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Cleaning guide for Pesach

Understanding the Halachos of what is required can save you time and effort and make Yomtov a more enjoyable experience.

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The lead-up to Pesach can be a stressful time. We are all busy meticulously cleaning our homes. The Torah prohibits us from owning Chometz with two prohibitions known as **בל ימצא** and **יראה ובל ימצא**. Additionally there is a positive Mitzvah to remove the Chometz from our homes so that when Pesach arrives our homes are Chometz-free.

Mideoraisa, nullifying the Chometz (Bittul) is sufficient. However the Chachamim require us to physically remove Chometz and not rely on the nullification¹. The prohibition on owning Chometz Min Hatorah only applies to a Kzayis volume of Chometz, nonetheless the Chachamim extended the prohibition to even pieces less than a Kzayis.

The Shulchan Aruch² records that the Jewish people are a holy people and go to great lengths to avoid even a trace of Chometz, even beyond that which Halacha mandates. The Seforim extol the great zechusim which come from the effort of thoroughly cleaning for Pesach.

We all try our best and every Balabusta has her Pesach cleaning routine and standards. The intent of this article is not to detract from anyone's stringencies, especially for those who can manage and are happy to do so. However many of us due to life-circumstance and other factors, have limited time, energy and wellbeing. And so we need to keep things in perspective as we approach the battle against Chometz.

It is important to know what is absolute Halacha, what are Chumros (Halachic stringencies) and what is not required at all. This way a person can focus their energies on the cleaning that is required without expending their effort on cleaning which is unnecessary or questionable or not priority.

Which rooms: Any room which a person may have brought Chometz into over the course of the year requires cleaning³. A room (or cupboard) into which one never brings Chometz does not require Bedikas Chometz⁴. However if one has young children, every room in the house requires cleaning because it is inevitable that Chometz was taken throughout the

¹ Shulchan Aruch Harav 431:1-3

² Ibid 442:30

³ ibid 433:13

⁴ ibid 433:14

house.

Homes, garages, offices, cars, prams, lockers, desks and bags all require cleaning for Pesach.

High-up spaces: High up ledges do not require Bedikas Chometz⁵ as they are too high to use for Chometz. Therefore one does not need to clean on top of bookcases or wardrobe shelves unless one knows that they did place Chometz there. This is true even if one has young children.

Hard to access areas: The Shulchan Aruch rules that if Chometz has fallen between the cracks of one's floor boards and cannot be reached, one is not required to remove the floor boards. Since the Chometz will be nullified and therefore the obligation to remove it is only Rabbinic, the Chachamim did not require one to exert excessive effort to remove the Chometz.

Therefore one does not need to move heavy furniture pieces which are difficult to move to clean under or behind them e.g. bookcases, pianos, large sideboards, fridges, dishwashers and ovens. One need only clean as far as they can reach (using a vacuum nozzle) and rely on the Bittul for the rest. Furniture which is easy to move or regularly moved must be moved to clean beneath them. This includes beds, couches, tables and chairs.

Likewise, one does not need to dismantle things (where it is not easy or common to do so) to reach Chometz which may be inside. Instead we rely on Bittul. One is not required to unstitch couch lining, even when one knows that there is certainly Chometz inside.

Outdoor areas: Outdoor areas are more lenient because of the likelihood that any Chometz would have been eaten by birds. On Erev pesach they should be visually inspected⁶. If one does eat Chometz outdoors or one's children do, they should be swept, especially where this was done within 30 days of Yomtov.

Tiny crumbs: Technically, tiny crumbs (pirurim) are so insignificant that they are automatically nullified⁷. Whilst one may not be obligated to remove them, nonetheless one cannot consume even the tiniest speck of Chometz on Pesach and so kitchen or food areas must be thoroughly cleaned from all crumbs. Nonetheless it is an accepted practise (and according to some opinions Halachically required) to remove even tiny crumbs in all cases.

Seforim: Based on the above, many Poskim rule that Meikar Hadin seforim do not require to be cleaned⁸. Nonetheless it is an acceptable Chumra for Seforim which have been used near food to either be cleaned (shaken out) or included in the sale of Chometz. One should have separate bentchers and preferably siddurim for Pesach as they are used around food⁹.

⁵ Ibid 433:17

⁶ Ibid 433:28

⁷ Kuntres Acharon 442:18. It is recorded in the name of the Sfas Emes that tiny crumbs do not need to be removed as it is a Tircha Yseira which Chaza"l did not obligate us to do

⁸ See Nitei Gavriel Pesach 1:22:4 footnote

⁹ Ibid 22:5

Soiled Chometz: Chometz pieces which are smaller than a Kzayis (and certainly crumbs) which have become even slightly soiled (Metunaf Ktzas) and will be nullified, do not need to be removed as there is no concern that they will be consumed¹⁰. Therefore, for difficult to clean areas, after rooms have been swept they should be mopped with a strong cleaning product which should be pushed into the cracks and crevices to render any remaining crumbs soiled. One does not need to clean under skirting boards using toothpicks etc.

Chometz which is completely spoiled or rotten to the extent that it would be inedible for a dog, does not need to be removed even when larger than a Kzayis¹¹. This also includes soaps, shampoo, etc.

Clothing: Based on the above, clothing which has been through a washing cycle with detergent does not need to be checked and the pockets do not need to be shaken out. The detergent renders any crumbs soiled. Likewise, previously washed linen and towels do not need to be checked or washed again. If one never puts food into their pockets or purses, they do not need to be cleaned even if they have not been washed.

Bins: Outdoor garbage bins do not require cleaning. In the unlikely case that any Chometz remains inside after collection, it will be minimal and completely inedible.

Areas being sold: Anything which is being included in the sale of Chometz does not require cleaning¹². Therefore as a way to minimise cleaning, toys and similar items can be sealed in cupboards and included in the sale of Chometz. Cupboards included in the sale of Chometz do not need to be cleaned.

Similarly if a person is moving out of their home for Pesach they are not required to clean. The Chometz in the home can be included in the sale of Chometz¹³.

Spring cleaning:

Spring cleaning is a good thing to do from time-to-time, but with so much to do for Pesach, spring cleaning can be left for spring (in the southern hemisphere) or another time.

The list below include things which are nice to do for spring-cleaning, but not required for Pesach cleaning. If they can be done as part of getting the house presentable for Yomtov, great. But they should not waste our time or be a cause for stress.

Steam-cleaning of carpets is not required. A thorough regular vacuuming is sufficient.

Washing curtains or blinds is not required. Kitchen or eating room curtains which have Chometz substance on them should be wiped or washed. Other curtains do not need washing.

¹⁰ Shulchan Aruch Harav 442:28

¹¹ Ibid 442:32

¹² Whilst there are those who question this where the sale only takes effect on the 14th of Nissan, Halachically accepted practise is as written within.

¹³ If a person will not be able to do Bedikas Chometz elsewhere, a small section of the home should be left out of the sale and Bedikas Chometz should be performed there.

Window cleaning is not required for Pesach. Similarly walls do not need cleaning, especially above the reaching height of young children. If any Chometz substance is stuck on walls such as in eating room, it should be removed. Kitchen walls near food areas and splashbacks do require thorough cleaning.

Dusting is not required. As they say, “dust is not Chometz”.

A couple more things to keep in mind; Halachically it is problematic to complain about the hard work and effort Pesach requires. The Poskim explain that this was the question of the wicked son – What is this Avodah to you?¹⁴.

Simchas Yomtov is a Mitzvah Min Hatorah and we should not come to the Seder feeling like a washed out Shmatteh. Chumros are meant to be an expression of joy in serving Hashem. If they are causing resentment, please speak to your Rabbi.

We also want our kids to enjoy and have a positive attitude to Yomtov and they should be involved in preparing. Stress and anger don't help create a positive atmosphere or association with the Yomtov and anger is a serious Aveira.

We wish each other a Kosher un Freilichen Pesach. With our efforts to properly clean and prepare and with Hashem's help it will certainly be Kosher. By keeping things in perspective, it will hopefully be joyous as well.

¹⁴ Ibid 469:5