

Bedikat Hametz - Searching for Leaven

After sundown on the evening before Pesach (Thursday, March 29, this year), the entire family participates in a ritual hunt for any leftover chametz. This is called “b’dikat chametz”—searching for leaven. First, we must carefully state our intent, which we do by reciting a b’rachah:

BARUCH ATAH ADONAI, ELOHEINU MELEKH HA-OLAM, ASHER KID’DESHANU B’MITZVOTAV V’TZIVANU AL BE-OOR CHAMETZ.

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Who has sanctified us through commandments, commanding us to destroy all chametz.”



HOW TO DO THE SEARCH

It is traditional to use a lit candle to collect the chametz, a feather to "sweep" up the chametz, and a wooden spoon in which to collect the chametz. (A flashlight can also be used.)

Since the house is already clean for Pesach, there probably is no chametz to find. For that reason, it is customary to “hide” ten (10) pieces in obvious locations throughout the house in rooms in which food or snacks normally might be eaten during the year. Wrapping the searched-for chametz in paper or foil helps contain the crumbs. Just make sure all the chametz pieces are found!

The pieces of chametz, the feather, and the spoon are collected in a special place, where they will be kept until the morning. The best suggestion is to place them in a paper bag and seal off the top of the bag. (Some kits include such a bag.)

After the search has ended and the chametz, the feather, and the spoon are set aside, we make that all-important statement (bitul chametz—the nullification of chametz) that excuses us if by chance some chametz escaped our search:

“All leaven in my possession which I have not seen or removed, or of which I am unaware, is hereby nullified and as ownerless as the dust of the earth.”

This should be recited after the search and again the following morning. The formula itself is in Aramaic, but should be recited in any language the listeners can understand. The Aramaic text usually may be found in the front of most haggadot.

In the morning, all of the chametz should be removed from the home and preferably burned (this is known as be-oor chametz—destruction of chametz, although any method of complete disposal is permitted, e.g., flushing into sewers, or throwing into the sea). This year, the latest this should be done is 11:51 a.m. DST. Some follow the custom of burning the feather and spoon, as well. The following formula is then recited:

“All leaven in my possession, whether I have seen it or not, whether I have removed it or not, is hereby nullified and as ownerless as the dust of the earth.”