

An Everything Guide to Pesach by Rabbi Yochai Cohen

We all know that there are a lot of things to do to prepare for Pesach like cleaning the house, cleaning our clothes, koshering our dishes, buying whatever is needed for the holiday, checking the rice (for those who their minhag allows them to eat kitniyot), make sure to have the proper amount of matzah (2 kezayit = 54 grams) and maror (1 kezayit = 27 grams), checking for chametz, burning the chametz, selling our chametz, sealing our sold chametz, and much more! We should make sure to do all these things in advance and not wait for the last minute because we may forget to do a lot of things.

13th of Nissan (at night it's the 14th of Nissan)

- The night of the 13th of Nissan, after the house has already been cleaned for Pesach, we have the mitzvah of **Bedikat Chametz (checking for chametz)**. The bedikah is done 20 minutes after sunset.
- Before the bedikah we recite the following beracha: "**Baruch ata Hashem Elokenu melech haolam asher kidishanu bemitzvotav vetzivanu al biur chametz.**" And we start to look everywhere in the house. All the rooms, closets, under the beds and sofas, even in places that you don't normally put chametz. We must check every hole and crack – even the car and every space that is in your possession! Other people can help you with the bedikah as well.
- It is customary to wrap 10 pieces of bread in foil paper, hide them around the house and find them when we do the bedikah. The following day you burn those 10 pieces with the other chametz.
- After the bedikah, we nullify the chametz, and we rid ourselves from it by saying the text that you find in the Haggadah.
- When checking for chametz, it's advisable to use a small candle (or flashlight) so that you can see into the holes and crevices. The reason for using a small candle is so that we could check the proper way and we won't be scared about burning the house.

14th of Nissan - In the morning

- It is forbidden to eat chametz starting 4 hours after dawn, which is at. But we still have another 2 hours that permits us to benefit from the chametz (6 hours after dawn), such as selling your chametz to a non-Jew, giving it to animals and other such benefits **but you are not allowed to eat from it.**
- Within these 6 hours after dawn, we need to make **Biur Chametz (burning of the chametz)**. The ways are **(a)** to burn the chametz, **(b)** crumble your chametz into little pieces and throw into the ocean, or **(c)** throw it into the **city** dumpster. But the minhag (tradition) is to burn the chametz.
- We must burn the chametz before the 6 hours after dawn are up. Afterwards, nullify the chametz with the text that's written in the Haggadah.
- We have to brush our teeth very well before the 6th hour because we might have chametz in our teeth, and that's forbidden.
- If you found chametz in your home during the holiday (and it was not sold), you are not allowed to benefit from it.

Mechirat Chametz (Selling Your Chametz)

- You have to sell all the chametz that you own, and even if you don't have any chametz you have to sell even things that were used for chametz. Everyone sells their chametz to the Rabbi that they follow and he, in turn, deals with selling it to the non-Jew.
- You have to give your address and write exactly where the chametz is in your house when you sell it to your Rabbi.

Necessary Hechsher for Pesach

- Everything needs to be kosher for Pesach except for the things that we know don't need to be (check the official kosher for Pesach list)
- Rice and kitniyot (legumes) must be checked 3 times, using sunlight because otherwise it would be difficult to differentiate between rice and wheat.
- Sephardic people are allowed (according to their minhag) to eat Matzah Ashirah (matzah that is made with something other than water, such as wine, apple juice, orange juice, etc.) on Pesach without any hesitation. Therefore, it is permitted to eat the cookies with the kosher stamp of approval by Morenu Ve'Rabbenu Ha'Rav Ovadia Yosef Shalita (Hechsher of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef).
- Anything that a dog cannot or won't eat is allowed to be used on Pesach. Such as shoe polish, cosmetics, soaps, etc.
- All toothpaste without a flavor (mint is okay) is allowed but others like strawberry flavored are not allowed.
- Medicinal pills that you swallow and you don't get any enjoyment from (pills with no flavor) could have chametz in them. They do not need to be kosher for Pesach but a pill that you suck or chew must be kosher for Pesach.

Halachot Erev Pesach

- After chatzot hayom (mid-day) you can't do any work so this way you will have time to prepare for Pesach.
- After chatzot hayom it's permitted to cut your nails, brush your shoes, and iron your clothes.
- On erev Pesach we are not allowed to eat matzah before the seder so that we should have an appetite to eat it when the time comes but

you are allowed to eat cookies, fruits and other such foods that are kosher for Pesach.

- On the 14th of Nissan all the eldest male children must fast until the seder (women are exempt).
- If a person participated in a simcha such as a brit milah, pidyon, bar mitzvah, or siyum masechet (when you finish a gemara, mishna, etc.), then they are exempt from fasting.
- When you purchase meat for the holiday you have to be careful not to say **bassar zeh le'Pesach** (this meat is special for Pesach) because in our days we don't sanctify the meat for Pesach therefore we should say "**bassar zeh le yom tov**".
- The two nights of Pesach we must eat handmade matzah shmurah. If, for some reason you can't, you are allowed to eat matzah shmurah machine made.

Pesach Night Prayers

- After Arvit we say Hallel with the beracha (and we finish the Hallel).
- Women are also obligated to finish the Hallel with a beracha.

The Night of Protection from Harm

- The night of Pesach is said to be a night of protection in which Hashem himself watches over and protects Bnei Israel from every bitter eye and embarrassment. Therefore, a person needs to strengthen their emunah (faith) on this night. We must praise and bless Hashem and in return whoever does will be praised.

Leil Haseder

Kadesh. Urchatz. Karpas. Yachatz. Magid. Rachtzah. Motzie-Matzah. Maror. Korech. Shulchan Orech. Tzafun. Barech. Hallel. Nirtzah.

There are 14 paragraphs and this symbolizes what Hashem told to Moshe: Because with a strong hand he drove them from our land and an upper hand in Gematria is 14 (yud, daled), this is a hint to the Exodus out of Egypt with a strong hand. The letters for the word “yad” backwards spell the word “dai” – Hashem said stop with our sorrows and he took us out of Egypt.

Kadesh

- The table should be set from earlier in the day so that when you come home everything will be ready.
- The Kiddush must be done after tzet ha kochavim and certainly you should **not** start the seder before tzet ha kochavim because in Egypt when they did korban pesach it was really in the night. And mitzvat ha haggadah is written in the torah – ve haggadatah le banecha (Maran BeChazon Ovadia).
- One woman and one man must have four cups of wine throughout the seder and we also get the small children used to these ways.
- We drink the first of the four cups of wine during kadesh while leaning to the left. The Sephardic tradition is that women should also lean. If they didn't then it is okay, they don't have to drink the cups again while leaning. But men must re-drink the cups while leaning if they did not do so the first time.
- We lean to the left side because this is the way the kings used to lean.
- It's meaningful to use red wine for the 4 cups and even though grape juice is okay, red wine is better.

- If someone drank the 4 cups of wine one right after the other and not according to the right order, they have not fulfilled the mitzvah.
- The cups should be rinsed inside and out. And someone else should pour the wine for you the way it would be done for a king.
- We must drink at least a revieet (81 grams) but it's better to drink most of the cup if it's not huge.

Urchatz

- We wash our hands without a beracha; we wash because we're going to eat something that we dip in a liquid and so we must wash without a beracha.

Karpas

- Take less than a kezayit of celery (that was cleaned from bugs) and if there is no celery you can use a different green vegetable and dip in lemon water or salt water. We say the beracha "boreh peri haadama" and eat it without leaning.
- The reason we dip in the liquid is so the little ones can ask "mah nishtana?" because usually we don't dip it even once.
- We leave a little celery in the big dish (this is according to the Kabbalah).
- The letters of karpas in Gematria is 60 which stands for the 60 million Jews that endured hard work.

Yachatz

- We take the middle matzah and break it into 2 pieces. The smaller half we leave between the other two matzot and someone hides the bigger one for the afikoman.
- The reason for breaking specifically the middle matzah is that the middle matzah symbolizes shevet Levy and they were not enslaved in Egypt and were able to remove themselves from the entirety and

not take part because it didn't touch them. Therefore, we take the matzah of Levy to show that they were also part of the redemption. If Bnei Israel was not redeemed, Hashem would have destroyed the whole world with shevet Levy. Also the breaking of the matzah symbolizes that Hashem broke the exile on Bnei Israel.

- Another reason is because on this night the miracles were visible to the eyes of the whole world. There are times of hidden miracles and times of open miracles Hashem yishtabach. And this is the time to reveal and publicize every detail on Pesach. Since the middle matzah is hidden between the other two, we have to break it (reveal them) as praises for the open miracles.

Magid

- The whole arrangement that we do revolves around Magid, which is the basis of Pesach for generations "ve'hagadata le'banecha" and so that we will retell the story in the ears of our children etc. Women are also obligated to read the haggadah and if the woman doesn't understand Hebrew we have to translate in a language that she understands.
- Magid starts with "ha lachma anya" until "benei chorin" and we must read every single word.
- If you can't read than its okay to listen Mideen shomeah keoneh.
- We drink the second cup of wine when we finish Magid.
- The table should be set with silverware, if possible, and gold utensils are even better.

Mah Nishtanah

- In the Chazon Ovadia where it's written about Korban Pesach that it's proper to ask a question about a question: The question is why do we ask "mah nishtanah" only on Pesach and not Sukkot? The answer is as follows: Bnei Israel was used to leaving their houses and

wandering in all the exiles, but to sit like kings we still are not used to doing yet, and therefore we ask questions (so we can merit in the coming of the redemption tzedek bimhera be'yamenu).

- Every other night we don't dip even once and on this night we dip twice: why did the author of the haggadah start with negative language - "ein anachnu" - and the rest of the four questions are written in the positive - "anu ochlin"? One answer is because it's the questions of the son and the way the son asks questions is that he starts it out negatively (like, why is that usually we don't do thing this way and now we do?). It causes the boy to pay more attention than he usually does. It's a psychological thing, when a person wants to grab attention he/she does it with negative language. Rav Hida a"h says that the child is used to modestly and humility (not dipping at all) and now he sees a different way, a way of pride and greatness (dipping twice). Therefore, he asks how come we don't dip the rest of the nights and now it's the opposite? Then we explain to the child that this way of pride and greatness is the way we thank Hashem Yitbarach.

Avadim Hayinu

- The midrash says that Bnei Israel didn't leave Egypt throughout all the years because they had informants between them and lacked love between one another. Therefore, we start with "Ha lachma anya...**Kol dichfeen**..." meaning that on this night we invite anyone that needs and he/she can come and eat as much as they please (to extend the love). The boy then asks why this night is different from the rest of the year in which we don't usually see things like this in the house. The answer is that we **were** slaves and Hashem took us out because "kol dichfeen" - so there should be love and brotherhood among Am Yisrael.

Baruch Shomer Hivtachtu

- In the haggadah, we read "Baruch shomer hivtachtu...kemo she'amar le Avraham Avinu..." If the promise was made to Yisrael what

connection is there to Avraham Avinu? And furthermore, when Hashem promised Yisrael, was the promise to Avraham?

Answer: In Parashat Vayigash it says “Vayomar Elokim le yisrael...at tirah merdah mitzrayma ki le’goy gadol asimcha sham: anochi ered imcha mitzrayma ve’anochi ealecha gam aleh...” – when it says Yisrael, its referring to Bnei Israel that went down to Egypt and there they will go up to Eretz Yisrael. This is what Hashem promised to Yaakov Avinu, who is also called by the name Yisrael. When it is written “ealecha gam aleh” – isn’t that redundant? The first time is for when they will bury him in Eretz Yisrael and the second is for the time after the exile. And this is the promise that Hashem made to Avraham Avinu – “Ve’acharei chen yitzu be’richush gadol” – (and afterwards they shall leave with great wealth).

Story Time

1. One day Rabi Yehezkel Landau was on his way to pray when he heard the sounds of someone crying in the street. The Rav lifted his eyes to see who was crying and he saw a little foreign boy crying bitterly so he went to him and asked him what was wrong. The boy picked up his head and saw that it was the Rabbi of the Jews. He told him that he’s an orphan and every morning his stepmother sends him out to sell cookies and he must bring back all the money. If he doesn’t finish selling all the cookies, his stepmother hits him very hard. Although he finished selling all the cookies that morning, he lost all the money that he made. The Rav had pity on this boy so he took him to his house, gave him bread and something to drink. Then he took out of his pocket the same amount of money the boy lost, gave it to him, and sent him home.

Some years had passed, and on chol hamoed Pesach, the Rabbi’s family heard someone by the door and when they opened to see who it was they were surprised to see a foreign young man. So they asked him what he wants and he asked to speak to the Rav. They brought him into to the Rav’s room and he too asked how he could help him. The young man asked “Rabbi, do you remember me?” The Rav couldn’t remember so the boy reminded him of that day some years ago when the Rav gave him the

money. The young man said he came to repay the good Rabbi with a favor. "What favor?" asked the Rav.

"Yesterday in my stepmother's house they gathered all the bakers of the city with their material and planned to poison the bread that the Jew will buy right after Pesach. But please Rabbi, one thing, just don't tell anyone that it was me who let you in on the secret."

For one long hour the Rabbi sat and thought about how to solve this problem and at last he came up with an idea. He called the leader of the community and told him to gather all the Jews of the area and bring them into the shul. When the hour came the whole entire shul was so full that you couldn't move. Rav Landau went up on the stage and decreed that on Issur Chag, which is the day after Pesach, no Jew is allowed to eat chametz. There was a lot of confusion going around between the people but when the Rav decrees something, there is no disobeying the Rav.

So on the morning of Issur Chag all the sellers came to sell their bread and they all wondered why none of the Jews were buying bread. When they asked, the Jews told them that the Rav decreed not to eat chametz. The sellers get very angry and they went to take it up with the chief of police. When the chief called on the Rav, he told him the whole story of what happened and... מידוהיל התיה הרוא החמשו נוששו רקיו

2. Rav Avraham Haim Ades from Halab, Syria wanted to go to the nearby city to do something. So he had to go with a traveling group. He rented a donkey from a Halabi Jew instead of the non-Jew so before the set out to travel, the leader of the group said to the Rav that since he didn't rent the donkey from him he was going to get his revenge. So Rav Avraham said with confidence that there is a creator of the world who protects his children and that he isn't afraid of him. While they were traveling, the group heard loud and strong noises and then they see that their leader was thrown on the floor with both of his legs broken. They realized that the donkey went crazy and wild and threw him down. From that moment the leader said "We will not do anything without consulting Rav Avraham first". From this we see the supervision of Hashem Yitbarach

that saves us from the hands of all the crazies that want to destroy us day in and day out.

It's a known thing that almost no non-Jew likes Yisrael and without Hashem Yitbarach they would have already killed us.

"Be'yad chazakah u'bezera netuya u'bemareh gadol" – Meaning great fear. Sometimes fear can kill a person through negative thoughts and this is one of the ways our creator punishes a person – it can cause death without the angel of death.

The Rambam was one of the doctors of the king in Egypt and the king loved him very, very much. Another doctor of the king was jealous of the Rambam: "He's just a simple doctor. I'm also a doctor. Why does the king like him better than everyone else?" So the other doctor went and tried to convince the king that there's nothing special about the Rambam. He was even ready to challenge the Rambam to see who was better. The king was happy to go along with his idea so he could get rid of this nuisance.

It was clear that by the end of the challenge, one of the two doctors could die of poisoning. The Rambam prepared himself very well for the challenge and he drank some sort of medicine that would protect his stomach from the poison. He ordered his students to go to his home to get a vomiting drug. And then the challenge began. The non-Jewish doctor gave the Rambam the poison to drink and because his students did everything he asked, the Rambam survived to live happily, healthfully, and peacefully.

Now it was the Rambam's turn to poison the non-Jewish doctor, but in reality the Rambam didn't have any poison that could kill a person. Nevertheless, in front of everyone, he asked if he could first try out the "poison" medicine on someone who the king had already sentenced to death. The Rambam told this person to close his nose when he drinks the medicine so that he won't be in misery when he dies. The minute the man drank the medicine he dropped dead on the floor. The other doctor got so

scared that before he was even given the medicine to drink, he dropped dead on the floor too.

The Rambam then went to give the medicine to the king and the king was shocked. "Do you want to kill me?!" asked the king. "No, God forbid!" replied the Rambam. "The medicine is just extract from flowers and it's very healthy. Those who died, died of great fear, not of any poison."

"Tze ulmad mah bikesh Lavan ha'arami laasot le Yaakov Avinu she'Pharaoh lo gazar elah al hazcharim ve'Lavan bikesh laakor et hakol she'neamar arami abed avi..."

Q & A

Question: Why does it talk about Lavan (in the above pasuk) when clearly we are talking about the miracles of Yetziyat Mitzrayim? Lavan was worse than Pharaoh so aren't we lessening the miracle by discussing him? What connection does Lavan have to Yetziyat Mitzrayim?

Answer: If you think about it you would find that Yetziyat Mitzrayim depended on Lavan. Lavan didn't want Yaakov to marry Rachel he wanted Leah to marry him and all the tribes came from Leah and her maids. The Chachamim say that if not for the merit of Rachel's sons we wouldn't have been redeemed. Yosef haTzadik commanded Bnei Israel to take his bones to Eretz Yisrael.

Question: It says - the ocean saw and split - what did the ocean see?

Answer: The Ocean saw Yosef's coffin and then it split in two. From this we see that Lavan wanted the sons of Yaakov to go down to Egypt and to work under Pharaoh so they will lose all hope. Lavan and Pharaoh had a common denominator and Hashem made a great miracle and saved us!

We drink the second cup of wine at the end of Magid.

Rachtzah

- We wash our hands with a beracha (al nitilat yadain).

Motzi-Matzah

- We must eat 2 kezayit of matzah (which is equal to 54 grams).
- When we eat the matzah we **must** lean a little to the left.

Maror

- Take one kezayit (27 grams) of maror (lettuce) and dip it into the charoset.
- We make the beracha of “al achilat maror”.
- We **do not** eat the maror leaning to the left.
- Charoset is usually made out of something sweet like dates, walnuts, or almonds.
- Charoset symbolizes the clay that the Jews used in Egypt.

Korech

- We eat korech in remembrance of Hillel - he used to eat matzah, maror, and charoset all together in one bite.
- We eat it leaning to the left.

Shulchan Orech

- We eat the meal in enjoyment. It's a mitzvah to be happy on the holiday and there is no happiness without meat and wine.

Tzafun

- We find the afikoman and everyone eats a small piece (a kizait).
- We may not eat anything at all after we eat the afikoman so have dessert before eating the afikoman.

Barech

- We say birkat hamazon.
- We drink the third cup.

Hallel

- We say Hallel.
- We drink the fourth cup.

Nirtzah

- We sing songs and pray that next year, we will be in Yerushalayim!