

מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ

MIKRA'EI KODESH

A Compilation of Pesach
Divrei Torah, Halakhot, and Guidelines



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SEPHARDIC BET MIDRASH

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***Important Note:** Please do not discard this publication into a normal trash can. It can be discarded in any of the *geniza* boxes located in our synagogues. Thank you!

Laws of Pesach

The following is based on Rabbi Yosef Bitton's "Pesach Made Simple: A Guide for the Laws of Pesach," published in the year 2020/5780

This guide is dedicated to the success and continued health of all health workers battling COVID-19 around the world. We are keeping in special regard Dr. Adam Harari (my son in law), an anesthesiologist who is part of the team running the ICU at Maimonides hospital. May Hashem protect him and all our health workers and bring us a speedy redemption.

I. The Eight Mitzvot of Pesach

In his introduction to Mishne Torah Hilkhos Pesach, Maimonides lists and describes a total of **eight biblical Mitzvot** related to Pesach. This list does not include the Mitzvot that have to do with the Pesach sacrifice (Korban Pesach).

There are **three** positive commandments and **five** prohibitions related to Pesach.

Three Positive Commandments:

1 - אכילת מצה

The first biblical positive commandment is to eat Matza on the first night of Pesach. In the Diaspora, this obligation automatically extends to include the second night of the holiday. For the rest of Pesach, it is forbidden to eat Chametz, but there is no formal obligation to eat matsa.

2 - והגדת לבנך

The second positive commandment is to tell our children the story of our slavery in Egypt and our miraculous redemption during the first night of Pesach. We do this during the Seder (once in Israel and twice in the diaspora). This story is narrated and explained in the Haggada of Pesach. This Mitzva includes many other Mitzvot and traditions, such as drinking the four cups of wine, eating the maror, etc.

3 - השבתת חמץ

The third positive Mitzva is renouncing the possession of our Chametz on the eve of Pesach that is the 14th of Nisan (Wednesday April 8th, 2020) before noon.

Five Negative Commandments:

4 - איסור אכילת חמץ

The first prohibition is that of eating Chametz during Pesach (the next section defines Chametz). This prohibition also includes se-or, or natural yeast.

5 - איסור אכילת תערובת חמץ

The second prohibition is against eating any food containing Chametz or a combination of Chametz during Pesach. The Gemara mentions as examples of food containing Chametz the *Kutab haBabli*, a type of cottage cheese (cottage=כֹּתֶת?) which contained bits of bread, and *shekebar haMadi*, an alcoholic beverage made from grain, like beer.

6 - בל-יראה

The third prohibition is that of owning Chametz during Pesach. This prohibition takes effect regardless of where the Chametz is found.

7 - בל-ימצא

The fourth prohibition is of owning Chametz during Pesach. This and the previous prohibition are in fact identical, there is no difference between them and they apply in exactly the same way. This is an exceptional case in the entire Tora.

8 - איסור אכילת חמץ ערב פסח אחר חצות היום

The fifth prohibition is that of eating Chametz from noon on Pesach eve. The rabbis extended this prohibition to two hours before noon, meaning that Chametz can only be consumed until the end of the fourth hour of the day. In our community (Great Neck, NY) this year this would fall on Wednesday April 8th at 10AM. It is important to mention that these "hours" are not fixed "60 minutes" hours. They are *shaot zmaniyot*, "daylight hours", which are obtained by dividing the daylight period of the day, from dawn to dusk, by twelve.

II. What is Chametz?

Out of the eight Mitzvot of Pesach we mentioned, six relate to Chametz. During Pesach we are not allowed to eat, benefit from or own Chametz.

What is Chametz?

Chametz is any fermented substance, solid or liquid, which comes from one of the following five grains: wheat, rye, spelt, barley and oats. These are also the five grains which are generally used to make bread, pastries, cakes, cookies, pizza, pasta, baked products, many

candies, and other edibles.

Liquid Chametz

The fermentation process does not only affect products with “flour” that come from these grains. It also affects liquid types of Chametz. Beer for example, is made from barley grains, which are soaked in water to ferment. Beer (like whiskey and many other alcoholic beverages made out of one of these grains) is considered Chametz, although the grain was never converted into flour.

Other Fermented Foods

A fermented food which does not come from or contain any of these five grains does not become Chametz, even if it undergoes a fermentation process. For example, wine goes through a fermentation process, but it is not Chametz since it is made from grapes. The same applies to other alcoholic beverages. For example, sake (known in Japan as “rice wine”), is made from fermented rice and is not Chametz.

Non-fermented Bread: Matza

Finally, not everything that comes from these five grains is Chametz. In fact, Kosher Matza, which is considered a type of bread, should only be made from one of these five grains. Matza is called the “bread of poverty” or לחם עני. In English it is called “unleavened bread”.

III. How Do Chametz & Matza Differ?

1. Time

The fundamental difference between bread and Matza is time. Bread and Matza are made with the same basic ingredients: flour and water. The difference is that when preparing Matza, once the flour is mixed with water, the dough cannot be left to rest. The dough must be kneaded and baked in less than 18 minutes. If from the time the flour comes into contact with water it is left idle for 18 minutes or more, the dough undergoes a fermentation process. This fermentation is called in Hebrew “Chimutz”, and the product of this fermentation is called “Chametz”.

2. Water

If the flour made from one of the five grains is mixed exclusively with fruit juice, honey or eggs (without any water) fermentation/ Chimutz will not take place. Technically, if I make a dough by mixing wheat flour with pure fruit juice, and I bake the dough, this will be called Matza Ashira, “enriched Matza”, and it is not considered Chametz.

3. Se-or

Yeast (Heb: se-or/ שאור) is part of the biblical prohibition of Chametz, even though yeast is not an edible food by itself but an additive. Today we mostly use commercial yeast which is bought in a supermarket and which many of us use mainly to bake Halot for Shabbat. Until a century ago, however, yeast was usually produced at home. How is yeast prepared at home? A mixture of flour and water is mixed and then kept for a period of four days. This mixture becomes sourdough, which smells like alcohol and is known as “natural yeast”. Sourdough is used as the catalyst for the process of fermentation in making home-made bread. In other words, when preparing bread, if we introduce some yeast into a simple dough, the fermentation process accelerates, and the dough grows bigger and spongier, resulting in a soft and tasty bread. All of the restrictions around Chametz--regarding its use, possession and benefit — also apply to se-or, natural or commercial yeast.

IV. Rice & Kitniyot

Based on the definition of Chametz, it is clear that rice is not included in its prohibition.

The Talmud records a minority opinion from Rabbi Yohanan ben Nuri (1C CE), a sage from Eretz Israel, who argued against consuming rice during Pesach. The Gemara also records the case of Rabbah, a famous Amora from Babel, who used to eat rice in the Pesach Seder in front of Rab Huna, perhaps to show that rice is completely allowed in Pesach. The Gemara concludes that rice is not Chametz and that it can be eaten in Pesach (Pesachim 114b).

The Ashkenazi custom, however, is to refrain from consuming rice on Pesach. This is not because Ashkenazi authorities consider rice Chametz. Why do Ashkenazi Jews not consume rice on Pesach? Because it is fairly easy to confuse - visually - rice with wheat, in terms of ears, grains and flour. Moreover, until about a century ago, food products were not sold packaged in the shelves of supermarkets or grocery stores. Food was sold in street markets by weight. Under these conditions, it was not uncommon to find some grains of wheat mixed with grains of rice. Rice and wheat grains could be sold in the same booths, and merchants used the same pallets and scales for both.

Additionally, the fields where rice was harvested used to be near the same fields where wheat or barley was

harvested. Because of this, some grains of wheat could be mixed in with rice. As will be discussed below, the prohibition of Chametz during Pesach is so strict that a single grain of wheat would turn a whole plate of rice into Chametz. All these elements contributed to the custom of abstaining from rice on Pesach.

It is worth noting that prohibiting rice on Pesach is not an exclusive tradition of Ashkenazi Jews. Sephardic Jews are divided on the question of rice. Moroccan Jews and Jews from other North African communities (except Egypt) also avoid consuming rice during Pesach. Generally, Jews from Israel, Iran, Iraq, Syria and other Middle Eastern countries consume rice during Pesach. To avoid the possibility of the accidental presence of a grain of wheat in rice, the custom of Middle Eastern Jewish communities that allow rice on Pesach is to check it carefully three times before using it.

Ashkenazi tradition prohibits the consumption of many other things which are not Chametz such as legumes, beans, corn, etc. These foods are known as **Kitniyot**.

Now, even those who follow the tradition of refraining from consuming rice, corn and other legumes (kitniyot) during Pesach, can keep these products in their possession during Pesach. There is no need to discard or sell these foods before Pesach (Shulhan Arukh, Rama, 453:1).

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, a known Ashkenazi rabbinic authority in Israel and author of the book *Penine Halakha*, points out that although the Ashkenazi custom is to avoid the consumption of Kitniyot products during Pesach, this rule applies when the legumes are or constitute the majority of that food item (see *Mishna Berura idem*, 9). But if the kitniyot are present in a small proportion, and/or if the kitniyot are used as a food additive (like: corn fructose, corn starch, etc.) that food is not forbidden for consumption during Pesach, even for those who refrain from kitniyot during Pesach.

V. Medicine & Non-Edible Chametz

Non-edible Chametz is permitted to own and use during Pesach. This includes any product that is not suitable for human or animal consumption, even if these products may contain Chametz. Examples of non-edible Chametz are: Cosmetics, glue, shampoos, deodorants, soaps, detergents or other cleaning products, etc. In all these cases it is not necessary to ensure an absence of Chametz in these products, nor do they need to have a special

rabbinical seal or certification for Pesach (Rabbi Obadia Yosef, *Yalqut Yosef*, 360: 31, 361: 68).

For Sephardim, it is also allowed to use drugs and medications that come in the form of non-chewable capsules or hard pills, that is, pills that are swallowed with water. The reason for this is that when a medicine comes in the form of a hard capsule or a non-chewable tablet, it is considered “inedible”. Therefore even if that medication contains a Chametz element (like wheat starch, which is nowadays highly unlikely - see below), it can be consumed during Pesach (*Yalqut Yosef Mo’adim*, 362: 40).

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed explains that today many Ashkenazi rabbis follow an Halakhic criterion similar to that of Rabbi Obadia Yosef’s in this area (see *Penine Halakha Pesach* p. 102, 103). Additionally, on the subject of non-chewable pills Rabbi Melamed makes an important practical observation: nowadays, virtually all medical hard pills are made with potato or corn starch – whose consumption in Pesach would still be allowed even for the strictest criteria– instead of wheat starch. This is, among other reasons, because wheat protein, gluten, is harmful for those with celiac disease.

As such, it is advisable, if possible, to ask doctors to prescribe medication in the form of non-chewable pills for consumption on Pesach. Needless to say, in the case of a serious medical condition, one should take any medication that is necessary.

Stricter Opinions:

Many prominent Ashkenazi halakhic authorities also say that any non-chewable medication should be allowed for Pesach. But in their opinion, vitamins should not be part of this category. According to these opinions, vitamins, even if they come in the form of non-chewable capsules or pills, cannot be used in Pesach unless one verifies that they do not contain Chametz. Some Sephardic Rabbis also agree with this criterion. Many Ashkenazi rabbis also adopt a stricter stance on the use of non-edible Chametz for Pesach (cleaning products or perfumes made from wheat alcohol, for example).

Liquid/Chewable Medicine

Powdered vitamins, food supplements or syrups should have Passover Kosher certification to be consumed on Passover, or one must be absolutely sure that they do not contain any Chametz ingredient in their composition. Bear in mind that many dietary supplements and vitamins are made with elements that are 100% Chametz (eg, grain fibers, wheat germ, etc.).

According to many rabbis, Ashkenazim and Sefaradim, one should also make sure that personal hygiene oral products that have a pleasant taste do not contain any Chametz element in their composition (for example, toothpaste, or flavored lipsticks, etc.).

VI. Chametz Mixed in Your Food

What is the difference between the prohibition of consuming Chametz and consuming any other non-kosher food? (For example, bread during Pesach vs. a non-kosher meat during the rest of the year).

One of the main differences relates to the percentage of Chametz that when mixed in a food renders that food forbidden.

Normally, if a food contains a non-Kosher product in a proportion that is **less than 1/60** of that food, the food is still Kosher. For example: what is the status of a meat stew into which you accidentally drop a few drops of milk? If you assess that the milk that fell into the stew constitutes less than 1/60 of the total stew (less than 1.6%), then the stew is Kosher.

During Pesach, however, **any quantity of Chametz renders the food forbidden**. Even if one small grain of wheat or a little bit of flour falls into a large stew it renders the stew not kosher for Pesach. In other words, even if the Chametz elements are less than 1.6% of the food it renders it all forbidden.

As such, since even a minimal amount of Chametz can cause a large meal to become non-kosher for Pesach, the possibility of “accidental” Chametz contamination during Pesach is very real. Therefore, any meal that is made during Pesach must adhere to strict standards. Hotel and restaurants kosher for Pesach, for instance, make sure not only that all the food’s constitutive elements are Chametz-free but also, that none of the workers involved in food prep are bringing any Chametz to the premises where the food is being processed, etc. Even a small bread crumb that accidentally falls from a worker’s meal can render an entire kosher meal as non-kosher for Pesach.

Exceptions

For Sephardi Jews, the rule that we just mentioned applies in a situation where the Chametz element was mixed into the non Chametz food **during Pesach**. However when a food was made **before Pesach**, we go back to the normal Kashrut rule: the non-Kosher for Pesach element must be present in a quantity above 1.6%

to render the food as not Kosher for Pesach.

Before Pesach begins, therefore, we can purchase normal non-Chametz food, even without a specific Kosher or Pesach supervision certificate, and use it for Pesach. Obviously, fresh fruits and vegetables; fresh fish; fresh meat and poultry do not need any special supervision for Pesach. And we can also use during Pesach some simple processed foods like regular tea, pure sugar, regular salt, and many other foods that do not contain any Chametz ingredient in their composition.

In many Sephardic communities Rabbis write a list of common food products, like jams, coffees, potato chips, ketchup, mayonnaise, that were not made under a specific Pesach supervision. Through this list, which is a result of careful research, the community rabbis verify that no Chametz element in a proportion higher than 1.6% was used in the basic composition. Usually, the list would clarify that these products should be bought before Pesach.

All what we just said, it is according to the Sephardic tradition. According to the Ashkenazi custom, however, any food that is to be consumed during Pesach has to be prepared or manufactured under special rabbinical supervision for Pesach, because **even before Pesach**, any amount of Chametz renders that food as non-Kosher for Pesach (chozer ve’neor).

Chametz Machinery

Another major difference between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Halakhic approaches to Pesach concerns food that does not contain a Chametz ingredient in its composition and might have been processed in Chametz machinery. For Ashkenazim such foods are forbidden for Pesach and for Sephardim allowed.

Why? The Sephardic tradition follows the rule “*Noten Taam bar Noten taam DeHetera Mutar Lekhatechila*”. This means that when the (intangible) particles of a prohibited substance are absorbed in the machinery and then these particles get reabsorbed in the non-Chametz food, it results in a kind of a “Chametz cross contamination”. And if that substance was considered Kosher at the time that the absorption took place, since Chametz before Pesach is allowed, the final product is Mutar (permitted).

Because of the strict Biblical prohibition of Chametz, many Jews impose upon themselves extra restrictions or Humrot. It is important to know that these restrictions

should be taken as an individual matter (*Iachmir leAtzmo*) and it is **forbidden to teach or instruct people to follow Humrot as if they were the actual Halakha**.

This includes, for example, instructing Sephardic Jews to follow restrictions of the Ashkenazi Minhag or vice versa. Rabbi Obadia Yosef (Yechave Daat, Alef, 11) has written extensively about the severity of teaching extra restrictions, especially regarding the Laws of Pesach.

VII. Keeping and Owning Chametz

One of the elements that makes the Biblical prohibition of Chametz so unique is that, unlike any other forbidden foods, we are not allowed to **own** Chametz.

There are three Mitzvot in the Tora related to this prohibition:

1. **בל יראה** “Your Chametz shall not be seen in your property” (Exodus 13:7);
2. **בל ימצא** “Your Chametz shall not be found in your premises” (Exodus 12:19).
3. **השבתת חמץ** “You shall end [ownership of] your Chametz on Pesach eve” (Exodus 12:15).

The Tora sheBe'al pe, the authoritative (halakhic) Jewish tradition, explains that the first two verses, the two prohibitions, are considered one single restriction, that is: “having” or “owning” Chametz during Pesach. It is forbidden to own Chametz, even when that Chametz is not physically in your house or premises.

Maimonides explains this concept in his Mishne Torah: In Chametz u'Matza (4:2) he writes “Chametz [food] belonging to a Jew...even though it is buried, or located in another city, or is entrusted to a gentile, causes him to violate [the commandments]: “[Chametz] shall not be seen” and “[hamets] shall not be found.”

We also have a third Mitzva called “tashbitu” which our oral tradition interprets as actively disowning our Chametz before Pesach begins.

In sum, there are two identical prohibitions (a unique case in the Tora) and one affirmative commandment, virtually for the same matter: **the prohibition of owning Chametz** during Pesach.

Strictly speaking, (and following Maimonides' opinion) these three Mitzvot would be fulfilled at once by

performing one single act: the **'bitul Chametz'**: verbally and wholeheartedly renouncing the ownership of any Chametz that belongs to us, regardless of where that Chametz is located.

By declaring the Chametz ownerless, one fulfills the Mitzva of not owning Chametz and avoids transgressing two prohibitions. This is even if - accidentally - we have kept Chametz in our premises.

Why, then, can't we just declare all our Chametz ownerless through the 'bitul', and keep Chametz at our homes? Why do we still have to search and remove it from our homes? Our Rabbis in the Mishna instructed us to physically get rid of all our Chametz before Pesach begins, and to renounce the ownership of any Chametz we might still have and have not found (“bitul Chametz”). This is because there are some practical complications with just “declaring” our Chametz ownerless while keeping it at home.

First, if we possess valuable Chametz, such as expensive whiskey, we might not mean wholeheartedly that we renounce its possession. Secondly, Chametz is the most common food. So even if we declare our Chametz ownerless, while keeping it at home, we might end up consuming Chametz accidentally.

Following the Rabbis' instructions this is what we actually do:

- (1) We should clean our home, cars, offices and any other properties before Pesach to **identify and remove** all Chametz from them.
- (2) We run a **final and formal search** of all our properties to make sure that we have removed everything Chametz from them (Bediqat Chametz, the night before Pesach).
- (3) We **physically dispose** of or get rid of any Chametz found in our properties before and during the search (Bi-ur Chametz). There are many ways to dispose of our Chametz: We can give our Chametz as a gift or charity to a non-Jew; or if we have bread leftovers, for example, we can throw it to the birds or to fish, or burn it or dispose of it in a garbage outside our premises.
- (4) Then, after we get rid of our Chametz, we **recite the kal hamira** — that is the formal Bitul Chametz-saying: “whatever Chametz we may still own anywhere, which was not detected during the bediqa and/or was

not removed by us, does not belong to us anymore, and from now on it should be considered ownerless (hefker) as the dust of the earth”.

VIII. Selling Chametz

In general, you only have to get rid of Chametz which is suitable for human or animal consumption.

In terms of food items, one can keep anything so long as one makes sure that it does not contain any of these five grains: wheat, barley, oats, rye, spelt (note that anything which contains gluten, is Chametz). You do not need to sell your pots and pans, or anything that might contain “invisible” Chametz (Chametz balua). Just put those utensils away during Pesach.

Medical pills, perfumes, cosmetics or any non-edible items could be kept, regardless of their composition. Nowadays, most communities, Ashkenazi and Sephardic, arrange a Chametz-selling system in which community members give their rabbi a power of attorney to sell their Chametz.

This procedure is a Halakhic leniency done in order to avoid the loss of expensive Chametz items like expensive whiskeys, etc.

Historically, Sephardic Jews did not practice a mekhirat Chametz (=selling of Chametz) procedure. They simply got rid of their Chametz before Pesach. The only exceptional case in which Sephardic rabbis authorized selling the Chametz was the case of a food-store owner, to avoid a very significant loss. In this case, a non-Jew would make a down payment for the total of the merchandise and from the moment the non-Jew made that payment, the Chametz merchandise would belong completely to the buyer.

Normally, I would encourage Sephardic Jews to preserve our ancient Minhag and not sell their Chametz, getting rid of it instead. But this year (2020) under the current situation of quarantine that no one knows when is going to end, many people fear supply shortages. Some families fear that if one of them contracts the virus, then they might not be able to easily purchase food, etc.

Because of this, this year, people who are fearful of a supply shortage in the area they are living, can rely on selling their Chametz. And B”H next year, we will go back to follow our traditions.

Special Note for 2020: We are all having a challenging time at these moments. But remember that many people are having a *very* difficult time. I’m thinking about many workers in the area where I live, many latino families, are without a day job and might not have enough to eat. This year we have this great Hesed (and Kiddush HaShem!) opportunity: consider giving our Chametz, in a safe way, to the needy people that live in our area. In times of crisis, we can bring the worst or the best of us: let’s bring the best of us now.

IX. Making Your Kitchen Kosher for Pesach

During Pesach we do not use the same utensils or the same dishes we use throughout the year for Chametz. Although the utensils in which we cook might be completely clean of Chametz, without any visible remaining food, the surface’s pores of these utensils absorb the flavor of the foods cooked in them. For example: if I cook meat and then in the same pot (even after I clean it) I boil eggs, the eggs would absorb some of the taste of the meat. Likewise, when we cook something in utensils used for cooking Chametz, some Chametz flavor will be reabsorbed in the food we prepare for or during Pesach.

It is customary and recommended, therefore, to have a set of dishes, plates and utensils to be used exclusively for Pesach.

When this is not possible, and especially this year under our extraordinary circumstances, we might use for Pesach the same utensils we utilize throughout the year for Chametz, after they go through a process known as hag’ala, (a kind of sterilization) to remove non visible residual Chametz that may be absorbed within the walls and pores of these utensils.

Before making the Hag’ala we need to make sure that those utensils are thoroughly cleaned of any visible of Chametz (חמץ בעין). The Hag’ala then ejects the Chametz absorbed (בלוע) in the walls of the utensil. Eliminating these adsorbed particles takes place under the same conditions the absorption of these substances occurred (כבולעו כך פולטו). The pores of a metallic surface open up when exposed to heat, and that is when absorption occurs. Consequently, the expulsion of these particles would also occur by exposing these utensils to heat.

Now, when a utensil is used throughout the year to serve or prepare cold Chametz food, it can be used during Pesach after cleaning it thoroughly from any visible rests of Chametz. These utensils don't need to undergo the Hag'ala process since absorption of Hamatez only takes place at high temperatures. Examples of these types of utensils are: plastic cups and containers, and trays that are used mainly (רוב שימוש) to serve cold food.

Examples of hag'ala:

Metal: Metal cutlery such as forks, spoons or knives, must be first cleaned of all visible residue of Chametz. Then, they must be immersed in a pot of boiling water. Then we wash them with cold water, and they may be used for Pesach. Hot water opens the metal pores, allowing the ejection of any absorbed Chametz. The cold water closes the pores again.

Glass: According to the Sephardic tradition, glassware, cups, plates, etc, used throughout the year for Chametz, should be washed thoroughly and can be used for Pesach without having to undergo the Hag'ala process. Glass is sterile, and it does not absorb any food substance through its pores, and therefore there is no Chametz to remove from its walls. This applies even for those glass utensils that are used at high temperatures for cooking or serving hot Chametz food.

Notice that this Halakha is very different in the Ashkenazi tradition. Some Ashkenazi rabbis like the Rama say that since glass is made from sand, glass utensils should be regarded as clay utensils, which are not susceptible to Hag'ala, and therefore cannot be used on Pesach because Hag'ala is useless for them. Other Ashkenazi Rabbis allow a Hag'ala process for glassware. Consult your community Rabbi.

Clay utensils, pottery and porcelain (Kele Heres): If these items were used for Chametz, they cannot be used for Pesach, because they are not susceptible to Hag'ala. The Rabbis explained that unlike metal or other utensils, clay utensils eliminate the substances absorbed in their walls in an erratic and inconsistent way. That is, sometimes they would expel an absorbed flavor and sometimes they will not. Because we cannot rely on the Hag'ala process to sterilize these types of utensils completely, they cannot be used for Pesach.

Most contemporary rabbis believe that regular porcelain utensils should be considered of the same category as clay utensils. However, there are many other considerations to take into account which can allow for

exceptions to this. Some factors which might indicate a more lenient opinion in time of need are: whether these utensils were used for cooking or for serving food; the temperature of the food served; whether the china was not used for a long time; whether it is common porcelain or glass coated, etc.

If you have further questions about this and other types of utensils that are mentioned in this brief section, please consult your community rabbi.

Sink and countertops: The sink, metal or porcelain, should be cleaned of any food residue and then pouring on it boiling water. Countertops and tables, if possible, should be cleaned and then by pouring on them boiling water. If pouring hot water is not possible because of the material they are made of (a wood table or countertop, for example) they should be cleaned and covered for Pesach. If you are using a regular table, clean it carefully and then place on it a Pesach or a new tablecloth.

Dishwasher: Before Pesach begins, after the dishwasher is completely clean and empty, it should run on an empty cycle with detergent. After this, it will be suitable for Pesach.

Oven: The oven should not be used for 24 hours and then cleaned thoroughly afterwards. If it is a self-cleaning oven, it should go through one self-clean cycle, and then it becomes Kosher for Pesach. If the oven does not have a self-cleaning feature, after it is thoroughly cleaned it should run on its highest temperature setting for half hour (including the oven racks). Following this the oven is Kosher for Pesach.

Microwave: Fill a microwave-safe bowl with water and some detergent. Insert it in the microwave and turn it on until the microwave walls are filled with its steam. The vapor penetrates the walls rendering the microwave Kosher for Pesach.

X. Erev Pesach - Bedikat Chametz (Searching for Chametz)

As we've explained, one of the biblical prohibitions of Pesach is to own Chametz. To prevent this, we clean our houses and other properties (car, office, etc) before Pesach and remove any Chametz found. Then, the night before Pesach, when the first stars come out (**this year, 2020, April 7, at approximately 8.00pm**) we do the Bedikat Chametz. Bedikat Chametz is a formal search of

our properties to look for any Chametz food that might have been left inadvertently.

How do we do the Bedikat Chametz? Customarily, we hold a candle or a flashlight and we search every place where we could have brought, eaten or stored food. We should pay special notice in our search to the kitchen and all food storage spaces, such as the pantry, refrigerator, freezer, etc. Remember that our mission is to look for "Hametz food": sweets, wafers, cookies, pastries, frozen foods, fiber drinks, cereals, and alcoholic drinks made from grain (beer, whiskey, most vodkas, etc).

Before beginning the search we say this berakha:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל בִּיעוּר חֻמֶּץ

*"Barukh Ata A- donay, E-lohenu Melekh ha'Olam
Asher Quiddeshanu beMitSvotav veTsivanu Al
Bi'ur Hamets"*

Then we say the first Kal Hamira, the formula to formally and legally renounce the possession of any Chametz that belongs to us and we have not found in the Bedika. The text (for Sephardic Jews) is as follows:

כָּל חֻמִּירָא דְאִיכָא בְרִשְׁוֹתֵי, דְלֵא חֻמֵּתִיָּה, וְדֵלֵא
בְעֵרְתִיָּה, וְדֵלֵא יִדְעָנָא לִיָּה, לְבִטֵּל וְלִהְיוּ כְעֶפְרָא
דְאַרְעָא.

*"Kal Hamira Deika Birshuti, Dela Haziteh Vedela
Biarteh, Libtil Veleheve Hafquer Ke'afra Dear'a."*

*"All Chametz or leavening substance that belongs
to me, that I have not seen or eliminated, should be
considered ownerless as the dust of the earth"*

At the end of the bedika we keep in a safe place the Chametz that we are going to consume or discard the next morning.

What happens if you spend Pesach out of town?

When one spends Pesach away, the searching for Chametz at home should be done the night before leaving home. So, this year, this would be true if you leave before Tuesday April 7th at night. This early Bedikat Chametz should be done without reciting any blessing. Upon arriving at your new Pesach residence (usually,

your hotel room), you should search for Chametz once again, on Tuesday April 7th, after nightfall. For this second search you should recite the blessing "...asher quiddeshanu bemisvotav vesivanu 'al bi'ur hames."

You should search for Chametz in your room (even if it is clean), your suitcases, your bags, making sure to go carefully through any snacks in your room, or those you might have brought, etc. In a hotel room, we recommend using only a flashlight for the search.

XI. Erev Pesach - Ta'anit Bekhorot (Fast of the Firstborn)

On the eve of Pesach we observe the fast of the firstborn. Firstborn men who are in good health should fast as a recognition of the protection of HaShem, who guarded the Jewish firstborn when all the firstborn of Egypt died. Since this is not a mandatory fast (it was not promulgated by the Tora or by the Rabbis of the Gemara), many avoid it by participating in a festive religious ceremony (for example a Berit Mila or a Pidion).

Since these occasions cannot be anticipated, it is customary for communities to organize a Siyum Masekhet, a conclusion of a Talmudic treatise, Mishna or Gemara. This *siyum* is considered a festive event and meritorious enough to avoid this fast. After participating in this *siyum* the first-born may eat on the eve of Pesach.

XII. Erev Pesach – Biur Chametz (Getting Rid of Chametz)

In the morning of Passover eve - **this year, 2020, on Wednesday April 8th**- we are permitted to eat Chametz until the fourth hour of the day (in the Mashadi community in Great Neck we set this time every year at 10:00 a.m.). Once we finish eating our Chametz, we collect any leftovers and combine it with any Chametz found during the previous night's Bedika. Next, we proceed to "eliminate" it.

The traditional way of disposing of the Chametz is by burning it. But this can also be done by throwing the Chametz to the birds or to the fish, or disposing it in a garbage bin outside our home. After we disposed of the Chametz we proceed to verbalize its last annulment, a more detailed declaration:

כָּל חֲמִירָא דְאִיכָא בְרִשְׁוּתֵי, דְחֲזִיתִיה וְדָלָא
חֲזִיתִיה, דְבַעֲרִיתִיה וְדָלָא בַעֲרִיתִיה, לְבִטִיל וְלֹהוּי
כַּעֲפָרָא דְאַרְעָא

“Kal Hamira Deika Birshuti, Dehaziteh Vedela Haziteh, Debiarteh Vedela Biarteh, Libtil Veleheve Hafqer Keafra Dear’a”

“Any Chametz or leavening substance that belongs to me, that I have seen or have not seen, that I have eliminated or that I did not remove, should be considered without owner as the dust of the earth”.

The elimination of Chametz and the verbalization of this declaration must be done before the fifth hour of the day (in the Mashadi community in Great Neck we set this time every year at 11:00 AM).

XIII. Erev Pesach – Eating Matza

On the eve of Pesach we should not eat Matza. We reserve the flavor of the Matza for its ideal moment: the night of the Seder. We can eat Matza ‘ashira, also known as Egg Matza or sweet Matza (Note that Ashkenazi Jews do not consume Egg Matza on Pesach eve). On Passover eve we also desist from eating a meal in the afternoon to save our appetite for the night of the Seder.

XIV. The Pesach Seder – Step by Step

KADESH

We start the Seder by consecrating the Holiday of Pesach and inaugurating it through the Kiddush. Upon concluding the Kiddush and the blessing of Shehecheyanu everyone drinks their first cup of wine, while reclining towards their left side. Throughout the Seder we have to drink four cups of wine. Each cup symbolizes a sort of “Lechayim” parallel to the four expressions that the Tora used to describe the unfolding of our freedom from Egypt. If one cannot drink wine or diluted wine, grape juice can be used instead.

U'RGHATZ

We wash our hands without saying any Berakha. This is in order to eat the Karpas, which is dipped in vinegar or salted water. In ancient times it was very common to have an aperitif (celery or another vegetable) before the meal to induce the appetite. Our sages instruct us to dip the karpas twice during the Seder to stir the curiosity of

the children and stimulate their questions. These questions are integrated into the famous text: *Ma Nishtana*. The first question refers to the dipping of the Karpas.

KARPAS

We take a small piece of Karpas, (celery) and we dip it in salt water or vinegar to remind us of the tears our ancestors shed in captivity. Before eating the Karpas we recite the blessing for vegetables, *Bore Peri haAdama*. As we have explained all these deviances from the ordinary dining habits are deliberate and focused toward one single goal: to motivate the children to ask questions in order to ensure their active participation during the Seder.

YACHATZ

We take the middle Matza from the three Matzot on the table and split it into two unequal parts. The smallest portion is returned to its place, between the two whole Matzot, and the biggest portion is kept for the Afikoman.

MAGGID

Now we start to recite the Hagada, the story of our foreparents' enslavement in Egypt and their miraculous redemption. It is recommended to translate and explain the Hagada in English if Hebrew is not understood by all. Several people can participate in the reading of the Hagada. The most important thing is to encourage the children's participation; they are the true protagonists of this night. The questions of “Ma Nishtana”; the symbolism of the four sons; the songs of Had Gadya and Echad Mi Yodea': all these elements of the Seder are directed to the youngest participants. **The Seder should not become an adult's monologue but rather an intergenerational dialogue.**

The purpose of the Hagada reading is not to recite a text as if we were saying some kind of a prayer. If we do not make the meaning of what we are reading understood, the educational message of the Hagada is lost. Parents should feel that we are transmitting the keys for Jewish continuity to our children on this night.

After finishing the Hagada, we drink the second cup of wine reclined on our left, without saying any additional Berakha.

ROCHTZA

We wash our hands in the traditional way, pouring water on the right hand and then on the left hand. Before we dry our hands, we recite the blessing *Al Netilat Yadayim*. This washing is not merely for hygienic purposes. *Netilat Yadayim* means: the elevation of the hands. Through this Mitzvah our hands and the food they touch acquire a spiritual dimension that elevates them.

MOTZI MATZA

We take now the three Matzot – the two whole Matzot and the broken one in the middle – and we recite the blessing: *haMotzi Lechem Min haAretz*. Then, we place down the bottom Matza and, holding the one and a half upper Matzot we pronounce the Berakha: *Al Akhilat Matza*.

We use now the broken Matza because the Matza is *Lechem Oni*, the bread of the poor, and a poor person usually eats pieces of food. After the Berakha is said everyone should eat Matza, leaning to the left. For the first two nights we use “Matza Shemura”

MAROR

We take a portion of Maror, the bitter vegetable, usually lettuce. We dip the Maror in the Charoset (Haligh), and before eating it say the blessing *Al Akhilat Maror*. The Maror reminds us of the bitterness of our slavery in Egypt, and the Charoset resembles the bricks we had to make from mud and straw in our forced labor.

Remembering our suffering in Egypt stimulates our sensitivity toward other human beings that live in oppression. The Tora commands us to be sensitive to people in pain, since we have experienced it in our own flesh: “*And you shall love the stranger (the paradigm of the oppressed) for strangers you have been in the land of Egypt*” (Shemot 22, 20). No one understands suffering better than the one who has experienced it.

KORECH

We take the third Matza and we make a sandwich with Maror and Charoset inside. We eat it leaning on the left. This food is in remembrance of the Pesach sacrifice that used to be eaten in the Bet haMikdash in Jerusalem, together with Matza and Maror. That is why before eating it we say: *Zekher laMikdash keHillel*, etc, this is a remembrance of the Temple's service.

SHULCHAN OREKH

Now it is time for the dinner of Pesach. We should make every possible effort to create an environment of harmony, joy, and thanksgiving to the Almighty for our liberation from Egypt. We ought to be aware that parents are planting in their children's little hearts the seed of faith in the Almighty and the pride of belonging to the Jewish nation. Tonight we, the adults, must become teachers of Jewish history, knowing that it's up to us to transmit the memories of our past to the future generations.

TZAFUN

After finishing the meal, we eat the Afikoman dessert (or after meal), leaning on our left. This is the Matza we saved from the beginning of the Seder (see Yachatz). The Afikoman remind us of the sacrifice of Pesach that used to be eaten at the end of the Seder, as a kind of a dessert, when everyone was already satisfied. It is a tradition for the children to search for the Afikoman, hidden at the beginning of the Seder, and it is customary to give a present to the child that finds it. In this way, children will want to stay awake until the end of the Seder.

BAREKH

After finishing the Afikoman, we recite the *Birkat HaMazon*, the blessing after the meal in which we thank God for the food we just had. In this blessing we acknowledge The Almighty who sustains every living creature, we thank Him for the land of Israel that He bestowed us, and we ask Him to quicken our redemption and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Upon concluding Birkat HaMazon, we drink the third cup of wine, leaning to the left, and reciting the berakha *Bore Peri haGefen*.

HALLEL

Lastly, and to bring the Seder to its conclusion, we read a series of Psalms and songs of praise to God, known as Hallel. We thank the Almighty for having been our Protector throughout our history and for saving us from the hands of all the tyrants that pursue our annihilation. As in every other Tefila, it would be useful to have a translation available to understand and better concentrate on the meaning of what we are saying.

At the end of the Hallel we drink the last of the four cups of wine, leaning to the left, without saying Bore Peri haGefen.

NIRTZAH

We end with the eternal Jewish wish to be "Next year in Yerushalayim!"

XV. FAQ

The following are some of the questions I received in previous years. I hope the answers will shed some light onto things that were not discussed at length in the Guide for Pesach.

Q: Am I allowed to use the tablecloths and dish towels that I usually use during the year after I wash them or it is better to use new ones?

A: You can use them after washing them. .

Q: In the Pesach Guide you said that we can use our glass dishes for Passover after we wash them thoroughly. Are we allowed to use all kinds of glass even if they have cuttings on them like crystal (glasses that don't have a smooth surface on them)?

A: If they are thoroughly washed, you are allowed to use them because there is no absorption/expulsion of any Chametz particles at the level of glass walls.

Q: Does fresh fish have to be Kosher for Passover?

A: No. Any Kosher fish for year round is also kosher for Pesach. Same thing goes for fresh unprocessed meat.

Q: If our domestic worker has Chametz in her room for herself is that OK?

A: We should instruct all people who work at our house or office not to bring anything Chametz during Pesach. Now, if the housekeeper or any of your employees brings something anyway, despite your warning and without your knowledge you are not accountable for it and you are not liable for the transgression of possessing Chametz during Pesach, because, although the Chametz is located in your premises it does not belong to you. Still, you have to be very careful that not leftovers of their Chametz food will be in contact with any of your food.

Q: Can Saffron be used for Pesach?

A: Pereg Saffron (Israel) can be used for Pesach, even without the Kosher for Passover sticker. Any other pure 100% Saffron, like Spanish and Persian Saffron, could also be used.

Q: Bottled water that we use with a water dispenser is OK to use for Pesach?

A: Yes, any mineral water is OK for pesach. Clean the dispenser thoroughly.

Q. At the moment of bedikat Chametz, are we allowed to talk between saying the Berakha "al biur Chametz" until doing the search and burning the bread?

A: Talking is allowed between the Berakha AL BIUR CHAMETZ and the BITUL (KAL CHAMIRA etc) only if you need to say something related or needed for the Bedika.

Q: I understand it's best to have wine for the Seder night, and if someone is diabetic they can dilute it with water. I wanted to know how much of the cup has to be wine and how much can be water?

A: More than half of the cup should be wine. Make sure the wine you use is 100% wine and does not already have any added water (Some wines are made with a lot of added water!)

Q: Would someone who just had a baby boy have to fast for their first born son on Erev Pesach?

A: According to the Minhag in our community, the father needs to fast for his first-born son.

Q: I'm a female firstborn, what does the Halakha say I should do for Taanit Bekhorot? I heard the first born is not supposed to eat Chametz, but I am not sure if that is for girls as well as guys.

A: In our community, the fast known as Taanit Bekhorot is only customary for first-born males, not females. Yet, many families in our community have the tradition that males –after they break the fast – and first born females, do not eat Chametz during Erev Pesach.

Why Recline to the Left?

Rabbi Yosef Bitton

One of the most important Mitzvot of Pesah is the celebration of the Seder. This occurs on the night of Nisan 15 and 16. The Seder is a very special celebratory dinner in which we perform certain gestures, physical and material, in order to recreate the experience of slavery and freedom.

We do this following the indication of the Sages who said "...in every generation we should feel as if we ourselves had left Egypt." The Pesah Seder, therefore, abounds in symbolisms related to experiencing as much as possible "physical" slavery and freedom.

Today we will deal with one of those symbols, one that expresses freedom (herut) known in Hebrew as haseba, (i.e. leaning/reclining). The Talmud, Maimonides, the Shulhan Arukh and practically all the rabbis indicate that it is an obligation to eat the Matsa, drink the four glasses of wine, etc. leaning on the left side.

Let's now see the origin and history of this custom. In ancient times common people would sit on the floor, around a table, to eat. The slaves, who in Athens or Rome constituted around 80% of the population, ate standing up. And the nobles, the royalty, the aristocracy, ate in a triclinium, especially when at a celebratory banquet.

The triclinium consisted on three or six couches organized in a U-shaped manner, which were "wide enough to accommodate three diners who reclined on their left side on cushions." The tables, where the food was served, were small semi-individual tables inside the U. People used their hands to bring food into their mouths. And why would they recline on the left side?

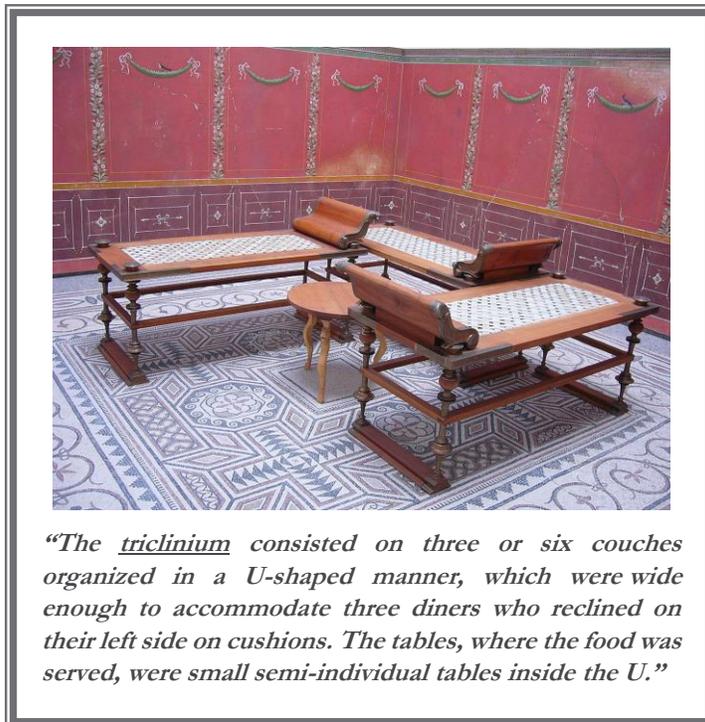
Simply because most of the diners used their right hand to eat.

Now we can understand a little better the symbolism of the haseba. The Sages of the Talmud established that to feel free on this night we should recline as the nobility and the aristocracy do. Even poor Jews, who were the great majority, should feel that night as free, important and well-off people, reclining comfortably on the left when eating (according to some rabbinic opinions, if one reclined on the right side he also risked choking).

We can now understand better that when the Sages said, for example, that the table should be "lifted" (עוקרים את השולחן) in order to awaken the attention of the children, they literally referred to lifting and removing the individual small tables where the food was served.

Over time the habit of eating in the triclinium fell into disuse. And some rabbis, like the Raaban (Abraham ben Nathan de Provence, France, 1155-1215), proposed to interrupt this custom, since in Europe the nobles sat on chairs, around the table. The vast majority of the rabbis, however, opined that we should not discontinue this ancient custom. And that if we do not recline while eating the Matsa or drinking the glasses of wine, we will not be fulfilling our obligation to its fullest. Some rabbis justified the permanence of this tradition by reassigning it to a different category: shinui, that is, those unusual gestures and actions we do in the Seder of Pesah to awake children's attention and questions.

Another issue that was discussed for centuries is whether women also had to recline while eating. The Talmud says no. And this is better understood when we



"The triclinium consisted on three or six couches organized in a U-shaped manner, which were wide enough to accommodate three diners who reclined on their left side on cushions. The tables, where the food was served, were small semi-individual tables inside the U."

take into account that at that time, this was not part of the protocol. The Talmud, however, mentions some exceptions, such as isha hashuba, an important woman. In the Roman Empire there were some women who belonged to the elite and were known as "roman matrons", (matronita in the Talmud).

Some rabbis of the Middle Ages, especially in Europe (Tosafot, Rema, etc.) thought that in their times (12-16

century) all women should recline, since "all our wives should be considered important women" Who can deny that?

In this case, the original view of the Talmud was readjusted, and today men and women, in virtually all Jewish communities, are equally obligated to the haseba.

Pesah, Matsah, & Maror - But Why?

Rabbi Joshua Maroof

One peculiar feature of the Haggada stands out year after year:

Rabban Gamliel used to say: Anyone who fails to mention three things on the night of Passover has not fulfilled his obligation. And what are they? The Paschal Sacrifice, Matsa and Maror.

The simplest interpretation of Rabban Gamliel's statement is that he is referring to the commandment to tell the story of the Exodus on the first night of Passover. Rabban Gamliel informs us that, unless the mitsvot of the Paschal offering, Matsa and Maror are discussed, one has not discharged one's obligation to speak about the Exodus. It is imperative that we identify the purpose of each one of these rituals on the Seder night.

This, however, poses an obvious problem. The mitsvot we are doing on the Seder night are not a part of the story! If Rabban Gamliel had insisted that anyone who forgets to mention the Ten Plagues has not done justice to the Exodus narrative, we would understand why. If he had ruled that anyone who fails to draw attention to the harshness of Pharaoh's oppression or the swiftness of the redemption had not captured the essence of the dramatic tale, we would accept it.

But explaining the commandments that we are about to perform on the night of Pesah - though important - is not a component of telling the story. Why should skipping that part of the Haggada invalidate our discussion of God's deliverance of His people from bondage?

Fascinatingly, this difficulty is not limited to the statement of Rabban Gamliel. There are several noteworthy instances in which the Haggada appears to value the discussion of the mitsvot of Passover more than the discussion of the Exodus itself. For example, consider the Haggada's instructions on how to respond to the query of the Wise Son:

You shall tell him the Laws of Passover that we do not have dessert after the Paschal offering.

What happened to the story of the Exodus? Why are we entering into a conversation about the rules and regulations of Pesah, when it seems we should be focused on gaining insight into the most fundamental event in our nation's history?

(Another memorable example is the discussion of the Rabbis in Bene Brak, which revolves around a practical halachic issue only tangentially related to Pesah).

I believe that the answer to this basic problem is surprisingly simple. It is contained in the language of the Torah itself:

When your son asks you tomorrow, saying, 'What are the testimonies, the statutes and the ordinances that Hashem our God commanded you?' And you shall say to your son, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand. And Hashem placed signs and wonders - great and terrible - in Egypt, against Pharaoh and his entire household before our eyes. And we He took out from there...And Hashem commanded us to do all of these statutes, to fear Hashem our God; for our benefit all of our days...

...the ultimate aim of the Seder is the enrichment of our observance of Judaism. We cannot allow the annual retelling of our ancestors dramatic Exodus to be reduced to an historical study...

A close examination of the Torah reveals that the mitsvah to retell the story of the Exodus is always mentioned in conjunction with the performance of the commandments of the Torah. A parent is typically portrayed as justifying his commitment to the halachic system based upon the historical experience of oppression and redemption in Egypt.

This indicates that the function of discussing the Exodus on Passover is not to entertain the family with historical trivia or midrashic tales. The Seder is not meant to transport us into the ancient past so that we can reminisce about a bygone era. Rather, the objective of Passover night is to draw from history so as to shed

light on the reasons for our current observance of Judaism.

This is precisely the message Rabban Gamliel is sending us. Our exploration of the Exodus must revolve around deepening our sense of commitment as Jews in the here-and-now. Otherwise, the dramatic narrative is reduced to an historical relic. The ultimate goal of Pesah is to revitalize our dedication to God each year through the performance of the mitzvot of the holiday. In order for this to happen, we must delve into the historical genesis of these commandments and reflect upon their relevance to the experience of our ancestors in Egypt.

The offering of the Paschal Lamb represented the Jews' rejection of the idolatrous worldview of the Egyptians, who worshipped the sheep as a god. The consumption of unleavened bread was a demonstration of our forefathers' rejection of the materialistic value system of Egypt. The Egyptian culture revolved around bread, the staple food of the wealthy man who lived luxuriously. Slaves, on the other hand, were sustained by unleavened products that were easier and less time-consuming to prepare. Through eating the "bread of affliction", our ancestors expressed their desire to live a life of service to God rather than a life of self-indulgence. Although free, they still saw themselves as dedicated to a purpose nobler than that of sensual gratification.

However, when all is said and done, this historical background must serve as a springboard for us to understand the significance of the mitzvot for our families today. What modern forms of idolatry must we liberate ourselves from in this day and age? What are the symptoms of our own attachment to the decadence of Western culture and its deification of pleasure,

wealth and power? What steps can we take to root it out?

If we walk away from the Seder table with beautiful new explanations of the Haggada text but without a better sense of why the Paschal Lamb, Matsah and Maror are relevant to our lives, then we have not fulfilled the mitzvah of discussing the Exodus. The experience has entertained us but has not transformed us.

This is why the more advanced a child is, the more we divert our attention from the story and spend time analyzing the Laws of Passover in depth. A wise youngster who is capable of appreciating the beauty of the mitzvot and their purpose will discover that the concepts, values and ideals expressed in the Exodus narrative manifest themselves in the mitzvot that we perform on Passover and all year round. The themes of the story are not vague philosophical notions about God or platitudes about freedom; rather, they are profound, highly practical ideas that are translated into rigorous halachic form and "lived" in realtime. A child who is the beneficiary of such a sophisticated Seder will have a qualitatively different experience of Pesah observance and of Jewish life in general.

The upshot of this analysis of the Haggada is that the ultimate aim of the Seder is the enrichment of our observance of Judaism. We cannot allow the annual retelling of our ancestors dramatic Exodus to be reduced to an historical study. Our goal should be to utilize the Haggada as a means of enhancing our family's appreciation of the eternal significance of the mitzvot of Pesah.

A Little Less Conversation, a Little More Action Please

Yaakov Bitton

The *Seder* night occurs at two parallel levels. There are many things we *do*, and many things we *talk about*. This is not a coincidence. It has to do with the very essence of Judaism. Judaism is about actions as much as, if not more than, it is about ideas. (Certainly, actions should always come before ideas.) Jewish identity can be compared to a lit lamp. Practice will build the structure, the actual lamp. Theory is the flame. “*For it is [like] a lamp, the Mishva; and the Tora, [is like] a flame*” (Proverbs 6). A flame without a lamp will not last. Knowing *about* Judaism does not guarantee a Jewish identity. In fact, knowing *about* Judaism without practicing it is a fairly safe way of ensuring a short-lived flame; a spark that will not last for long. Rather, a strong and lasting identity is achieved by first having a solid lamp, on which the flame is lit later.

In some ways, Judaism resembles Eastern, rather than Western, tradition. And this is why the notion of leading with the *doing* is not straightforward to us, living in 21st-Century Western Civilization.

Eugen Herrigel¹ (1884–1955) is an example of a person who realized the difference between the Western and Eastern approaches. Herrigel traveled to Japan to try and master the ancient Japanese art of archery. As a well-educated Westerner, Herrigel put all of his efforts in trying to abstract the *theory* of archery. He wanted to understand exactly what he was supposed to do, for what purpose, and what his end-result should look like. However, the Japanese master insisted on the *practice*, and actually considered problematic any conscious effort by Herrigel to first try and understand what he was supposed to. As it turns out, practice (just doing something) wires the brain in ways we are not aware of; but only if we don't interfere with the process by having our conscious mind try and supervise it. Action, repetitive and disciplined action, is transformative of our brain in a way that thinking alone can never be.

¹ Zen in the Art of Archery (1953). It is alleged that Herrigel was an Anti-Semite and Nazi sympathizer. If so, I am sure nothing would infuriate him more than being cited to elucidate a Jewish concept in an effort to make the most Jewish of all nights even more effective in preserving Judaism forever.

Judaism, too, is based on practice, first and foremost. And we actually trust that our Creator, and the Jewish sages over the ages (the wisest individuals our wise nation ever produced), devised practices that have a profound effect in aspects of our psyche, in ways we are not aware of. In the famous movie *The Karate Kid*, Daniel-san painstakingly applied wax, on and off, Mr. Miyagi's car. Without realizing it, he was disciplining his muscle and brain memory in a manner that, later, his own conscious mind could appreciate. So too, *Halakha* (the habits and acts prescribed and proscribed under Jewish law) has the effect of wiring the mind to think like a Jew and the heart to feel like a Jew.

Most clearly, this is true regarding actions which we more naturally identify with “practice,” like eating *Maṣṣa*. However, this is also true regarding how we study the Tora. If one approaches Tora education as a Zen master approaches archery, then this Tora education will wire the mind and the heart in the most Jewish of ways so that one is equipped to later analyze and interpret the Tora like a true Jewish master. In fact, the way Tora used to be taught until a few generations ago (a method we should all aspire to reconnect with), was exactly like that.

At first, a Jewish child should be introduced to sounds and routines that may seem mindless. *Pesuqim, Ta'amim, Mishnayot...* Reading, reciting, memorizing and repeating. Between the ages of five and ten, recitation (with the traditional intonation) of the *Tanakh*. At this stage, the point is not to teach the meaning of what is being read. All the focus is put in having child read precisely and carefully: rigorously pronouncing every syllable with the correct intonation.

Between the ages of five and ten, the child, now having mastered the *reading* of the *Tanakh*, is introduced to the world of Rabbinic texts. The main work to be taught at this age is the *Mishna*, which the child is supposed to memorize.² At this stage, the meaning of what's being

² On a personal note, I will be forever indebted to my father, *Mori veRibbi*, for investing incredible effort, time, attention and resources to ensure that I received during my childhood something very similar to what I am describing.

recited is not what matters. Like with Zen archery, trying to abstract what's being done (meaning, trying to delve into the meaning and reasons of what the child is reciting) may actually be counterproductive.

Unlike Zen archery, however, once the "action" is mastered, Tora education calls for a further stage. And so, once this "more-doing-less-thinking" foundation (in the form of recitation aloud, memorization and otherwise) has been grounded, comes the time for theory. At the age of fifteen, the Jewish teenager is finally introduced to the *Talmud*, and is called upon to engage in more abstract forms of analysis on sources he is presumably already fluent on.

So to be more precise, Judaism demands a foundation of practice *before* engaging in theory. Few civilizations, if any, can claim an intellectual tradition as rich, rigorous and sophisticated as the Jews. But, in Judaism, intellectual pursuit should only occur after having established a solid foundation of practice. The lamp precedes the flame. The "wax-on, wax-off," comes before the lesson on how to effectively strike.

To wit, as the famous story has it, Ribbi 'Aqiba started his journey to Jewish erudition at the age of forty (!). Now, let's think about this for a second. How would Hollywood tell this story? Had this same story been told in a culture other than the Jewish one, the 40-year old 'Aqiba would start his journey by reading all books, and attending all lectures he could find, *about* Judaism (as an outsider), and then proceed to obtain a Ph.D. from an advanced institution with a fancy name. The Hollywood movie would be about someone acquiring the flame, not the lamp. As it happened, however, Ribbi 'Aqiba started like a little child. No shortcuts. Repeating aloud letters, and then chanting verses, of *Vayiqra*. He then went on to become one of the brightest and deepest intellectual luminaries in Jewish history.

"Knowing" is no substitute for "doing." And one's identity cannot be formed any way other than through practice (at first, mindless practice; and only later, with more understanding). You could read all the books in the world about Japanese archery, but you will never become a Zen master. So to, you could read all theories, and listen to all the lectures you can find, about Judaism: but this alone will not make you a proper Jewish lamp. Any fire you have may be more like a short-lived spark than like a lasting flame grounded on a solid lamp. As we all know, a Ph.D. on Judaic Studies from Harvard will not guarantee your Jewish identity. Or your children's Jewish identity.

And given that tonight we are engaged in fomenting a strong Jewish identity, it stands to reason that the order of *Practice > Theory* should be a recipe for the *Seder* as well. And it is! The two main themes of the night are (A) behaving as if we were slaves who are now free men (for example, reclining, having four cups of wine, starting the meal with a fresh herb, and generally acting—literally—the part of an Israelite after the Exodus), and (B) telling, and discussing, what in fact happened.

The *Seder*, as the name implies, offers a structure ("seder" in Hebrew) based upon certain acts that we *do*. It is tonight's lamp. On this structure, we kindle rich discussions and ideas in the form of the *Haggada*. This is tonight's flame.

Because the tendency of modern man is to insist on the ideas and the theories, we must remind ourselves quite adamantly that the deeds are as important, and must always precede, the ideas and theories. Insist on *doing*, first and foremost. Especially for the little ones, whose identity we are trying to shape.³ Let the things we *do* tonight lead, and have the stories we *tell* and explanations we give only follow as a response to the curiosity that all of this doing created.

³ In fact, I always thought that teaching toddlers *about* the *Seder* before they actually *do* it, is counterproductive. It makes the act feel artificial, and prematurely quenches that curious impetus which should indeed rule the

night. Let the young ones be surprised by what they see and do. And if they learned about certain things, do and make them do things they do not expect.

Bye, Bye Chametz Robin Rendel

We all heard it before and most of us know it to be true, “money can’t buy happiness”- but do we really live like that? Do we spend more time at work making money or more time with our families? Do we spend more time online or more time being present? Do we spend more time acquiring more things or more time enjoying the things we own?

Do we spend more time Pesach cleaning or more time wondering why we have so much stuff?

Self-quarantining during this unprecedented time in history, has ultimately revealed to us that our values were mixed up all along. Pesach is here for us to recognize and appreciate what it means to be free. Our Exodus from Egypt was the essence of freedom.

Rav Zelig Pliskin (citing the Ohr Hachayim) points out that the Jewish people were physically freed the day they left Egypt, but the Torah records it later, after the sea split, “On that day, Hashem saved Israel from the hand of Egypt, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore” (Exodus 14:30). Freedom is not a physical state of being- it’s an emotional state of mind. The Jewish people were liberated only once they saw their enemies dead. The freedom was no longer just a physical release from bondage, it was an emotional freedom in their hearts.

We may be physically free after the quarantine is over (G-d willing soon) — but will returning back to our “normal lives” with sports, shopping, social gatherings, and work allow us to *really* be free? Do we feel free with so many obligations? So much to buy, so much to do? What if being free means choosing to say “no” sometimes? No to that extra hour at work away from our families in pursuit of money to buy more stuff, or no to our phones constantly buzzing for our attention. Living free is living with intention and purpose. Living free is forgoing screen FaceTime for actual face-time with the people we are closest to. It is consciously choosing to do what you truly value and love more: answering texts or listening to your spouse talk about his or her day at the dinner table? Scrolling on Instagram or reading a meaningful book before going to sleep? Pesach reminds us how to be free, by

Only after we remove chametz, we are commanded to eat matzah. Only after we remove the excess, we can experience the joy of our values.

letting go of the excess in our life. Chametz represents these things.

There is a positive commandment in the Torah to remove all chametz from one’s home, “For a seven day period shall you eat matzot, but on the previous day you shall nullify the leaven from your homes” (Exodus 12:15). Later, there is an additional commandment to eat matzah and not to have chametz in one’s domain, “...in the evening you shall eat matzot...leaven may *not be found in your homes...*” (Exodus 12: 18-19). The Torah could have plainly told us not to possess any chametz, but instead commands us first and foremost, to *remove* the chametz then a second time not to possess it. Why the redundancy dealing with chametz? Why do we need to first get rid of chametz before eating matzah? To begin living more simply and with more value, we have to remove all that makes life complicated. It could mean removing the candy in your home and trying to eat more fruits or removing the cell phone from your bedroom to try focusing on your spouse. All the “chametz” that takes away from what we truly want to do and who we truly want to be.

Removing Chametz becomes the priority for the holiday, while symbolizing the first step in simplifying our lives — ridding ourselves of any distractions. Year after year, we clean our houses intensely but it never seems to last. We frantically turn each room upside down once again, careful not to keep a mess, only to do the same next year. Alternatively, we could clean our homes with the intention to remove what does not belong (once and for all), what might take us away from what (or who) we sincerely love. This could mean donating that extra third winter coat sitting in our closet to someone who might need it and wearing our favorite winter coat more instead. It could mean no longer continuously buying more of the same stuff year after year. How do we kick this habit? The Torah hints at the solution. Only after we remove chametz, we are commanded to eat matzah. Only after we remove the excess, we can experience the joy of our values.

The commandment to eat Matzah is a reminder to end the vicious cycle of clutter and life's distractions we encounter yearly. Matzah is a simple bread: its only ingredients are flour and water, nothing else – the bread that represents our freedom. Chametz on the other hand, is a lot more complex. Chametz requires more of our time and more ingredients. Chametz is excess. Matzah was the bread we grabbed in our rush to freedom. It was enough to nourish us. It was all we needed. A simple life is freeing. To live in this way means we don't have to buy more and clutter our homes once again with things that don't bring us happiness. It means Pesach cleaning doesn't have to be so stressful. Once we remove the chametz, the distractions, we can make way for what is truly valuable, whether it be our favorite items, our favorite people, or using our time and energy doing what we love.

We know in our hearts materialism does not make us happy, but have we ever stopped to think whether we are truly living the simple life our soul desires? We left Egypt with our simple bread. We had our loved ones, our few valuables, and matzah. In fact, it would be some of the valuables that led to our greatest national disaster. The Alshikh (Devarim 1:1) points out that the Jewish people had taken spoils from Egypt, but they ended up

using it to sin with the Golden Calf. Attaining more can lead to bigger problems, like getting carried away with buying more in hopes to find happiness, or even worse – disconnecting from God as the Jews did with the Golden Calf. As the Jewish people used spoils to create a false god, we too can fall into the trap of worshipping materialism.

We have Pesach to get rid of all the chametz, all the excess in our lives. Our quarantine isolation might be physical, but it too will eventually end and the question we must ask ourselves will be: what will we do with this new freedom? As Pesach approaches, we find our real sense of freedom. At the Seder Table, when we sit back without any chametz in our homes, we can see our values when we eat our simple, untainted Matzah. We can choose to live in the present moment, with intention, doing what we love. We can worship God instead of our stuff.

Joshua Becker, founder of *BecomingMinimalist.com*, and Wall Street Journal best-selling author of *The More of Less* sums it up beautifully, "Once we let go of the things that don't matter, we are free to pursue all the things that really do."

The Root of Mitzrayim

Giacomo Bassal

What is the root of the word Mitzrayim (מצרים)? It is Metzra (מצר), meaning to restrict, border, bound, or limit. Tzar (צר) can mean suffer, distress, or narrow. Many of these connotations can describe the time the Jews spent in Egypt. Much can be learned from the name of this nation that will be discussed here.

To describe the Nation of Egypt in a nutshell, it is said to be a foreign land to the Jews. The people were Idol Worshipers, they were promiscuous and immoral. Most of their acts did not abide by the 7 Noahide laws let alone the Jewish laws. In a passuk from parashat Lech Lecha which is read on the night of the seder, G-D says to Abraham “יָדַע תְּדַע כִּי-גֵר יִהְיֶה זְרַעְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לְהֵם,” That his seed will be strangers in a foreign land. Many can understand this passuk to be talking about Egypt and the seed being the B'nei Israel. There was much Egypt had to offer at the time, as far as agriculture, medicine, architecture and art. Jews found much appeal there and were immersed in the nature of the society. 80% of the Jews in fact were never able to leave Egypt and were left behind during the exodus. Many ideas as to why they stayed back surround this. Chazal say some Jews perished during the plague of darkness. G-D simply didn't differentiate them between the Egyptians when he brought down the plague. They had assimilated to such an extent that they were targeted together with the Egyptians.

The Talmud discusses a great point that gives perspective on the times of the exodus to the generations living now in the year 2020. The Tanna speaks on the Mishna in Masechet Pesachim “בכל דור - יודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים” - Every generation needs to look at themselves as if they left Egypt. One can look at this literally or can see it as a mentality or a state of mind. To explain the Tanna further here, we have to understand that every generation is susceptible to the society around them. The Tanna wanted to make a point of this and instill it in the generations to come. Examples can be seen in the times of Channukah with the Greeks, The Spanish Inquisition and Nazi Germany. All these nations had implemented laws to consume the Jewish neshamot. Some fled the opposition and others were lost.

In 2020 the Jews are still dealing with a society that has them bound to it. Through the internet we are even more exposed to the immorality of a modernized Egypt, that is America. The luring objects of our society can keep us narrow sighted and unable to identify with the truth, that is G-Ds will. This can be compared to a generation that's living in a modern day Mitzrayim and experiencing “מצר”.

We read the Hallel prayer on Rosh Chodesh and the Moadim, which is a praise to Hashem. There is a line that states “מִן הַמִּצָּר קָרָאתִי יְהוָה” - “from my distress, I called out to you”, “עֲנֵנִי בְמִרְחֵב יְהוָה” - “And G-D answered me with expansiveness.” During the holidays we praise Hashem for the Joyous moment, thanking him for bringing it to us. The Jewish people have said this in every moment in their history no matter the circumstance. Showing us there is always a reason to be grateful. The Jewish people use struggle to elevate themselves. As mentioned by Chazal and many influential figures: “A life without struggle is a life with no growth”.

As difficulties surround the people of today via the Coronavirus, much can be gained from it. Not being able to leave the house or spend time with the family for Pesach can be heartbreaking for most people. The desert that our ancestors set out for in Egypt was not much easier either. We can use this time as a springboard to bring us closer to the redemption which we are told to anticipate every day. Through concentrated prayer, learning and a little more effort in engaging in acts of kindness it can be possible. The opportunity is there for everyone to come together through desire of being together and the appreciation we have for one another can bring us closer to that. It has been taken away from us and therefore we thirst for the brotherhood even more. We shall be free from this “מצר” soon enough. With the help of G-D we will see the Moshiach and he will bring us to celebrate Pesach in the Holy Land speedily in our times. I hope this finds my community members well and I look forward to seeing everybody very soon for happy occasions.

Chag Pesach Kasher V'Sameach!

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