

Pesach: Common Questions and Answers

Rabbi Doniel Neustadt Yoshev Rosh, Vaad Harabbonim

We are going away for the entire Pesach but we're getting conflicting viewpoints on what, exactly, we are required to do. Are we permitted to leave our *chometz*-filled house as is, or do we have to clean one area and do *bedikas chometz*? Please advise!

Anyone who owns *chometz* is obligated to get rid of it before Pesach begins. This can be accomplished in one of two ways: By destroying it [either by eating it, burning it, flushing it down the toilet, or throwing it in a river], or by selling it [or giving it away] to a non-Jew. Either way, one fulfills his basic obligation and does not transgress the Biblical injunction against owning any *chometz*.

But there is something else to consider: Chazal obligated each person to search for *chometz* on the night before Pesach. [If one leaves town before that time, he is still obligated to search for *chometz* the night before he leaves, although no blessing is recited for that search.] In the opinion of many *poskim*, the search for *chometz* is obligatory whether or not one owns his *chometz* by the time Pesach arrives, since once the rabbinic ordinance was enacted, it cannot be abrogated regardless of the circumstances. Consequently, selling the house to a non-Jew does not free one from his personal obligation to search for *chometz*.

A solution to this problem is to set aside one room in the house, even a small one, and not sell it to the non-Jew along with the rest of the house. That room should be cleaned for Pesach and thoroughly searched for *chometz* on the night before Pesach, with the proper blessing recited for the *bedikah*. One who will have already gone out of town by the night before Pesach should follow the same procedure on the night before he leaves – but he may not recite a blessing on the *bedikah*.

I am expecting, *b'ezras Hashem*, right before Pesach, and I am in no condition to do a deep cleaning. Please can you outline the guidelines for a kosher Pesach without going crazy?

The most important thing to remember that the mitzvah of Pesach cleaning is meant to be for *chometz* only. It is not the time for spring cleaning, dusting, wall papering or painting. Obviously, any area in the house where there is possibility that *chometz* was brought in during the year, including the attic and basement, must be cleaned and checked. Besides the kitchen area, which requires extensive work to clean and kasher, the rest of the house just requires a good thorough cleaning—ie. not much different from any thorough cleaning that a house needs on a weekly basis. The walls do not need to be washed, the curtains do not need to be dry cleaned, and the silver does not need to be polished. You are also not obligated to clean behind the stove or the refrigerator or move heavy furniture around to look for crumbs. *Chometz* crumbs which are not accessible are not considered *chometz* and one need not check for them.

You do need to check your medicine cabinet for sprays, toiletries, and cosmetics including mouthwash, that are not recommended for Pesach use, thoroughly clean and wash the playpen, as well as the high chair and crib, carriages and strollers. Don't forget the toy boxes.

Last year, my son managed to unearth a cookie during *Chol Hamoed*. Needless to say, we were all shocked and embarrassed, but we were unsure of what to do with the *chometz*. What is the halachic way to dispose of the cookie?

If the *chometz* is found on Shabbos or Yom Tov, then it should be covered with a utensil, a towel, or anything else that will shield it from view. The *chometz*, which is considered a severe form of *muktzeh*, should not be moved at all, not even with one's feet or body. After Shabbos or Yom Tov, the *chometz* should be destroyed, preferably by burning it. If this is not possible, then it should be flushed down the toilet or crumbled and thrown to the winds or cast into a river. If the *chometz* is found on *Chol ha-Moed*, it should be disposed of immediately, in the manner described above.

I am confused about the permissibility of selling *chometz*. There seem to be many who don't sell their *chometz* and instead use it all up or give it away to neighbors, and many who sell every single type of *chometz*—from flour to barley to crackers. Is it okay to sell *chometz*? Is it forbidden? Is it preferable not to do so?

As you state, there are various views and customs about selling *chometz* to a non-Jew before Pesach. There are those who sell all *chometz*, including “real *chometz*” (*chometz gamur*) such as

pasta and crackers. Others only sell alcoholic beverages such as whiskey and beer, while others are more stringent and do not sell any "real *chometz*" at all. All of these customs have valid halachic sources, everyone should follow their family's custom, or if they have no custom, should ask a rav for guidance.

But it is important to clarify that there are many items which are not kosher for Pesach, but are still - for various reasons - not considered "real *chometz*." (and sometimes they are not *chometz* at all, although we do not eat them on Pesach). Those items may be sold to a non-Jew according to all halachic views, without compunction. This category includes such items as pearled raw barley, dry cake mixes, flour (without malted barley), glue, ketchup, all *kitniyos*, mayonnaise, medicines, mustard, pickles, vinegar, vitamin tablets, baker's yeast and yeast extract.