



Pesah Guidelines in light of COVID-19

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Hadar's General Guide to Preparing for Pesah can be found [here](#).

A MINIMALIST APPROACH TO PREPARING FOR PESAH

Some people are finding themselves with much more limited time or resources this year. Some are working in the health industry and their time is overbooked. Others are juggling responsibilities without a broader network of support. Some are recovering from being ill—well enough to prepare for Pesah, but not well enough to put in the usual effort they expend in other years. Reviewing the minimal requirements—all halakhically sound and the overwhelming majority of which are the letter of the law on any Pesah—is particularly important this year.

NOTE: IF YOU ARE ILL AND DO NOT HAVE PHYSICAL ENERGY TO CLEAN OR KASHER AND ARE ALONE, YOU ARE IN A STATE OF DURESS AND SHOULD ONLY FOCUS ON YOUR RECOVERY AND WELL-BEING. If someone else (like a roommate) is in your apartment they can be your agent to check for hametz. You should still say the nullification for hametz. You or an agent you appoint can sell your hametz.**

Supposing you are well enough but short on time or bandwidth, if you keep these following rules in mind, *cleaning* for Pesah should take only a few hours, depending on the size of your home. And you can do a lot of it while doing some of the basic kashering below!

- **The prohibition on owning hametz only applies to something the size of an olive or greater.** You do not need to eliminate every crumb of bread from your home. The task is to consume, destroy or sell any hametz that is worthy of eating—the size of an olive or greater.

Moreover, you only need to worry about checking areas where you bring hametz the rest of the year. Granted, for those with small children at home, that space can be expansive. But, for instance, if you never eat in your bedroom, you don't need to check your bedroom, just perhaps the pockets of your clothing. We generally clean thoroughly for Pesah for fear that we might sweep together all the little bits of our hametz in our house and there will end up together in an olive-sized pile on Pesah. But this concern doesn't apply to little pieces that are smaller than an olive and are already somewhat gross from being on the floor. (See Mishnah Berurah 442:33)

- **There is no ban on owning *kitniyot*, even for those who do not eat them on Pesah.** You can have shelves full of rice and beans—you do not need to do anything with them.
- **Any hametz that you are selling simply needs to be made inaccessible so that you won't accidentally use it on Pesah, but you don't otherwise need to get rid of it.** Many try to avoid selling hametz in regular years and get rid of it all. If you are unable to have the timing on that work out this year, and you have possible fears of certain stocks of things being unavailable after Pesah, you should feel free to sell. Just keep it in a separate place, authorize a rabbi or qualified agent to sell it, and tape it up so you won't accidentally use it.
- **As a backstop, we rely on mental nullification of the ownership of our hametz.** If there is hametz that you realized you did not get to selling or to getting rid of and you have no way of getting to it, you simply nullify it with the following declaration on the morning of the 14th of Nisan (as we do every year):

"כל חמירא וחמיעא דאיכא ברשותי, דחזיתיה ודלא חזיתיה, דבערתיה ודלא
בערתיה, לבטיל ולהוי הפקר כעפרא דארעא"

“All hametz and leaven that is in my possession, whether I have seen it
or not, whether I have gotten rid of it or not, I hereby nullify—let it be
as ownerless as the dust of the earth.”

While this nullification is usually symbolic, some people may need to really rely on it this year, as in cases when one cannot get back into an apartment where one left hametz. Hametz left in an apartment this year that had to be vacated abruptly in the thirty days leading up to Pesah has the status of חמץ שנפלה עליו מפולת, a building that collapsed, leaving the hametz inaccessible to the owner. Mishnah Pesahim 2:3 clarifies that in such cases, the hametz is considered to be destroyed, though R. Hisda, on Pesahim 31b, requires a mental nullification in addition. You can also sell the hametz there, remotely.

- **You do not need to place hametz items around the house for *bedikat hametz*.** You say the *berakhah* for *bedikat hametz* knowing that if you find hametz you will get rid of it, but you do not need to hide hametz in advance as has become Ashkenazi custom.
- **If you find hametz on Pesah:** On Shabbat or Yom Tov you should cover it. On Hol Ha-Moed, you should put it with hametz you sold if you sold your hametz, or get rid of it (burn it, flush it down toilet if it is small, or throw it in the trash if you have no other option)

WHAT CAN I BUY WITHOUT PESAH CERTIFICATION IF I DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO MY USUAL SOURCES OF PESAH FOOD?

Any liquids or other liquid-like items (i.e. items not made up of discrete pieces) made of pure ingredients can be bought in advance of Pesah without need for special kosher for Passover certification. (These commonly include milk, butter, extra-virgin olive oil, honey, finely-ground pure spices, and cottage cheese. One must make sure there are no additives, which can surprisingly often be hametz. It is worthwhile to check various online guides with regard to specific products, such as ou.org.) This is due to the basic principle that hametz before Pesah (including on the afternoon before Pesah) can be nullified in the standard 60:1 ratio. It is only when Pesah begins that it forbids in infinitesimal amounts. So as long as the combination happened before Pesah, confidence that the hametz was a small, insignificant minority is sufficient to permit the food for Pesah use.

GRADUALLY KASHERING FOR PESAH

Many people find themselves at home this year with multiple people needing to eat much more frequently in the lead up to Pesah, and with fewer options for procuring food from outside the home. As such, it is worthwhile to review how you can turn a kitchen over for Pesah gradually, as you may still need to eat hametz while preparing for Pesah.

- **Start outside the kitchen and work your way in.** Get a head start on cleaning everything that is away from food prep; you can already do that now. Clean out your car of all visible hametz, clean out bedrooms and living areas that are not used for eating and treat them as hametz-free zones as soon as they are done. Take on your pantry or other food storage areas and segregate anything you plan to use for Pesah from everything else.
- **In the kitchen, begin with shelving.** Clear off a few shelves, wipe them down carefully with soap and water and make sure there are no crumbs or other food left. (Some have the custom to cover, but if you have cleaned well with soap, you need not do this.) Place all the Pesah things you expect to need in the kitchen tightly in these initially cleared shelves. You can begin to move out hametz dishes and utensils that you don't expect to need in the final days.
- **Kasher an initial prep area for Pesah.** You don't need to kasher everything all at once! Start with a section of counter: scrub it down with soap and water, getting it totally clean, and pour boiling water over it. (If it can't handle boiling water, then cover it.)
- **Kasher initial cooking areas for Pesah.** If you can afford to not use your oven for now, switch it over by cleaning it out well (racks, inside of oven door, back wall, any crevices) and running it on its clean cycle. Alternatively, run it on its highest temperature for 45 minutes. Kasher burners (by cleaning the surface under them, pouring hot water on it, and then running burner on high for 15 minutes) and leave the ones you need for the final days of hametz unkashed. Hametz burners do not invalidate Pesah ones through dry heat. As long as you don't cook at

the same time and keep the surfaces clean, you can have parallel hametz and Pesahh cooking tracks running on the range on the same day. Just keep everything clean and separate. You can start kashering any utensils you plan to use and set them aside. Feel free to do this in several batches over several days if it is useful. Or kasher everything and then pick out a few things to make hametz again and redo them in a final push.

- **Start segregating your refrigerator.** Identify a shelf that will contain Pesahh things, clear it off, remove the shelf and clean off with soap and water. Place Pesahh things there and keep them separate from the other parts of the refrigerator. There is no problem with keeping Pesahh and hametz items in the same refrigerator as long as they are kept separate.
- **Make your final push.** When you are ready to switch everything over (perhaps as late as the night of *bedikat* hametz or even the early morning of the 14th of Nisan) get rid of all hametz everywhere. Clear out all hametz and hametz dishes from shelves or tape up the ones you won't use. Kasher any remaining burners. Kasher all remaining utensils. Finish kashering all countertops and tabletops by pouring boiling water or covering. End by pouring boiling water over the sink and you are done!

HOW CAN I KASHER AS LITTLE OF MY KITCHEN AS POSSIBLE?

- Clean the minimum number of shelves in your fridge to store perishables for Pesahh. Cover other areas and the food left there with newspaper or a cloth.
- Clear off counter-space you will need for Pesahh and clean with soap. Pour boiling water over that part of the counter or cover it if it won't hold up to boiling water. Cover any other part of the counter and any year-round items left there.
- Clear off the minimum number of shelves you need to store Pesahh food. There is no need to cover the shelf if you have cleaned it with soap and water. Using soap or a cleaning agent will render any hametz particles inedible and thus remove any problem they can cause if there is inadvertent contact on Pesahh. Or store food on the counter. Consolidate year-round items into cabinets and tape them off, or cover on counter space you don't need.
- Kasher one or more burners by cleaning and leaving on high for 15 minutes.
- If you need your microwave—and it is a type that can be kashered—clean it, let it sit unused for 24 hours, and put a glass with water in it on high until the chamber fills with steam and water starts to spill out of the cup. If you don't need the microwave, just leave it uncleaned and tape the door!
- If you need your oven, clean it—including inside of over door and back wall—and turn it on highest temperature for 45 minutes. Or just run the clean cycle.
- Clean sink and pour boiling water over it. (Some sinks may be made of materials that can't be kashered—still wash it out well with soap, pour boiling water over it 3 times and then just make sure to have a Pesahh rack in there, which can be something you kashered.)

MINIMALIST KASHERING OF UTENSILS

- **Keep it simple.** Only kasher what you need. 1) Procure a cutting board that can be used for Pesah (one for meat and one for milk), or just cut on plates. 2) Kasher a large pot (see regular guide). 3) Kasher a cutting knife (one for meat and one for milk). An all metal knife or metal with hard plastic handle can be cleaned well and kashered through *hag'alah* (full immersion in boiling water). 4) Kasher minimum sets of metal silverware needed for people in your home, plus extra for serving. (Although once you are kashering silverware, it is often easy to throw in more.) 4) Glasses only ever used for cold liquids can simply be rinsed well and they are ready for Pesah.
- **Relying on leniencies.** People with unavoidable needs and unavailable resources can appropriately rely on halakhic positions they otherwise would not follow. 1) If you don't normally kasher hard plastic (of the sort that can withstand being in boiling water), but only by kashering plastic will you have enough utensils for Pesah, you should rely on the many permissive views this year. 2) Ashkenazim can rely on the Sephardic views that treat glass, pyrex, Corelle, and other similar material to be non-porous. They can be prepared for Pesah by thoroughly cleaning them. That includes simply using one's glass plates from the rest of the year for Pesah. 3) These are also appropriate circumstances to use disposable plates and cutlery in moderate measure and someone who has no Pesah dishes and no access to glass should use such disposables throughout the holiday.
- **Extreme Need.** Someone completely unable to kasher for health reasons but who is nonetheless able to cook for themselves--and who needs to--should speak to a rabbi for guidance. There are contexts where it is appropriate to set aside a totally clean *hametz* pot for 24 hours and then use it to prepare Pesah food without kashering it. But this is an absolute last resort and each case is distinct. However, if one is in a pressing situation and has food that was prepared in *hametz* dishes that had certainly not been used in the 24 hours prior to preparation and care was taken that it was *hametz* free, one may eat that food on Pesah and need not throw it out. This may be relevant for people who, due to travel restrictions and/or quarantine, must remain in someone else's home who is not kashering for Pesah, such as a secular relative. Ideally one would kasher the minimum needed items or eat only cold food, but this is not always possible in a given family dynamic.

MINIMALIST SEDER IN EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

- **If you have only one olive-size amount of matzah** you first say the blessing on marror, eat your meal, and then say hamotzi and the blessing for matzah at the end OF THE MEAL and eat this matzah as afikoman, eating nothing afterwards. (See Mishnah Berurah 482:6)

- **If you have less than four cups of wine:** the priority is 1) kiddush, 2) birkat hamazon, 3) maggid, 4) hallel. (See Mishnah Brurah 483:1)
- **If you do not have wine/grape juice at all** the Ashkenazi ruling is to use other beverages commonly considered significant (liquor, and possibly juice if necessary). (See Rema Orach Hayyim 483:1) If you have no such beverages, you start your seder by saying kiddush over the matzah (hamotzi instead of hagafen) and add the blessing “al akhilat matzah” at the end of kiddush. After maggid you say the blessing for marror and then do koreykh. (See Shulhan Arukh Orach Hayyim 483)

Some other resources:

The Minimalist's Guide to Passover and Seder by Rabbinit Leah Sarna of ASBI Congregation in Chicago. cRc maintains an excellent guide to kashering various kitchen materials and appliances of all kinds. OU has extensive Passover guidelines.

Here is a guidebook by Rabbi Eidlitz that contains an exhaustive list of foods that do not need special kosher for Passover certification.