



A Bedikat Chametz Ritual for the Night Before Pesach

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The ritual that begins the Passover festival is *bedikat chametz* or the search for leaven. This ritual, traditionally performed on the night before Pesach, is a symbolic check to make sure all leaven has been removed from the home. Ceremonial accoutrements such as a candle to search for breadcrumbs in the dark, and a lulav or feather to sweep the crumbs away, add mystery to the ritual. In my own family, we hide funny notes with each carefully hidden pile of chametz, so that the searcher will be amused as well as leaven-free.

Chametz is any grain product touched by yeast. It is likely ancient Israelites abstained from yeast in this season as an encouragement to the new grain, that it not become too wet and ferment on the stalk. However, in Jewish tradition, chametz came to represent arrogance, pride, and puffed-up-ness. In the Talmud (Berachot 17a), Rabbi Alexandri says the following prayer: "*Ribon ha'olamim, galu veyadua lefanecha sheretzonenu laasot retzoncha*, master of the worlds, it is known before You that our will is to perform your will. *Umi me'akev? Se'or sheba'isah*. What prevents us from doing your will? The yeast in the dough." In other words, our selfish impulses are kneaded all through us like yeast in dough, and it's hard to separate them out. So Passover became a time to remove internal chametz as well as external chametz. The Chasidic thinker known as the Sefat Emet understands chametz as arrogance and matzah as humility, and points out that *lechachmitz* means to miss an opportunity. To remove the chametz, the arrogance, is to discover more opportunities to connect and grow.

We will welcome the Passover season with a symbolic search for internal and external chametz. As you can see, we have four piles of chametz on the table. Each pile represents a different place where chametz must be removed. Rav Abraham Isaac Kook said that there are four songs in the world: the song of the self, the song of the nation, the song of humanity, and the song of the whole world. So as we sweep away these piles of chametz, we hope for a cleansing and a healing for the self (each self here), for our community, for relations among all people everywhere, and of our relationship to the earth itself.

Four intentions

Please take a moment to intend to remove the chametz or puffed-up-ness within.

Please take a moment to intend to do your share to improve and heal our community.

Please take a moment to intend to do your share as a citizen of the human species to improve our world.

Please take a moment to intend to do your share to care for our earth, all its resources, and all its creatures.

Now we will recite a modified blessing, after which four ritual helpers will sweep away each pile and make the official declaration that we have cleared away the chametz.

Baruch asher kidshanu bemitzvotav vetzivanu al bi'ur chametz.

Blessed is the One who has sanctified us with commandments and has asked us to remove the chametz.

Four intentions

All chametz within the self that we have not seen and have not removed, may it be void and ownerless as the dust of the earth.

All chametz within our community that we have not seen and have not removed, may it be void and ownerless as the dust of the earth.

All chametz in our relationships with all kinds of people in our nation and around the world that we have not seen and have not removed, may it be void and ownerless as the dust of the earth.

All chametz in our relationship with the earth that we have not seen and have not removed, may it be void and ownerless as the dust of the earth.

Kein yehi ratzon—so may it be.