

Weekly Halacha Discussion

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A discussion of Halachic topics provided weekly. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

The Search for Chometz and Ta'anis of the Bechorim

The Search for Chometz

QUESTION: *Should ten pieces of chometz be hidden throughout the house before the search for chometz takes place?*

DISCUSSION: The *poskim* differ in their views regarding this practice. There are four basic approaches:

- 1) The *Rama*¹ states that the custom is to hide pieces of *chometz* around the house before the search takes place. Since it often happens that no *chometz* is found during the course of the search, the blessing over the *bedikah* could possibly be a *brachah l'vatallah*. To avoid this eventuality, one would be required to hide some *chometz* before the *bedikah* begins.
- 2) Although *l'chatchilah* pieces of *chometz* should be hidden, The *Rama* himself holds that if they were not, the blessing would nonetheless be valid, for the *mitzvah* is to search for *chometz*, even in the event that one does not find any.
- 3) Many *poskim*² hold that one need not be concerned about a *brachah l'vatallah* at all and one need not hide any *chometz* before the *bedikah*.
- 4) Some *poskim*³ hold that the practice of hiding *chometz* should be abandoned. They are concerned that some pieces may be lost or overlooked, with the result that *chometz* will remain in the house over Pesach.

Mishna Berura agrees with the *poskim* who are not concerned about the possibility of a *brachah l'vatallah*. He nevertheless states that it is not proper to discontinue a long-standing Jewish custom⁴. Indeed, the majority of homes today observe this time-honoured practice⁵.

Nowadays, there is an additional reason for maintaining this custom. The halacha demands that the home be thoroughly searched during *bedikas chometz*. Any place into which *chometz* may have been brought during the year must be checked. In many homes, however, the search has become merely ritualistic, taking but a few minutes with no serious search conducted. One reason why the *bedikah* has become perfunctory is that today, homes are thoroughly cleaned and scrubbed for days or even weeks before the search takes place. Consequently, most people assume that no *chometz* will be found and are satisfied with going through the motions. Although there is a possible justification (*limud zechus*) for people who conduct such a perfunctory *bedikah*⁶,

¹O. C. 432:2.

²GRA, *Chayei Adam* and *Chok Yaakov* quoting the *Ra'avad*.

³Taz, quoted by *Sha'ar ha-Tziyun* 432:11.

⁴There are also additional reasons - especially according to *Kabbalah* - for this ancient custom.

⁵*Chok Yaakov*, *Shulchan Aruch Harav*, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* and *Aruch ha-Shulchan* all note this custom.

⁶See *Sha'arei Teshuvah* O. C. 433:11 (also quoted by *Kaf ha-Chayim*) who says that the masses do not conduct a through check since they rely on the cleaning process done before the *bedikah*. In his view, this may be relied upon even if a professional non-Jew did the cleaning. See *Chochmas Shlomo* (433:11) and *Da'as Torah* (433:2) for similar rulings.

many other *poskim* do not agree with this leniency and require that a proper *bedikah* be conducted.

In order to satisfy the views of all *poskim*, it is recommended⁷ that one hide *chometz* around the house before the *bedikah*. Since the searcher is aware that there definitely is some *chometz* to be found, he will necessarily have to conduct a proper *bedikah*. Therefore:

- ◆ Unless one has a custom to the contrary, ten⁸ pieces of bread should be hidden in various places around the house before the *bedikah* begins.
- ◆ Care must be taken that the pieces are wrapped well so that no crumbs will escape. Only hard pieces should be used. The exact location of the pieces should be recorded and carefully checked. Upon concluding the search the pieces must be properly discarded⁹.
- ◆ Each piece should be **less than 1 US fl. oz¹⁰ (29.57 ml)**.
- ◆ The custom has become that household members who are not going to be searching the house hide the pieces¹¹. However, the searcher himself may also hide the pieces¹².
- ◆ Some *poskim*¹³ rule that a person who is leaving home for Pesach and therefore conducts his *bedikah* in advance of the 14th of *Nissan* without a blessing¹⁴, need not hide pieces of *chometz*.

Ta'anis of the Bechorim

QUESTION: *Who is considered a bechor in regard to ta'anis bechorim on erev Pesach?*

DISCUSSION: Concerning *ta'anis bechorim*, any first born male who is over thirty days old, whether first-born to his father or to his mother, is considered a *bechor*. A first-born of a *Kohen* or a *Levi* is considered like any other *bechor* in regard to *ta'anis bechorim*¹⁵.

The status of a *bechor* born by caesarean section¹⁶ or of a first-born non-Jew who converts¹⁷, is a matter of disagreement among the *poskim*. It is therefore recommended that these *bechorim* participate in a *seudas mitzvah* and thereby satisfy all opinions¹⁸.



⁷Ruling of Harav S. Y. Elyashiv (quoted in *Seder ha-Aruch*, vol. 3, pg. 27-28). See also *Chok Yaakov* 232:14 and *Machazik Brachah* 232 who advance a similar idea.

⁸This is the custom, based on the *Arizal*, quoted by the *Mishna Berura*.

⁹*Mishna Berura* 232:13-14.

¹⁰*Sha'arei Teshuvah* 432:7. Together, though, all the pieces should total at least one US ounce (29.57 ml) - see *Orchos Rabbeinu*, *Pesach* 5 quoting Harav Y. Y. Kanievsky.

¹¹See *Chok Yaakov* 232:14.

¹²Harav S. Y. Elyashiv (quoted in *Seder ha-Aruch*, *ibid.*). This was the also the custom of Harav Y. Y. Kanievsky (*Orchos Rabbeinu*, *Pesach* 5) and Harav Y. Teitelbaum (*Hagadah Divrei Yoel* 108).

¹³*Minchas Yitzchok* 8:35. See *Kinyan Torah* 2:82 who disagrees.

¹⁴As ruled in *O. C.* 436:1.

¹⁵*Mishna Berura* 470:2

¹⁶See *Chok Yaakov* 470:2; *Kaf ha-Chayim* 470:3.

¹⁷*Shevet ha-Levi* 8:117.

¹⁸Harav Y. S. Elyashiv (*Seder ha-Aruch*, vol. 3, pg. 44).