

The Night Before the Seder

The Search for Chametz

בְּדִיקַת חֲמֵץ

1. The Search for Chametz (products containing leavened grain) is the ceremonial culmination of several weeks of transforming the house into a sanctified setting for Pesach. The physical efforts help create a psychological readiness for the seder.

2. Prior to this evening's ceremony, we **clean** all the rooms where food might have been eaten or stored, so that no chametz is left. We **collect** all the chametz products (like spaghetti or whiskey) and put them in a cabinet. We **seal** it, mark it as chametz, and **sell** its contents to a non-Jew for the duration of the holiday. Generally a local rabbi will serve as your agent for the ritual "sale."

3. After dark, on the night before the seder (or two nights before the seder when it falls on Saturday night), conduct a candlelight search for chametz into all the corners of the house. (In Eastern Europe Jews used a candle, a feather to sweep the crumbs and a wooden spoon to collect them. For greater safety you may prefer a flashlight to a candle). We recommend that ten pieces of chametz be hidden before the search begins, to enhance the fun of the search for the children.

4. Before the search recite the blessing. After the search recite the Aramaic formula for disowning any chametz still undiscovered in the home.

The Blessing before the Search in the Evening:

BLESSED ARE YOU, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who sanctified us by commanding us to remove all the chametz.

The Formula for Disowning Unseen Chametz After the Search:

ALL CHAMETZ in my possession which I have not seen and have not removed shall be nullified and be ownerless as the dust of the earth.

Ba-ruch ata Adonai
Elo-hei-nu me-lech ha-olam,
asher kee-d'sha-nu b'meeetz-vo-tav
v'tzee-va-nu al bee-ur cha-metz.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל בְּעוּר
חֲמֵץ.



Sefer HaMinhagim, Amsterdam

כָּל חֲמִירָא וְחֲמִיעָה דְאִכָּא
בְּרִשׁוּתֵי דְלֵא חֲמִתָּהּ וְדֵלֵא
בְּעֵרְתָּהּ וְדֵלֵא יְדַעְנָא בֵּיהּ
לְבַטֵּל וְלֵהוּי הַפְקֵר כְּעַפְרָא
דְאַרְעָא.

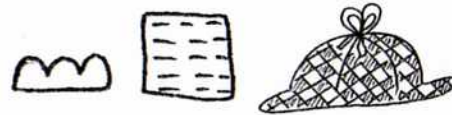


B'deeikat
Chametz

The
Search

Sherlock Holmes and the Haggadah

In the picture on this page, we have dispersed ten small pictures of a challah. Later on in the Haggadah we have hidden ten small matzot (afikoman). Good luck ferreting them out!

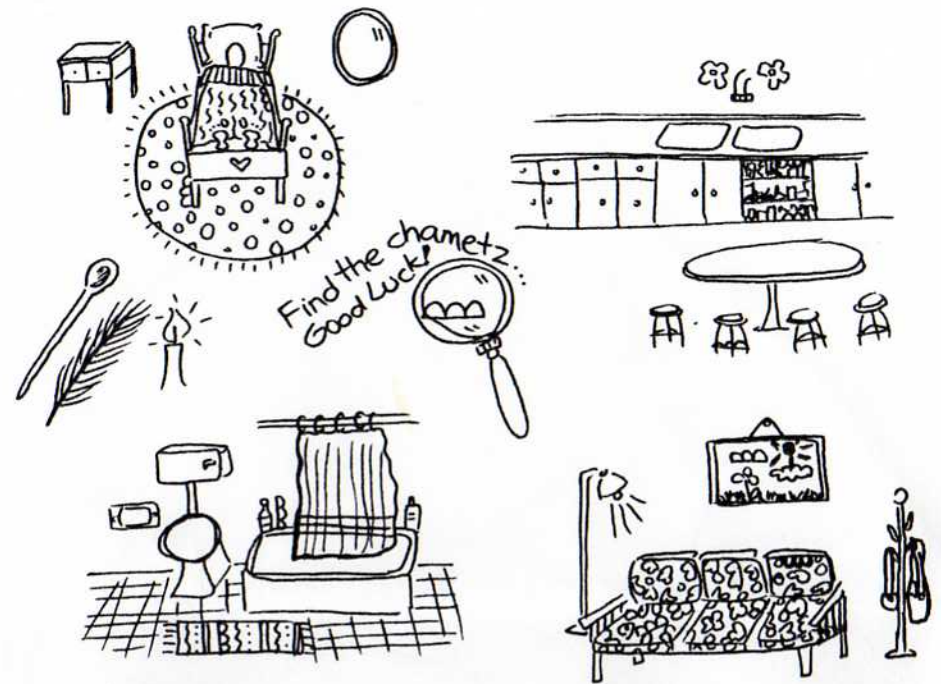


Complications

WHEN SEDER NIGHT FALLS ON Saturday evening, the search is conducted on Thursday night and the bonfire on Friday morning. Challah is put aside in a special "chametz zone" in the house to be eaten by approximately 10 a.m. on Shabbat morning. The leftovers may be removed by means of a flush of the toilet.

Keeping Your Pockets Clean

RABBI MOSHE ISSERLES (16th C. Poland) required that the search for chametz include checking one's pockets. The Kabbalist Isaiah Horowitz added an ethical dimension to this internal audit: check carefully that your pockets contain no funds deriving from theft, robbery or fraud.



Searching for Chametz

Hide and Go Seek

A medieval custom perfectly suited to a children's game involves hiding ten pieces of bread throughout the house before the candlelight search for chametz begins. Originally this was done to guarantee that even after the scrupulous cleaning, the ritual search on the last night before seder would still uncover some chametz. Today it provides an occasion for a game in which ten pieces of bread secured in closed

plastic bags are carefully concealed.

On each bag a word or a clue or a question may be attached (the words add up to a secret message or a Pesach song; the clues hint at the next hiding place; the ten questions constitute a quiz about basic Pesach facts).

Remember that besides finding the pre-hidden bags of chametz, one must genuinely check the typical "hang-outs" of forgotten chametz (like the car's glove compartment).

