



## **Rabbi Leff's Pesach Guide 2017**

# Rabbi Leff's Passover Guide - 5777

Passover is very much associated with freedom. In the words of the Haggadah, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but God brought us out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm." It is important to remember, however, that the freedom of Passover is not the freedom of the libertine, the freedom to skip work or school—it is, rather, the freedom to serve God and come together as a Jewish people.

There are three central elements to the observance of Passover:

- 1) **Getting rid of, and not eating any chametz (leaven) during the 8 days of Passover**
- 2) **Eating Matza**
- 3) **Having a Seder**

There are many many details associated with the observance of Passover. My goal with this guide is to provide a basic reference for what to do and when, and a suggestion for sources of additional information.

## Chametz

Chametz is leaven from one of the five species listed in the Torah: wheat, oats, rye, spelt, and barley. If one of these five grains is in contact with water for more than 18 minutes, it becomes "chametz." Matza is not chametz because it is finished baking within 18 minutes after it is mixed with water; hence it does not have the time to rise. We are forbidden to have chametz in our homes or in our possession during Passover. The rabbis say that the puffed up chametz symbolizes our "puffed up" egos; in addition to striving to rid ourselves of the physical substance of chametz, we are encouraged to work to rid ourselves of "spiritual chametz" as well, to get rid of our sense of self-importance, to reduce our egos.

**The rules about chametz are very stringent: you are not allowed to eat, or even own ANY chametz over Passover.**

The first step in getting rid of your chametz is to do a basic spring cleaning. You don't need to go overboard with cleaning though – dirt is not chametz! Don't forget your car, especially if you have kids who eat cookies and crackers in the car.

People go to different degrees of craziness in preparing their kitchens for Passover. You should use separate dishes that are only used for Passover that have never been used with chametz. Any silverware and pots and pans you want to use during Passover should be kashered using boiling water. I know one Orthodox rabbi who claims to have his kitchen ready for Passover with 30 minutes of cleaning. Between

my pantry and kitchen I think it takes me over 8 hours, and I know some people who go crazier than me. As the Talmud teaches “the one who does a little and the one who does a lot are the same provided their hearts are directed to heaven.”

**Machirat Chametz (selling your chametz).** Any chametz you want to keep and use after Passover should be put in a box or bag and put in a special, separate location, like in a closet, a storage shed, etc. If you fill out the form provided, I will sell this chametz for you: it will be technically owned by a non-Jew during Passover. Please note that alcohol made from one of the five species is chametz, and needs to be set aside during Passover. No beer and no Scotch during Pesach! **Make sure I receive your form for the sale of your chametz by the end of the day Sunday, April 9.**

**Bedikat Chametz (the search for chametz).** Once your house is ready, the next step is "bedikat chametz," the search for chametz. On **Sunday night, April 9**, you should make a ceremonial search for any leftover chametz. If you look in any Haggadah, you will find instructions for the ceremony. There is a bracha to recite.

**Biur and Bitul Chametz. Monday morning, April 10**, you do the ceremonies of "biur chametz" and "bitul chametz," burning your chametz and nullifying your chametz. Again, consult your Haggadah for details. Basically, we burn the chametz we found in our search for chametz the night before, and we recite a formula renouncing ownership in any chametz that might be remaining in our possession after we've gone through all that.

You may eat chametz up until 10:30 am Monday morning (in Birmingham, Alabama – local times vary). Just take care not to mess up your house which you have gone to such effort to prepare. The bitul chametz should be completed prior to 11:43am in Birmingham.

## Matza

Eating Matza on Passover is a separate, specific commandment. To make sure we have an appetite for matza at the seder, it is forbidden to eat matza during the day on Erev Pesach, during the day before the seder. At the seder we eat matza, and as called for in the Haggadah we recite a special bracha regarding the commandment to eat matza. It is preferable, but not mandatory, to use Shmira Matza, matza which has been guarded every step of the way, for fulfilling this mitzvah at the seder. Shmira Matza is usually available at any store selling Passover foods. Warning: the handmade Shmira Matza is definitely “the bread of affliction!” You should not use egg matza to fulfill the mitzvah of eating matza at the Seder.

## Seder

**Monday night, April 10.** The Seder is of course the heart of the Passover experience. We are commanded to tell the story in such a way that we will feel that we

ourselves were brought out of Egypt by God. If everyone falls asleep or can't wait to get to the food, you have not properly fulfilled the mitzvah.

The key to having a seder where people will feel as if they lived through the experience is to be creative. The person leading the seder should definitely do some planning as to how he/she wants the seder to go. It is worthwhile to look at a variety of Haggadot with commentaries to find interesting ideas to bring into your seder. Some things you can do to help enliven your seder:

Act out the plagues—use props, like ping pong balls for hail. Have first born people sitting at the table do a dying act.

Dress like you are about to go on trip. Have a suitcase sitting near the table.

Tell the story in the first person.

Encourage discussion.

While it is good for everyone to have the same Haggadah for following along, it is also good for people to have different Haggadot so that they can share different commentaries during the Seder.

**The Basic Seder.** It is not mandatory to read every single word in the Haggadah. It's not even necessarily recommended. The basic seder requirements are listed below. There is always tension between the tradition which says "the one who expands on the Passover story is praiseworthy" and the tradition which focuses on the fifth question: "when do we eat?" If you recite the following selections from your Haggadah and skip the rest, you will meet the minimum requirement and you will be eating about an hour after you start.

#### **Before the Meal:**

1. Signposts of the Seder: Kadesh Urchatz
2. First Cup: Kiddush
3. Dips: Karpas
4. Breaking the Matza: Yachatz
5. The Story of the Matza: Ha Lachma
6. Four Questions: Ma Nishtana
7. Storytelling—"We were slaves": Avadeem Hayeenu
8. Four Children
9. The Promise: V'hee She-am-da
10. The Tale of the Wandering Jew
11. Ten Plagues
12. Da-yeinu
13. Explaining Pesach, Matza, Maror

14. "In every generation"
15. Psalm 114: Hallel
16. Second Cup
17. Eating Matza, Maror, and Korech

**After the Meal:**

18. Afikomen
19. Blessing after Eating: Barech
20. Third Cup
21. Elijah's Cup
22. Fourth Cup
23. Songs: Echad Mee Yo-dei-a; Chad Gad-ya
24. Next Year in Jerusalem: La-Shana Haba-a

## Miscellaneous

**Fast of the First-born.** It is traditional for people who were first born to fast during the day before the seder. However, by attending services where someone is celebrating a siyyum for having completed studying a tractate of Mishnah or Talmud, you get exempted from the fast. We will have services **Monday morning, April 9**, and we will have a siyyum for a volume of Mishnah which I will complete that morning. This will exempt first borns from fasting.

**The first two days.** In Israel Passover itself is celebrated for one day; here in the Diaspora it is celebrated for two days. We have seders both the first night and the second night, convenient for those with large families and in-laws to contend with. We will have a community seder on the second night, see the Temple Beth-El [website](#) for details.

**Additional Information online:**

The Conservative Movement's Rabbinical Assembly's [Pesach Guide](#). Includes useful information about koshering your kitchen, and buying foods that are kosher for Pesach

A collection of [Passover Resources](#) from the Rabbinical Assembly.

The [Valley Beth Shalom Passover Haggadah](#). An EXCELLENT Haggadah prepared by Valley Beth Shalom synagogue in Encino, CA can be found on their website. You are welcome to print it out and make as many copies as you need for your seder.

The [Passover archives](#) on my personal website.

**If you have any questions, feel free to contact me:**

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