

Passover Cleaning Made Easy

By Rabbi Yitzchak Berkowitz

By knowing what and how to clean, Passover cleaning needn't be a chore.

INTRODUCTION

God took the Jewish people out of Egypt in the springtime. The Talmud notes that God was very thoughtful. Not only was He interested in redeeming the nation, He wanted to do so at a time when the weather was just right. Not too hot, not too cold.

Everything about the Passover season is beautiful. The whole idea of re-doing your house -- your environment -- for the holiday should be a beautiful experience. For some reason, though, the burden of all that cleaning often hangs heavy over us, and as a result we lose much of the joy of Passover.

I'd like to not only make Passover cleaning a little easier, but above all to change the attitude once and for all to stop being frightened. Passover is not a monster. It's the most beautiful time of the year.

In order to change our attitudes, two things are necessary. The first is to know the halacha. There are so many Passover preparations that are done unnecessarily, where if you want to do them for extra credit, that's fine. But it's important to understand what is necessity and what is voluntary.

Secondly, there's practical advice. I want to share some tips that I've picked up over the years. Cleaning for Passover can actually be easy, there's lots of room for creativity, and it's fun.

THE OBLIGATION TO GET RID OF CHAMETZ

In cleaning for Passover, we are first and foremost fulfilling the mitzvah of /biur chametz/ -- getting rid of chametz. /Biur chametz/ is actually quite an easy mitzvah in terms of physical exertion. The Torah says: "/tashbisu se'or mibateichem/" -- make all your sour dough rest. The Torah commandment is that you can possess all the chametz you want, but in your mind it must be dust -- ownerless and valueless.

Now obviously we are dealing with something subtle and vague. What goes on in your mind, no one knows except you and God. It's quite easy to think you have considered everything "null and void," when in truth you can't wait for Passover to be over so you can partake of all those goodies!

So the Sages instituted a requirement to physically destroy chametz. This mitzvah is known as /bedikat chametz./ The Sages say it is not enough to emotionally write the chametz off as "dust"; you must actually search out any chametz you can find -- and physically destroy it.

WHEN TO SEARCH

The mitzvah of /bedikat chametz/ is to be done on the night of the 14th of Nissan, the evening prior to the Seder. Why at night? Because in your home there are crevices and corners that have to be illuminated by artificial light -- and artificial light works best at night.

Why the 14th? The Sages said that if some people do it on the 12th and others on the 13th, you'd lose the power of the community reminding and encouraging each other. This

way here is a set time; every Jew does bedikat chametz on the night of the 14th.

However, our homes over the years have grown in size, and consequently are more complicated to clean. As a result, the ability to do bedikat chametz in a few hours on the night of the 14th is no longer feasible. Even if you stay up all night, chances are there are parts of your home you'll never get to. So we start our /bedikat chametz/ early. So realize that when you start cleaning for Passover, you are doing /bedikat chametz./ This is important because there are specific rules for /bedikat chametz./

CLEANING DAY OR NIGHT

As we said, /bedikat chametz/ must be done at night, because that's the only time that artificial light is effective. As a result, we have the following rule: You can inspect by daylight anything that does not need artificial light -- i.e. anything moveable that you can hold up near a window, or any part of the house that has sufficient daylight. (If you choose to add artificial light during the daytime, it doesn't hurt.)

On the other hand, any part of the house that needs artificial light-- e.g. closets, corners, insides of cabinets -- these places must be inspected at night. And make sure they are sufficiently lit.

The only time that you cannot do /bedikat chametz/ altogether is in twilight. You don't have enough daylight, and yet it's not dark enough for the artificial light to be effective. Consequently, you could clean at twilight if it's convenient -- as long as you later inspect these cleaned areas (whether in daylight by day, or in artificial light at night).

WHAT ARE WE SEARCHING FOR?

What kind of chametz do we have to get rid of? And what is "chametz" anyway?

The Torah says: /Lo yera'eh lecha chametz, velo year'eh lecha se'or bechol gevulecha/ - "neither chametz nor se'or shall be visible to you in all your boundaries." Chametz is defined as the result of grain that ferments. Se'or is sourdough -- highly fermented dough that is used to make another dough ferment. Instead of using yeast, what they did in the olden days (and many people do today as well) is to take a little piece of old dough, mix that with the fresh dough, and it causes the fresh dough to rise.

So chametz and /se'or/ are the two things the Torah requires us to get rid of. But there's a difference between the two. Chametz is food. It's edible by human standards -- you'd serve it, you'd eat it. If a human being wouldn't eat it, then it's not chametz, because by definition chametz must be food. On the other hand, nobody eats /se'or/ -- non-edible fermented grain which has the function of fermenting other dough.

There's a third category: Non-edible chametz that is not capable of fermenting other dough. That is neither chametz nor /se'or/. Halachically we call this "garbage" -- and it does not have to be gotten rid of for Passover. Similarly, the Talmud says that se'or which is so bad that even a dog wouldn't eat it -- i.e. it's poisonous -- is halachically not regarded as /se'or/ and is therefore not a problem on Passover.

To review the three categories:

- 1) *Chametz* is food made of fermented grain.
- 2) */Se'or/* is non-edible sourdough, which has the power to ferment other dough.
- 3) "**Garbage*" is something that is either incapable of fermenting other dough, or so totally non-edible that a dog wouldn't eat it.

DEODORANTS AND COSMETICS

Let's talk about different products we have around the house -- for example, deodorants and cosmetics which may very well contain some grain products. Of course, you're not going to eat it. Is it therefore automatically disqualified from the category of chametz? And what about /se'or/? Can deodorant be used to ferment another dough? It cannot, and consequently should not be se'or either.

Some years ago, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein came up with a unique approach that revolutionized the practical applications. He said that even if something in its present state is inedible, but if you can possibly distill it and produce edible chametz, then we would call that "chametz." As a result, he ruled that anything containing grain alcohol (ethyl alcohol) is considered chametz. Even though you would never dream of eating it, nevertheless if you distill it, it would turn into drinkable alcohol. (Ask any alcoholic -- in desperation, they may distill something poisonous like after-shave and drink it.) Therefore, any liquid cosmetic that has any form of grain alcohol is considered chametz and must be gotten rid of for Passover.

This idea only applies to liquids -- because you can't distill a solid. Therefore, any solid substance like stick deodorant or soap which is inedible (i.e. not chametz), and could not ferment a dough (i.e. not se'or), and cannot be distilled -- the halacha is you can own these solid substances on Passover, and you don't have to put them away. Technically, you could even use it on Passover, although the custom is not to use any stuff that has chametz in it as a cosmetic. That's why people buy soaps that are special "Kosher for Passover."

How about beer shampoo or liquid deodorant which contains no grain alcohol but has wheat germ in it. That's not chametz, because you wouldn't eat it. Can it ferment another dough? No. Can you distill it? No. (It's only alcohol that you can get by distilling; you won't get wheat germ vapor by distilling your deodorant.) Consequently, these things are not a problem. You're allowed to keep them around during Passover -- though again the custom is not to use them.

BREAD CRUMBS

What about bread crumbs on your kitchen floor? There are various opinions in halacha, but I'm going to present one in particular that is easier to understand.

We established that the third category -- "garbage" -- is defined as anything that cannot ferment another dough, and is so non-edible that even a dog wouldn't eat it. According to most halachic authorities, there is one more substance that is defined as garbage": Chametz that is smaller than a /kezayit/ (about 30 grams) *and* you would not

use it for anything.

This is something most people call "garbage" -- you would easily throw it away and in your mind it's nothing. Crumbs fit into this category. The only kind of crumb that's problematic is one you'd pick up with your finger and put on your tongue. So leftover crumbs from the table are in fact "chametz." Leftover crumbs on the floor, which you wouldn't eat, are garbage. Therefore, any crumb that you would consider dirt (and is smaller than a kezayit) does not have to be gotten rid of. (The fact that a baby eats it does not turn it into chametz. Because when a baby decides to eat something, it is not a conscious decision that "this is food." If you have non-food around, a baby will eat that, too!)

A QUICK REVIEW

Before we go on, let's make sure we've got it all straight. When we do /bedikat chametz/, what are we looking for?

One crumb of edible chametz cannot remain in your house and you've got to destroy it. Also, anything that contains ethyl alcohol, since it can be distilled, is called "edible chametz" and must also be disposed of.

We are also looking for something that is more than a /kezayit/ -- regardless of whether you would consider it food or not. If it's less than a /kezayit/ of non-edible chametz, you don't have to get rid of it because you consider it dirt. Also, if it's something even a dog wouldn't eat, then even more than a /kezayit/ is not problematic.

When you're cleaning for Passover, all the goodies in your freezer and cabinets -read, cakes, crackers -- all of that is chametz. You have to get rid of it one way or nother. But aside from that, you probably won't find much edible chametz in your house. /Bedikat chametz/, therefore, is not so difficult. In the bedrooms, for example, you don't have to sit with a pin scraping the corners!

Even further: Let's say you have gook stuck to your chametz dishes. If the stuff is non-edible, then you can forget about it -- as long as it does not total a /kezayit/ of gook. But there is no need sit there and scrub the dishes with steel wool. Just make sure there is no edible stuff on them, and no /kezayit/ of gook -- and put them away.

One important point: If you feel like going beyond the limit and scraping the walls and ceiling, go right ahead. Of course it's not required, but the halacha is actually stated in Shulchan Aruch that no one is allowed to laugh at you. In the words of the rabbis, /Yisrael kedoshim heim/ -- "Jews are holy" when they go beyond the letter of the law.

Be careful, however, not to go so far that you develop an antagonistic attitude toward Passover. If all this extra, non-required cleaning is going to make you dread the holiday, then forget about it. And certainly you should not clean so much that you're exhausted for the Passover Seder. Part of being "holy" is appreciating the holiday, too!

THE PROHIBITION OF EATING CHAMETZ

Besides the mitzvah of /bedikat chametz/, there is a second, more time-consuming aspect of cleaning for Passover. And that revolves around the Torah prohibition of eating any chametz on Passover. In fact, if you intentionally eat even one molecule of chametz on Passover, you're breaking a Torah prohibition.

Furthermore, when it came to Passover, the Sages built "fence around fence." They prohibited things on Passover that we would not otherwise dream of.

Case #1: The Sages said that if one crumb of chametz falls into a huge pot of chicken soup, then -- even if the crumb was removed -- that negligible bit of "bread taste" will still render the whole mixture "chametz."

Case #2: All year long, we know that you're not supposed to use non-kosher dishes or pots. But what if you accidentally use a dish that was used for non-kosher food a long time ago (i.e. not within 24 hours)? The halacha is that your food is still kosher. There are some exceptions, but generally speaking, an "old taste" absorbed into a pot will not ruin your food. However, on Passover, the Sages said that if a dish or pot was ever once used for chametz in its whole long history, and then was used on Passover, the old chametz taste absorbed into the pot will wake up again and give your food the status of chametz.

This rule applies during Passover itself. But if case #2 occurred before Passover -- i.e. if the pot was used ages ago for chametz and you mistakenly cook food in it /before/ Passover -- then the halacha is that your food remains kosher.

With regard to case #1, however, the Sages said that if there may be the tiniest trace of chametz still in your food -- even if it happened before Passover -- the halacha is that your food is considered chametz. (/Note: This applies for Ashkenazim./)

As a result, we need special "Kosher for Passover" /everything/ -- pots, pans and even all the ingredients we cook with. Plus, we have to be extremely careful with what's around the house, particularly in the kitchen. If there's any bit of chametz that may make its way into our food, then we've got to get rid of that. And unlike the rules of /bedikat chametz/, it makes no difference whether there is more or less than a /kezayit./ Plus we have to make sure that any place that "hot" Passover food will touch (like a countertop) doesn't even have an absorbed chametz taste.

One exception to this rule: Totally non-edible chametz that makes its way into your food is not called chametz and will not ruin your food -- unless you purposely eat it. If it accidentally falls into your food that's not a problem. (However, as we said, if it's edible chametz, then even the tiniest drop in your food will ruin everything.)

CLOTHES

In preventing chametz from coming in contact with food, let's start with some things you'd never think of. Any clothes that you're going to wear to the Passover table, if it has a speck of chametz that may fall into your food, then you've got to get that speck off your clothes before coming to the table.

As a result, when cleaning your clothes closet for Passover, you should select the clothing you plan to wear for Passover -- and these clothes have to be 100 percent clean. Put them in the laundry, send them to the dry cleaners, or at the very least brush them out well to make sure there is no chametz whatsoever.

What about the clothes you're not going to wear during Passover? Just take a quick

look, empty the pockets to make sure there's no edible chametz, and put them away. Don't worry about specks.

With regard to closets, try to keep your Passover clothes off the closet floor. And with regard to *bed linens*, be aware that during Passover you may get up in the middle of the night and walk to the kitchen. So be sure to change the sheets and blanket covers as close to Passover as possible.

CHILDREN'S TOYS

It's best if children's toys do not come to the table on Passover, but that's wishful thinking. In reality, you never know when toys are going to come in contact with food. As a result, we do the following: First, take the toys that are complicated to clean and put them away. Don't even attempt to clean them for Passover. Just make sure there's no edible chametz on them, or a /kezayit/ of non-edible chametz. That should take a total of two minutes. As far as selling the toys is concerned, the text of the sale document includes any chametz you've got around the house, so you don't need to specify toys; it's covered by the contract anyway.

As for toys that are going to be used on Passover, make sure they are washable. For small pieces, fill up a pillow case and put it in the washing machine. (Make sure to tie it tight or you may ruin your washing machine.) Another option is to put the toys in the bathtub. Let them soak, and give them a quick rinse under pressure. You don't need anything more than that. It's not necessary to wash the toys with ammonia. What about a bicycle? Make sure there's no real chametz on it, and then it can be used during Passover. But the bike should not be ridden around the house on Passover -- because once it's been ridden outside, there's bits of chametz all over the street that gets caught on the tires.

Some people have special Passover toys, and this is good practical advice. Children are fascinated by playing with toys they haven't seen in a year. Even if you have some other toys that you wash, breaking out new toys is a great way to keep children occupied in those days just before Passover when you're busy cooking and preparing.

BOOKS

Any book that will be brought to the table on Passover must be 100 percent clean. How do you do that? It is almost impossible. That's why any books you are going to bring to the Passover table -- like a Haggadah - should be kept wrapped in plastic or put away all year long so that it is 100 percent chametz-free. If you want to study the Haggadah before Passover, then get a different one which will be your "chametz Haggadah."

As for books that will not be brought to the Passover table, all you have to do is make sure they have no edible chametz or a /kezayit/ of gook. You may have some edible crumbs there, so turn each book upside down and bang it out. That's sufficient to assume that no edible chametz remains.

DINING ROOM - LIVING ROOM

Things in your dining room may certainly come in contact with food.

Table: The table itself will need to be kosher because you put hot food down on it. Of course, this is not always so practical to clean -- even though you can kasher wood by dousing it in boiling water, you don't want to do that to your fine wood table. Besides, tables usually have hard-to-reach crevasses that can be filled with crumbs.

What should you do? Cover the table with something waterproof. Otherwise, if you put a hot dish down on your table, the moisture will penetrate your tablecloth, creating a direct line of moisture going from the table to your food -- making your food chametz! So the table must have a waterproof layer -- either plastic over the tablecloth, or the tablecloth over plastic. If you prefer, corrugated cardboard works, too, because it's so thick that we assume there will not be a direct line of moisture going from your food all the way down to the table. Of course you also have to clean the entire table. You don't have to sit there with a toothpick picking out chametz stuck in a crevasse of the legs. But make sure there's nothing loose that can fall onto the floor and eventually make its way back onto your table on Passover.

Chairs: If you have upholstery, you have to clean that very well. It's best to shampoo the furniture if you can do so without ruining it. If there is a removable part to your chair, check there and you're certain to find lots of crumbs. Check carefully, because chairs get moved up and down, and some crumbs may come off onto someone's clothing and then into the food on Passover.

Couch: Remove the cushions and check there. It is common to find a /kezayit/ of chametz stuck inside the couch. Also clean in any cracks or crevasses. A vacuum cleaner works best for this.

Light switches: Since you often touch light switches during the meal, make sure they're perfectly clean. It is sufficient to dampen a cloth with ammonia or any strong cleanser, and go over the switch once so that nothing edible is left there.

Doorknobs: Again, use a damp cloth with cleanser. However, this is not enough if you've got a fancy doorknob with crevasses. In that case you should use a cloth that's more saturated, so any chametz that may remain will be totally non-edible.

KITCHEN BASICS

There are surfaces in the kitchen that will not touch your food, but that may come in contact with food indirectly -- because you touch them while you make food. Examples include doorknobs, doors, windows, cabinet covers, radio, and especially the telephone. These surfaces must be perfectly clean, or at least nothing edible should be left on it. Use ammonia or a strong cleanser. (Window cleaner contains ammonia.) If you can unscrew part of the telephone, it's a good idea, because you never know how many crumbs are in there.

Some items in your kitchen are on even a lower level. This is the category of things

that you are going to put away in storage -- e.g. your chametz dishes. All you have to do is make sure there's no edible chametz and no /kezayit/ of gook -- then put them away in a cabinet which is closed shut, then taped, locked or labeled. This way you won't accidentally take it out during Passover.

What about chametz dishes that are used only for special occasions-- e.g. a breakfront where you have china and crystal on display? These you can continue having on display. Since you don't take these out regularly, there's no danger of you accidentally taking it out during Passover. (Additionally, there is no Passover prohibition of owning the "taste" of chametz absorbed in a plate.) People may feel uncomfortable about leaving these dishes on display, and of course it's perfectly acceptable to put them away. But the halacha is that you are allowed to leave them out.

Speaking of discomfort... On Passover, some people will cover up a piece of artwork that shows bread. Certainly there's no requirement to do so, but you can appreciate someone not wanting to have a picture of challah hanging next to their Passover table!

UTENSILS USED IN COOKING

Now we get to the surfaces that will actually come in contact with your food. The most obvious example is pots and pans. Of these, the most severe category is those things used on the fire without liquid -- e.g. a frying pan. If you want to use this pan for Passover, you'll have to burn the chametz out. This is called /libun,/ literally getting the metal red-hot. You basically have two choices: use a blowtorch, or a self-cleaning oven. (Just be careful that the plastic handle doesn't disintegrate.)

What about pots that are used on the fire with water -- e.g. your spaghetti pot, or utensils that were used with hot food -- e.g. silverware? If you want to use this for Passover, then you have to boil it completely. This is called /haggalah./

How do you do /haggalah/? First, make sure the item is completely clean. Then, fill up a big, big pot with water. Get it boiling, and then completely immerse whatever you want to kasher in the water. Since the item will cool the water somewhat, you have to leave it in there long enough so that the water reaches a boil again. The optimum time is to leave it in for 30 seconds, and then remove the item. If you leave it in any longer, there's a problem of re-absorbing some of the chametz. Thirty seconds is ideal. /Haggalah/ becomes a bit more complicated if the item you want to kasher is a big pot. What can you immerse that in?! One option is to fill the pot to the very top with water, then bring it to a boil, and finally throw something in so the water boils over the sides.

The other option is to call your local synagogue and see if they offer a "kashering day." This is where they prepare a huge public vat of boiling water. Just make sure that whoever is dipping your pots is patient enough to leave it in for the requisite 30 seconds. The custom is not to kasher anything that was used for chametz within 24 hours. And generally speaking, people today try to have a separate set of pots and silverware for Passover. If you can afford it, it certainly simplifies things.

THE CANDLESTICKS STRINGENCY

There is another level which is a stringency for Passover. The Ashkenazi custom is that anything that came to the table during the year cannot be brought to the Passover table, unless you kasher it first. That includes items that have only come in contact with cold chametz during the year, like a Kiddush cup. Generally there's no "chametz taste" absorbed in that, because the medium of heat is necessary to infuse a taste. Nevertheless, if you want to use the Kiddush cup on Passover, you must kasher it in boiling water. The same applies to candlesticks if they've been brought to the table.

There is one leniency here, however: it's enough to just pour boiling water over them (as opposed to the regular immersion). But don't forget -- if the Kiddush cup is a fancy silver one with a lot of crevasses, you have to clean it well with silver polish before koshering. If you can't get it fully clean, then it's best to use a different one for Passover.

To review: Anything that you cook in needs to be immersed in boiling water. (Though the custom is to have a separate set for Passover anyway.) Whereas anything that you do **not** cook in -- but came to your table during the year -- needs boiling water poured over it.

STOVE GRATES

Surprisingly, you don't really have to kasher stove grates. This applies all year as well. For example, if some meat juice spills on your stove grate, and then some milk spills there -- it's still kosher. Why? Because since the grate is constantly over the fire, any spill is regarded as burned up before the taste can become absorbed into the grate.

For Passover, we make the same assumption -- i.e. any chametz was burned up before its taste became absorbed. However, the Ashkenazi custom is still to kasher the grates. We use a "light" form of "burning out" called /libun kal./ Practically speaking, you heat up the grate until it is so hot that if a piece of paper touched it, it would turn brown. The easiest way to do this is to heat up your oven, stick in the grates, and that will be sufficient. Or, you can turn on a few burners, and put your Shabbos /blech/ right on top of the grates. (Don't turn on all four burners, because with the /blech/ there is not enough oxygen and the fires will go out. Instead, turn on two diagonal ones, then do the other two on the other side.) In either case, be sure the grate is hot enough so that a piece of paper touching it would turn brown.

KITCHEN COUNTERTOPS

Stainless steel counters can be kashered. First, make sure they've not been used for hot chametz in the past 24 hours. Then, clean them well. And finally, pour boiling water from a kettle all over them. The problem is this is a really messy job and you may have to fill up lots of kettles. So one alternative is to put cold water all over your counter (put something on the side so the water doesn't spill over), then take an electric steam iron,

and go over the entire countertop. This will make the water "sizzle," which is the halachic equivalent of using a red-hot stone -- /eh'ven meluban./ (Don't worry, a steam iron is waterproof and this will not ruin your iron.)

But remember -- this only works on stainless steel counters.

What if you have stone or marble counters? That depends on the type of stone. In Israel, most people have what is called /shayish. This is a combination of stone and epoxy -- and *cannot* be kashered for Passover. You have to cover it with something waterproof. And although it's not required, some people pouring boiling water over it before covering it properly.

If you have what they call "granite," that is real stone and *can* be kashered for Passover. (Use the methods described above for stainless steel.) The only problem spot is the seams where you have a little crack filled with plaster. Some people put rubber mats over their granite (even if they do kasher it) just to cover these seams. But halachically, if you pour boiling water there, it should be sufficient.

What about the wall behind the countertops? Since your pots touch the wall during the year, make sure to cover it. It doesn't make a difference what the wall is made of, you should cover the wall behind the counter.

Additionally, you should cover the underside of the upper cabinets that overhang the counter. Why? Because some Passover food may touch it. But beyond this, there is steam that can go up and absorb the taste of chametz steam that was absorbed there. Not everyone agrees, but I believe that surface should be covered.

As for the outside of the cabinets themselves, we assume that food will not touch there directly. But make sure you clean them well.

As for the kitchen table, it is the same as we said for the dining room table: cover it with something waterproof. If your tabletop is made of wood, metal or stone, you could pour boiling water from a kettle directly onto your table, and that would actually enable you to use the table without any covering. This method does *not* work for formica.

REFRIGERATOR

Most people generally don't put hot food directly into the refrigerator. But if you do during the year, don't do it on Passover! The basic rule with a refrigerator is the same as doorknobs: It must be cleaned spotlessly. First take out the shelves, then clean the entire inside very well with something that renders food non-edible. It may be a little difficult to bend in there, but the surface itself is smooth and not too hard to clean.

What about the shelves themselves? If you try going over every surface by hand -- in between the little slats -- it's going to take forever. So the best thing is to fill the bathtub about halfway with water, add some ammonia, and put all the shelves in there. Wash them off under pressure, and make sure that nothing edible remains. Although this is sufficient, some people still feel uncomfortable putting Passover food directly down onto the shelves. You can cover the shelves, but be careful: If you cover them with something

that air cannot go through, then there will be no circulation in the refrigerator, the thermostat will get confused and the motor will run forever. You can kill your fridge that way! Instead, cover the shelves with something that air can circulate through -- like paper towels or aluminum foil poked with holes.

As for the freezer, defrost it and clean it out thoroughly. If you have a self-defrosting freezer, make sure to pull out the water pan at the bottom. If you haven't cleaned that pan out lately, there could easily be a /kezayit/ of crumbs down there!

Next: the rubber gasket around your refrigerator door. Obviously clean it well with a cloth. But more important, you need to clean the accordion folds. The most effective way is take a Q-tip, dip it into ammonia (or windex), and run it through the folds. The Q-tip will do a great job of picking up all the dirt.

What about food that you want to leave in your refrigerator (or freezer) and include in the sale of chametz? You should wrap it up, put it in a corner of your refrigerator (or freezer) and then cover it to avoid any contact on Passover.

For the outside of the refrigerator, make sure to clean the door and handles, because you're going to be touching that frequently during Passover. Also check on top of the refrigerator, especially if there are kids in the house. Who knows what may have gotten tossed up there! As for the exterior sides, just clean them well. Some people like to cover them, but the halacha does not require it.

KITCHEN CABINETS

We already spoke about the outside of kitchen cabinets. But what about the inside shelves? Since you normally don't put hot food there, you don't have to use boiling water. Just clean it very well with detergent and make sure there's nothing edible left.

Still, many people feel uncomfortable putting Passover dishes and food down on surfaces that are used for chametz all year long. This is the source of the "ancient Jewish custom" of shelf paper. Many people put shelf paper on the bottom of drawers and cabinets, and some put it on the sides as well.

KITCHEN SINK

The sink obviously has to be kosher for Passover. A stainless steel sink can be kashered by dousing it with boiling water. It is important that for a period of 24 hours prior to koshering, the sink cannot have come into contact with hot (non-Passover) food.

The drain of the sink has a seam that you can't really get perfectly clean. One solution is to clean the stainless steel sink by blasting it with a blowtorch. However, most halachic authorities maintain that blowtorching is not necessary, and it is sufficient to pour strong detergent down your drain. This way, anything that is stuck -- either on the seam of the drain or in the drain pipe itself -- will be rendered totally non-edible. If you have plastic pipes, drain cleaner may disintegrate plastic pipes, so strong detergent is good enough. Additionally (although this is not really necessary), some people put a plastic insert or rubber mat in the sink so that nothing touches the sink itself.

A porcelain sink cannot be kashered. You must clean the sink thoroughly and then put a plastic insert. But sometimes your sink can back up with water, and you can end up getting drain water coming onto the plastic insert! This obviously defeats the whole purpose. The key is to remove the strainer from the drain in your sink, and instead to put a strainer securely in the insert. This way, all the dirt will get stuck on top, which you can clean out, and if anything goes through, it will go all the way down and not stay in the sink.

Furthermore, the insert should be slightly raised, not sitting directly on top of the sink. You can put two little pieces of wood in the sink, which the insert will sit on -- as long as it's slightly removed and not touching directly.

What about lining a sink with contact paper? The problem is that you may get a water bubble inside it, and then that water would transmit taste from your non-Passover sink. If you can be sure that there is no water under the contact paper, then contact paper is okay.

While we're on the subject of the sink, don't forget the faucet itself. The handles should be cleaned perfectly. Some people actually have different handles for Passover. If you don't feel like unscrewing them, at least wash them in detergent to render any particles non-edible. With regard to the faucet itself, you have to pour boiling water on it because it comes in contact with chametz steam all the time.

A plastic faucet is a very big problem because it cannot be kashered. So you will have to keep the faucet moved to the side during Passover, and keep it away from your pots, to make sure that no steam comes on it.

DISHWASHING ON PASSOVER

In order to avoid all sorts of problems in your sink, don't wash dishes in very hot water on Passover. This will avoid getting any residual chametz to a point where it can cook. (The halachic cooking point is called /yad soledet bo/ -- literally "too hot to the touch"- which is 45 degrees Celsius, 112 degrees Fahrenheit.) It's not forbidden to wash with very hot water, but it's a way to avoid many problems. You can get your dishes just as clean by using very warm water that's not too hot. This caution is only necessary on Passover.

THE OVEN

Our final appliance is the oven. If you have a self-cleaning oven, put it through the self-cleaning cycle and that will make your oven "Kosher for Passover." In a self-cleaning oven, if you have any interior parts that are rubber -- or other substances which halachically cannot be kashered -- then you should cover those pieces with aluminum foil, and make sure they stay covered whenever you use your oven.

If you do not plan to use your oven during Passover, all you have to do is look inside: If there is no edible food inside and no /kezayit/ of gook, just close the door, tape it shut, and that's all. If you want to be stringent, spray some oven cleaner inside, wait three minutes, wipe it off, and close the door. Halachically, if you're not using your oven on Passover, it does not have to shine. Please don't make anyone scrub your oven for hours because of a stringency! Simply make sure there's no edible chametz and no /kezayit/ of gook.

If you never use your oven for chametz and you want to use it for Passover, you still have to kasher it. However, here you can rely on turning on the thermostat to the highest setting and waiting until it reaches its highest temperature.

What about the *top of the stove,* where the burners sit? We already discussed how to kasher the stove grates -- they need /libun kal/, which means they get hot enough to turn a piece of paper brown. The same rule applies to the burners that the fire comes out of -- just clean them well, and then turn them on to make sure you burn out any food.

The top of the stove, however, is a different story. In reality, that surface is always treif, because it gets splashings of milk and splashings of meat. During the year, this is not a problem. Why? Because first of all, you're careful that those splashings don't touch what you're cooking. And if it does, then it all depends on whether the splashings are "edible food," and what the proportion is, etc. Furthermore, if your stovetop is cleaned, then the only problem is that it has absorbed milk and meat "taste" -- which we assume happened more than 24 hours ago. So during the year, it's very unlikely that these splashings can render your food "non-kosher."

On Passover, however, the 24-hour leniency doesn't apply. Something that was used for chametz a year ago is still chametz. Consequently, Passover food cannot touch your stovetop and it must be covered. The easiest way is to take aluminum foil and cover the whole stove top. Use the heavy-duty kind so it doesn't tear. The most problematic part of your stove is a part you may have never seen: under the top platform. If you remove that, you will find remnants of all the different cereals and soups you cooked during the year. There may likely be some edible crumbs there, as well as a /kezayit/ of gook. So you have to remove the entire stovetop. Hopefully, you have one that's removable (perhaps with screws). Otherwise it means getting under there with your fingers. That is very difficult, and the only advice is to pry it open and then spray some ammonia detergent to make everything non-edible.

Assuming you've removed the stovetop, the first thing is to get a vacuum cleaner and get rid of all the crumbs. This way, you won't have crumbs flying all over the place. If you don't have access to a vacuum, then take a damp cloth and go over the area. The crumbs will stick to the cloth. Don't make the cloth wet, because that will make a mess of your whole oven. This is necessary even if you're not going to use your stove on Passover.

If your stove is built into the counter, the top is generally not a problem, because spills have no place to fall into.

Other stoves are more problematic. If you have one big glass or porcelain top with heating elements under it, then kashering that for Passover (because of the material) is not possible. The only thing you could do is to cover it with aluminum foil, but the problem is that when you cover these things, they don't work as well. Unless you can find a way of covering it without losing efficiency or ruining your food, the best solution may be to get a different stove for Passover.

If you have electric elements that are exposed, then the elements have to be cleaned but not kashered.

An electric warming tray (/plata/) should be cleaned as well as possible. And if you want to use it for Passover, cover it over with heavy-duty aluminum foil that won't tear. A metal burner cover (/blech/) has to be either kashered or totally covered. It makes more sense to buy a thin /blech/ especially for Passover; otherwise heavy-duty aluminum

foil should suffice, although it may emit harmful and unpleasant fumes.

Some stoves have a cover that you can put down when not using your stovetop. Since this gets splashed all year long, you must clean and cover it (or else detach it completely). Similarly, the wall behind your stove has definitely absorbed some chametz -- so either move the stove away from the wall so no pots will touch it, or cover the wall.

If you have a *ventilator* above your oven, that's a problem -- a breeding ground for chametz steam and particles. The best thing is to cover the vent and don't use it during Passover. Additionally, if there's anything edible in there (or a /kezayit/ of gook), you have to clean it out.

MICROWAVE AND DISHWASHER

A microwave itself can be kashered for Passover, providing that the inside is metal (or even painted metal). Simply insert a bowl of water and have it make a lot of steam for 20 minutes. It's preferable that you get a new glass plate for Passover, or at least cover it.

If you have different parts in the microwave -- like little rubber pieces -- this is a big problem. First of all, rubber is a substance that can't be kashered. And secondly, since this is a microwave, the pieces obviously can't be covered with tinfoil. The best solution is to get replacement parts and save those for Passover only. Otherwise, you can't use your microwave for Passover.

A microwave with a plastic interior cannot be kashered for Passover.

In order to kasher a dishwasher for Passover, it must be metal. Additionally, you should have a separate rack for Passover.

SMALL KITCHEN APPLIANCES

There are other appliances that we do not use on Passover. These include a toaster, toaster oven, and mixer -- things that you use for bread and cake all year long. Although it may be possible to kasher these things, it's just going a little too far and we don't do so.

So what do you do? First of all, if you think there's anything edible, clean it. Take the crumbs out of your toaster and toaster oven. Do the best you can, but don't go crazy. You don't have to take apart your toaster, toaster oven or mixer.

The reason you don't have to be as careful cleaning these items is that you're going to include them in your sale of chametz anyway. So even though we have a custom not to sell /chametz gamur/ (i.e. bread and cake), there is no problem of selling a toaster that has some crumbs left in it. Just remove whatever chametz you can, and whatever you can't reach, rely on the sale.

As for your mixer: If you're afraid it has a bunch of dough still attached, it's probably not edible. In which case just make sure you don't have a /kezayit./ The best way to solve all this is to wash it with detergent which makes it totally non-edible.

THE FLOOR

Crumbs on the floor, assuming they're less than a /kezayit/, are regarded as dirt. The problem, however, is that clothes fall on the floor, children play on the floor, etc. So to minimize problems in general, try to keep the floors fairly tidy during the days you're cleaning for Passover. And then, as the final step when everything else in the house has been kashered for Passover, wash the floors very well. (You don't have to use ammonia.)

What about during Passover itself? Realize that every time anyone enters the house from outside, they're carrying many potential chametz particles on their clothes, and particularly their shoes. You can keep sweeping your house, but that won't do a perfect job.

So the rule is: Anything that falls on the floor during Passover does not go back on the table. The original custom was that it didn't go back on the table at all for the duration of Passover. Today, we're lenient to permit washing it off. For instance, if a piece of silverware falls on the floor, just wash it off and then you can use it again. The same with toys -- if a child wants to bring it to the table, it must first be washed off.

With about rugs? They're full of crumbs -- even edible crumbs -- and they're very difficult to clean. The best option is to shampoo the carpet before Passover, which will eliminate anything edible. Otherwise, many people just roll their carpets up, put them away, and sell them for Passover. This is not required, but is certainly advisable (unless you're shampooing).

One crucial thing to remember: You spend your whole time cleaning for Passover, and where does all your chametz go? It gets stuck in the broom, goes into the garbage can, and into the vacuum cleaner bag. You must clean your broom well, so that there's nothing edible left in it. Or preferably have a special broom for Passover that you put away from year to year. Make sure your garbage can is cleaned well. And above all, make sure to throw out the vacuum cleaner bag. That's one instance where you're likely to have a whole /kezayit/ of chametz gook together!

SALE OF CHAMETZ

The prevailing custom is not to sell real edible chametz like bread, crackers, etc. The exception is when getting rid of it will involve a hardship -- i.e. you've got a large quantity of it, it's difficult to obtain, or it's expensive. Certainly you can include a half-bottle of scotch in the sale. Otherwise, you can give the food away to a non-Jewish acquaintance. Some cities specifically host food drives for poor people in the days before Passover.

But what about food that's not "real" chametz -- i.e. a can of tuna fish that's not labeled "Kosher for Passover," or food that was cooked in a chametz pot? These things you can put away in a cabinet and sell them. Taping the cabinet closed is only necessary if out of habit you may open it on Passover. By the way, even chametz of a non-Jew must be put away and covered.

Have a happy and kosher Passover -- and an easy cleaning!