. In general, there is no need to dismantle anything with screws. Any way you look at it -- if the chametz is accessible, you can take it out without a screwdriver, and if it is not accessible, it will not come out on Pesach either.

Chumrot - Being Strict

If you know that you are being stricter than Halachah requires, and you choose to be strict, you deserve a blessing. And if you accepted a stricture on yourself and now you want to stop,

the way to do that is to do "Hatarah" (getting the vow annulled). But if you thought that a particular act was the actual Halachah, and now you realize it is a stricture, you do not need a "Hatarah." If you have a strong desire to clean a lot, you deserve a blessing, especially for Pesach, "whoever is strict deserves a blessing." You should not, however, force a stricture on yourself, but accept it with love.

Summary

In light of what is written above, it should take about an hour for the dining room, two-three hours to kasher the kitchen, and another hour to clean the rest of the house. In short, about one day!

All the rest of the cleaning jobs are either strictures or just made up. When we work hard, we use up our energy and get mad at the kids. You have to educate the kids -- but not to educate them to be aggravated: "I told you not to go into this room anymore! Why did you go in?! Eat on the porch! Eat standing up! Don't touch!" The whole kitchen looks like it was overturned by vandals; the husband and kids are trembling in fear in some corner and eating; the mother looks at them like a drill sergeant; there's anger between husband and wife. This is preparation for Pesach?! This is educating the kids? This is definitely not setting a positive example! Our memories of Pesach should not be of a reign of terror.

If you clean together with the kids, that is great, but it must be a happy adventure. First of all, you have to clean what you must – taking half a day – and after that if you want to do other things, you can clean with happiness and joy. Clean, sing, pour water and "you will clean with joy from the wellsprings of salvation" (based on Yeshayahu 12:3).

The Rama rules in the Shulchan Aruch writes: "Every person should sweep his room before Bedikat Chametz, and check his pockets for chametz, and the pockets or cuffs where you sometimes put chametz also need to be checked" (Orach Chaim 433:11) The Mishnah Berurah (#46) adds: "It is the custom to sweep the whole house on thirteenth of Nisan, so that it will be ready to check immediately after nightfall on the fourteenth." This custom is enough. Beyond that, "whoever is strict deserves a blessing" -- as far as Pesach goes, but not as far as the kids go.

It is understood that I am not forcing my opinion on anyone. I am simply stating my humble opinion with explanations. Whoever accepts the explanations will listen and whoever does not accept them will not. I heard most of the practical suggestions about how to shorten the cleaning from women themselves. It is possible that a woman has a strong desire not to

shorten this work, and just the opposite, she finds joy in it. That is okay. Even she will benefit from all of the above, because she will not feel pressured that she might violate the Halachah, but rather she will clean with satisfaction and tranquility.

The essential point is the distinction between chametz, which there is an obligation to clean with all the severity of the Halachah, and dirt – which should obviously be removed, but not necessarily before Pesach. You can spread out the work of removing dirt over the whole year, so that we and our families do not suffer before Pesach. I am not advocating poor housekeeping. We should stand before chametz with awe and fear, but not all dirt is chametz. Do not treat chametz cavalierly, G-d forbid, but at the same time, not everything that is accepted as Pesach cleaning is directed at chametz.

Have a kosher and happy Pesach. We should ensure that we have a HAPPY Pesach and a KOSHER Purim. We should arrive at the Seder night neither tired nor aching but happy, so that this night will be a powerful experience for the kids, and a great source of faith in Hashem, the Redeemer of Israel.

"Dirt is not chametz and children are not the Pesach sacrifice!"