



## Cleaning for Pesach

The excitement of Pesach begins well before the actual holiday – Pesach preparations are an intrinsic part of this special *chag*. Rav Mordechai Eliyahu ז"ל shared a few thoughts on the importance and inner meaning of cleaning for Pesach and searching for *chametz*:

When there's an argument between different groups of Jews, for example between different political parties, the discussion should be conducted in a dignified, respectful and "clean" manner. The Gemara teaches this: "The verse did not speak to the disparagement of [even] a non-kosher animal, as it is written: 'From the pure animals and from the animals that are lacking purity' (Bereishit 7:8)."

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In other words, the Torah wanted to teach us how to speak cleanly, and chose a longer expression, "from the animals that are lacking purity," so as not to say "from the impure animal."

The commentators question this though. In other places in the Torah, "impure animal" is specifically used, so why is the longer, 'cleaner' phrase not used there like it is in the above verse, listing the animals that entered the

ark? They answer that when the Torah teaches us the laws of kosher food, there is no reason to shorten its words, because this is Torah and *halacha*, but when the Torah is only telling which animals entered the ark, which is not practical *halacha*, it is necessary to add extra words and avoid using unclear language. Wise people should learn from this. In the words of the Ran: אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנָה טְהוֹרָה ("that are lacking purity") contains 13 letters. הִטְמָאָה ("impure") contains five. Eight letters were added just so the language would be clean.

We know we must check for *chametz* in the holes and cracks. Our commentators suggest that a person should also check his own "cracks," his pockets. One should check if one's money is 'clean,' and whether one gave charity to *talmidei chachamim*. As Yirmiyahu says, money which is not clean and pure contains no sign of blessing: "the man who gains riches by unjust means – when his life is half gone, they [his riches] will desert him..." (Yirmiyahu 17:11).

The Shulchan Aruch writes: "In the beginning of the eve of the 14th of Nissan, *chametz* should be searched for by candlelight, in all of the places where one regularly brings *chametz*."

One should be careful not to begin any work or eat before he searches. And even if he has a set time to study Torah at that time, he should not study until he searches. If he started to learn while it was still day, he need not stop. And there are those who say he should stop." If he is hungry and wants to eat before searching for *chametz*, he may eat fruits or less than a *beitza*-worth of bread. We also do not set time for learning Torah at the end of the 13th of Nissan, and a Rabbi should not begin a *drasha*, lest he continue late and prevent *bedikat chametz* from being carried out on time.

The time for searching for *chametz* is at the beginning of the eve of the 14th of Nissan. The *Kaf HaChaim* says this means right before night begins. The *Magen Avraham* says it means before *tzeit haKochavim*, before three stars are visible, even though there is still some light.

*LeHalacha*, we say the time for *bedikat chametz* is when *tzeit haKochavim* begins, since during *bein haShmashot*, the light of the candle doesn't shine well, and the *mitzvah* is to search at the beginning of the night, אור לארבעה עשר, (the eve of the 14th), which is why the Mishna uses the word אור and not חושך (darkness), to imply the very beginning of the night when it is not yet fully dark.

"In Nissan we were redeemed and in Nissan we will be redeemed." *Chazal* say: we don't want to wait, we want redemption immediately.

As Rashi says, the future redemption may occur even at night, and the *Beit HaMikdash* will descend, built and complete. We believe in the coming of Mashiach every single day. *Yehi ratzon* that we merit to sacrifice the *korban Pesach* in its set time, and we should merit the *geula shleima*, speedily in our days, *Amen*.

Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu זצ"ל served as the Rishon LeZion and Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel from 1983 to 1993.