

## Searching for Hametz (Bedikat haChametz)

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Source: "A Night to Remember: A Haggadah of Contemporary Voices," Chabad.org, and Star-K.org

"The human soul is the light, the candle of Hashem, for searching for the hidden, innermost self." (Proverbs, 20:27)

The night before the seder, after dark, we search for hametz in all corners of the house in a veritable "search and destroy" mission. Hametz is grain products that may have leavened, fermented, and risen like yeast. We know that bedikat hahametz is not merely a time for inspection, but also for introspection. The 16th century Kabbalist, Moshe Alsheikh of Tzfat, said, "The search for hametz is not simply a search for leavened bread, but rather than opportunity examine ourselves. On the night before Pesach, when each of us is at home within our own walls, where there is no one else around, and we are not troubled by daily affairs, it is then that we can sit alone and confront all of our outstanding obligations to G-d, saying to our souls, 'Let us awaken and arise, let us examine our ways and turn away from all our sins. Let us cleanse and purify ourselves and remove our evil ways from G-d's sight. Let us become allies, my soul, and stand guard together. We will abjure slumber from our eyes day and night. We will not rest, rather we will be gatekeepers lest we return to our evil ways. Maybe G-d be with us as G-d was with the imahot and avot.'"

Prior to this night, we clean all the rooms where we may have eaten or stored food. Just before doing bedikat hahametz, we hide 10 pieces of hametz to be "found," wrapped in foil or other flammable material. It is a good idea to write down the places where we have "hidden" this hametz in case we forget.

For bedikat hahametz, we conduct the search in the dark, with a candle or flashlight for spotting hametz, and a feather and or a spoon for collecting hametz. All hametz found is burned the next morning, or placed in a separated area marked as "sold for Pesach."

Prior to the search, recite the following blessing:

"Baruch atah Ado-nai, Eloh-ainu Melech haOlam, Asher Kidishanu b'Mitzvotav, Vitzivanu al bee-ur haHametz."

After the search, the morning of the seder, we bring the hametz to a bonfire to be incinerated. The burning of the hametz marks the symbolic division between hametz and matzah, winter and spring, the yetzer ha'ra (the evil inclination) and the yetzer hatov (the desire for good and purity). After the bonfire, we recite this formula called "Kol Hamira" in Aramaic, disowning any hametz still undiscovered in the house:

"All hametz in my possession, whether I have seen it or not, and whether I have removed it or not, shall be nullified and ownerless as dust of the earth."

After saying Kol Hamira, some Sephardim recite the following tikkun from the Ben Ish Hai: "May it be your will, Hashem my G-d and the G-d of our ancestors, that just as we burned the hametz out of our homes today, so You will help us burn out the evil inclination from our hearts. Please, G-d, remove from our hearts the bad part of our ego, and purify us lovingly, empowering the good sides of our ego. Let our souls shine and be empowered with your light, and be connected to You in the highest holiness, which shall be with us always."

**Halachic P.S.** - When Seder falls on Saturday night, the search is conducted on Thursday night and the bonfire is held on Friday morning. Hallah is put aside in a special "hametz zone" to be eaten by approximately 10 a.m. on Shabbat morning. The leftovers should be removed by flushing them down a toilet.

