

PESACH PREP

with the pros

With the busiest season of the Jewish year upon us, how can we balance all of our responsibilities while still nurturing our homes, our children, our husbands, and our spirituality?

Four experts offer invaluable guidance

WEEK 1

HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

With *mishloach manos*, costumes, and Purim fests behind us, it's time to tackle Pesach cleaning in earnest

Your Home

Putting the Tension Down on Paper

Yael Wiesner, home management consultant and author of "How Does SHE Manage?" (Feldheim Publishers):

The morning after Purim, I like to make myself a detailed schedule for the next month that includes cleaning, shopping, and meal planning. This puts all the tension on the paper and gets it out of my head. Even though I probably won't end up sticking to my schedule (do we ever?), I have what to work with. It also prevents that feeling of *Hmm, what should I do today?* If I see I can't do it all, I know I either need to cut back or get help.

In the weeks after Purim, I start the jobs that don't interfere with day-to-day living. I'll separate the *chometz* in the pantry from the non-*chometz*; defrost my freezer; take my kids shopping for Yom Tov clothing; and clean a few of the easily washed toys, like Clics, putting them away so they'll be fresh for Pesach.

I'll start cleaning the bedrooms, the upper kitchen cabinets, and the bathrooms, but nothing that interferes with my family's normal functioning. To

clear up time for Pesach cleaning, I'll hire a babysitter in the afternoons, or I'll eliminate fancy dinners and company for Shabbos. Also, when I cook for Shabbos, I cook double and put half in the freezer for the week before I turn over my kitchen.

Some stages in life don't allow us the luxury of all this work. If you're expecting, right after birth, or recuperating from surgery, take a minimalist approach and don't clean all the closets. Instead, set aside a closet or two for the week of Pesach and put inside a week's worth of clothing for every family member. You can close off your basement, playroom, den, and any other room that you feel you can manage without for a week. Check with your *rav* on how to do this.

Remember, it's not the Pesach cleaning that's hard, it's all the peripheral details (feeding the kids, spring cleaning, staying on top of laundry) that stress us out. If we plan for these details ahead of time, everything else can fall into place.

Your Children

Unrealistic Expectations

Rabbi Allon Yisroel Bruckenstein, educational psychologist:

We often launch our Pesach cleaning with unrealistic expectations of all the parties involved – ourselves, our spouses, and our children. Just a few days into the cleaning, you may find yourself saying things like, "Why is the whole burden on me? Why can't anyone else pitch in around here?" Obviously, this is counterproductive. If we want our children to help with the cleaning, we have to ask them to contribute in a way that makes them feel respected and appreciated. Just as we, as parents, get resentful when we feel we're being taken advantage of, so will our children.

This doesn't mean that we have to devise elaborate prizes, treats, or outings to get our kids to cooperate. Usually positive feedback and genuine appreciation is enough. If we really mean it, our children will know that we value their involvement ... and eventually we'll hear them expressing their appreciation back to us.

If you do find yourself losing it, don't waste time and energy feeling guilty afterward. Instead, take a break to regain your equilibrium. Go out for some fresh air or take the kids to the park to break the tension. Give yourself – and your kids – a chance to restart.

Your Marriage

Gaining Clarity over Coffee

Mrs. Yitti Bisk, marriage educator:

Can your marriage handle the stress of the biggest homemaking project of the year? If you've been putting in regular "deposits" in the "bank" throughout the year, by nurturing your marriage in a myriad of small but tangible ways, it can.

Although it's normal to feel frazzled before Pesach, we can't take our husbands for granted just because we're stressed out. Make sure to notice what your husband does for you and express appreciation for it, and carve out time – even if it's just ten minutes a day – to focus on your relationship.

If you need your husband's help with cleaning, ask yourself: *Is he on board with pitching in? Does he know what's expected of him?* If the answer is "I'm not sure," make a date over a cup of coffee and present the situation objectively. "There's a lot to get done, and I'm feeling overwhelmed. How can you help with x, y, and z? What can you do to help us get through this hectic time?"

Listen (really listen!) to his answer. It might not be "your way" of Pesach cleaning, but it can have merit. Your husband may also have some very valid reasons for not helping as much as you want him to. Try to work together toward a clear understanding of how things will get done in a way that best meets both of your needs. At the end of the day, though, you may have to scale back on your list so that it only includes essentials, or enlist the help of a third party, whether it is your cleaning lady or willing and able *bochurim*.

Your Ruchniyus

Working for a Lofty Cause

Rebbetzin Devora Berson, popular seminary teacher and lecturer:

Rav Shimshon Pincus teaches that when a person is working for a lofty cause, she doesn't feel it's a burden; instead, it's a privilege. Cleaning our homes for Pesach is a cause that's both liberating and uplifting – when we view it in the right way. Someone has to do the cleaning, and it's our privilege to make sure it gets done.

One thing that helps me get in the right frame of mind is concentrating on the end results – how the house will sparkle, how everyone will enjoy sitting down at the Seder together. It's an *avodah* that leads to fulfillment and joy on both a personal level and a mitzvah level. There are women who listen to *shiurim* or music as they scrub, to make the work go more quickly. And, of course, our main *avodah* at this time of year is to stay calm, to keep things under control, and to ensure that the cleaning is done in the right spirit so that it doesn't become too onerous.

Finally, don't forget to make time for yourself in the midst of all the cleaning. If you wait until everything is finished, you'll never get a break, because the cleaning is endless. Carve out breaks for yourself throughout these weeks to prepare for the other aspects of Yom Tov – whether it's sitting down with a sefer if you're so inclined, or planning a family get-together for Chol HaMoed. I enjoy preparing an arts-and-crafts project with my children for the Seder ... more about that next week.

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Mishpacha

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C.B. Gavant

WEEK 2
WE'RE MAKING PROGRESS,
but not there yet. It sometimes
feels like we'll never finish it all.

Your Home

Slow but Steady

Yael Wiesner, home management consultant and author of "How Does SHE Manage?" (Feldheim Publishers)

At this point in our Pesach cleaning, we shouldn't be washing windows or filing papers or even painting. We need to clean for *chometz*, and that's it. Decluttering and spring cleaning are only going to slow us down. If you don't have clarity on what's necessary and what's not, check with your *rav*.

I like to finish the bedrooms during the first week of Nisan and then move on to the living room and dining room (Pesach cleaning only). We're able to move quickly through all these areas because we've already cleaned cabinets, closets, and other areas. I make my meat and chicken order and put it in my freezer, which has already been cleaned. When the groceries arrive, I store them in a room that's already Pesachdig.

Since the children are often around,

I make sure to schedule in activities for them, like arts and crafts projects, so I won't get frazzled by their boredom. I also plan where and what to feed them (for example, pita sandwiches, which make less crumbs than bread, and potato or *kitniyos*-based meals, with lots of vegetable sticks).

I arrange for the younger set to be out when I want to do my heaviest cleaning. When my children were small, some friends and I organized a round-robin for the week before Pesach. Each of us took a turn watching the kids, and the remaining mornings we had free babysitting.

Finally, remember not to compare notes with your friends! Every person is individual; while one woman will already be turning over her kitchen, you may still be scrubbing out the pantry. If you stick with *your* Pesach schedule, it doesn't matter what everyone else is up to.

Your Children

Accept Their Work – and Them

Rabbi Allon Yisroel Bruckenstein, Jerusalem-based educational psychologist

Parents often ask how to get their children to help out with the cleaning. Your own attitude toward cleaning is a major contributing factor. If your children see that you despise cleaning or get frustrated, they'll understand that cleaning is unpleasant and must be avoided. If, on the other hand, your attitude is calm and positive, they'll be eager to get involved as well.

We need to keep in mind that our children aren't miniature adults. As adults, we have the ability to forgo eating, sleeping, and other needs to reach a goal. Children haven't yet developed that skill, and at a certain point they're going to lose steam. A ten-year-old will last longer than a three-year-old, and a teenager even longer, but they all need breaks. Be sensitive to your children's needs, and have realistic expectations.

Another point to keep in mind is accepting the job a child has done. Often we'll look at the work and think, "I'm going to have to do the whole thing over." Be careful – they'll sense what you're thinking even if you don't say it. If you've asked your child to do something, you have to accept it as it was done, even if the candlesticks aren't sparkling or the bookcase still looks dusty. If you can't, don't ask for their help. And don't wait until they go to sleep and then finish the job yourself – they may very well notice and feel discouraged from helping in the future.

Make It Happy

Rebbetzin Devora Berson, popular seminary teacher and lecturer

The challenging aspect of Pesach cleaning is preventing ourselves from getting so caught up in the details that we forget that Yom Tov is coming! Our true goal in Pesach cleaning isn't getting those toothpicks between the floor tiles, but rather coming closer to Hashem through the *zman cheirusinu*. When a person's work is purposeful, it's manageable, whereas

avodas parech, purposeless work, can kill a person. If we remind ourselves as we work that this is our contribution to our family and to Klal Yisrael, that can give us the emotional wherewithal to keep moving.

In our house, some of the goals are also fun ones. As soon as a room is finished, we hang up Pesach signs: "No *chometz* allowed" on the doors of each bedroom, kids' projects in the dining room, and a full panorama of matzoh-baking photos in the kitchen. Each room takes on a festive feel, and we gain a sense of accomplishment.

Another one of my goals is to make a Pesach craft project for the Seder with the kids. We all enjoy arts and crafts, and this allows us to take an afternoon off and have fun. We've made personalized place cards for the Seder table, laminated so they don't get ruined; napkin rings from "matzoh paper"; little crowns to remind ourselves that we're *bonei melachim*. One year we made a clock with hands that pointed to each step of the Seder, which we moved throughout the night. Instead of a sense of drudgery, we all experience joy as we progress toward the Seder.

Your Marriage

Your Knight in Shining Armor

Mrs. Yitti Bisk, marriage educator

Do you find yourself saying to your husband every night, "I'm so nervous, I'm never going to get everything done," and hearing him respond, "Come on, it's not such a big deal. You always manage,"?

The first step to avoiding this common scenario is to clarify to yourself what you really need before you open your mouth. Ask yourself, "Am I trying to get my husband to pitch in and help, or am I expressing my feelings and just want validation?" Once you've got this figured out, give him clear direction: "I just need to share my feelings with you and feel understood" or "I could really use your help."

Many husbands like to feel that they're helping their wives, and not that Pesach cleaning is their job. Let your husband feel he's your knight in shining armor – and thank him for everything he's doing. Showing appreciation is an amazing tool to getting the work done, and it puts you in a better emotional space as well. Be specific with your thanks and praise!

And don't forget to connect with your spouse on a daily basis. Even a walk around the block can do the trick if your cell phones are off and you're both present.

Your Ruchniyus