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{ TOPIC }

Hiding and "Stealing" the Afikoman



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Hiding and "Stealing" the Afikoman

One of the most interesting customs of the *Pesach seder* is to "steal the *afikoman*." Weeks before *Pesach* the children plan their *afikoman* present and where to hide the *afikoman*. What is the source of this custom? Is this custom practiced by everyone? Are there any other customs related to *afikoman*?

Breaking the *Matzah*

At *yachatz* the middle *matzah* is broken in two.¹ The larger piece² is taken for *afikoman* and smaller one for *hamotzi*.³

Where to Place the *Afikoman Matzah*?

Underneath the Cloth

Many have the custom to place the *afikoman matzah* "underneath a cloth" as the *yiddin* did when they left *Mitzrayim*.⁴ This means to wrap it in a cloth.⁵

1. Magen Avraham 473:20.

2. Magen Avraham 21, Be'er Heitiv 473:19, Elya Rabbah 28, Machtzis Ha'shekel 21, Shulchan Aruch Harav 35, Mishnah Berurah 473:58, Kaf Ha'chaim 122. Refer to Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 119:3 who says since the *afikoman* is in place of the *korbon Pesach* the larger *matzah* is taken for the *afikoman*.

3. Shulchan Aruch 473:6, Aruch Ha'shulchan 473:20. Refer to Mishnah Berurah 57.

4. Shibuley Haleket 218, Kol Bo 50, Rokeach 283, Shulchan Aruch 473:6, Elya Rabbah 28, Leket Yosher 1:page 84, Siddur Yaavetz 2:page 48:2, Shulchan Aruch Harav 35, Chai Adom 130:19:6, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 119:3, Kaf Ha'chaim 123.

5. Lekutei Maharich 3:page 518 (new).

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On Shoulders

Some people have the custom to place the *afikoman matzah* on their shoulder as a remembrance to what we did while exiting *Mitzrayim*.⁶

Under a Pillow

Many have the custom to place the *afikoman matzah* under the pillow which they recline on during the *seder*.⁷ Although one should avoid placing food under a bed⁸ or where he lays down,⁹ this is permitted. Some *poskim* suggest that we do this so that the children who steal the *afikoman* will not be seen by everybody.¹⁰

Walking Around the House

Some people take the *afikoman matzah* and walk around the house with it on their shoulders, saying that this is what our fathers did when leaving *Mitzrayim*.¹¹ However, many *poskim* stress that this should be done before eating the *matzah* at the time of *afikoman*, and not after *yachatz*.¹² Others keep the *matzah* on their shoulder from *yachatz* until the *afikoman* is eaten.¹³

6. Magen Avraham 473:22, Shulchan Aruch Harav 35, Mishnah Berurah 59, Kaf Ha'chaim 123. This was the custom of the Chasam Sofer zt"l (Natei Gavriel Pesach 2:83:footnote 20).

7. Elya Rabbah 473:28, Be'er Heitiv:19, Siddur Yaavetz 2:page 48:3, Aruch Ha'shulchan 20, Lekutei Maharich 3:page 518 (new), Darchei Chaim V'shalom 597:page 190, Vayagid Moshe page 118.

8. Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 116:5.

9. Vayagid Moshe page 119.

10. Pe'as Sudcha O.C. 51:4.

11. Pri Megadim Eishel Avraham 473:22, Refer to Vayagid Moshe page 117.

12. Maharshal 88, Elya Rabbah 473:28, Pri Megadim Eishel Avraham 22, Be'er Heitiv 473:19, Lekutei Maharich 3:page 532 (new), see Halacha Shel Pesach 2:page 299:footnote 63.

13. Vayagid Moshe page 117, Halacha Shel Pesach 2:page 299:footnote 63.



Which Custom

There are many customs regarding this matter; all are acceptable.¹⁴

Other Reasons for Hiding the Afikoman

One of the most well known reasons for hiding the *matzah* is to arouse the children's curiosity.¹⁵ This also prevents us from eating it before the proper time.¹⁶ Other *poskim* explain that the *afikoman* represents the *korbon Pesach*. Just as the *korbon Pesach* needed to be watched, so too the *afikoman* needs to be watched.¹⁷ Based on this, some say that the child should return the *afikoman* right before we are ready to eat it.¹⁸ Others compare this to the custom of covering the *challah* during *kiddush*, so that the *challah* does not get embarrassed.¹⁹ So too, we cover (and hide) the *afikoman matzah* so it should not be embarrassed when we eat the other half of the *matzah* for *motzi matzah*.²⁰

The *Sefas Emes*²¹ says that the *geulah* of *Mitzrayim* is a preparation for future *geulos*. Since we are still in *golus*, we cover the *afikoman* as a *remez* that the *geulah* is hidden and not yet complete.

14. Kaf Ha'chaim 473:123.

15. Lekutei Maharich 3:page 519.

16. Ibid.

17. Matamim Hachodesh page 65:17 (new), Mekroei Kodesh Pesach 2:41:page 148. Refer to Sefer Matamim Hachodesh ibid:18.

18. Moadim V'zemanim 7:188:footnote 2:page 111.

19. Bais Yosef 271, Shulchan Aruch 271:10, Darchei Moshe 7, Magen Avraham 20, Mishnah Berurah 41, Aruch Hashulchan 22.

20. Matamim Hachodesh page 64:16, Vayagid Moshe page 119, Halacha Shel Pesach 2:page 300:footnote 65.

21. Pesach page 56.

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Giving it to Someone Else

The *Shulchan Aruch* prescribes that one should give the *afikoman* to someone else to watch in order to make sure that it is not eaten during the meal until the proper time.²² Instead, we allow the child to take it from us.²³ This fulfills the same purpose, as the child will ensure that the *afikoman* is not forgotten,²⁴ and there is no need to give it to someone else.²⁵

“Stealing” the *Afikoman*

Custom

A widespread custom in *klal yisroel* is that children steal the *afikoman* and hide it in return for a prize.²⁶ Some quote this as being a beautiful custom.²⁷ The *Noheg Katzon Yosef*²⁸ says that this custom should not be abolished. The custom spread as older children and wives also steal the *afikoman* and ask for prizes.²⁹

Reasons

The *Gemorah*³⁰ says that we grab *matzos* on the night of *Pesach* so that the children do not fall asleep.³¹ The

22. Shulchan aruch 473:6, Shulchan Aruch Harav 35, Kaf Ha'chaim 121, see Pe'as Sudcha O.C. 51:2. Refer to Kaf Ha'chaim ibid for another reason for this. Refer to Rivevos Ephraim 4:113:10, 8:200:5.

23. Lekutei Maharich 3:page 518 (new), Rivevos Ephraim 8:200:5. Refer to Seder Hayom page 132 (new).

24. Vayagid Moshe 18:9.

25. Pe'as Sudcha O.C. 51:3-4.

26. Chok Yaakov 472:2, Siddur Yaavetz 2:page 48:3, Sheilas Rav page 356:33, Vayivorech Dovid 1:58, Teshuvos V'hanugos 3:141. Refer to Hakotton V'hilchosov 22:33:footnote 60. If a child does not want to give back the *afikoman* you can take it with force (Sheilas Rav page 357:34).

27. Opinion of Harav Elyashiv zt"l quoted in Halacha Shel Pesach 2:page 301:footnote 72.

28. Page 222:4.

29. Vayivorech Dovid 1:58.

30. Mesechtas Pesachim 109a.

31. Chok Yaakov 472:2, Be'er Heitiv 473:19, Noheg Katzon Yosef ibid, Meiri Pesachim 108b



*Rambam*³² says that we do unusual things on the night of *Pesach* in order to arouse the children's curiosity. One thing is "grabbing *matzah* from one another." Some say that is the source of the custom of children grabbing the *afikoman matzah*.³³ (Those who disagree with this custom say that this *Rambam* is not referring to the *afikoman matzah*. Rather, it means that adults grab the *matzos* in order that the child should ask why this night is different.³⁴ In addition, see below for other translations of the word "*chotfin*.-grabbing").

Others offer the following reason for the custom of "stealing" the *afikoman*. We know that the dogs did not bark on the night of *yetzias Mitzrayim*.³⁵ The *Gemorah*³⁶ says that people steal when dogs do not bark, since the dogs are not a deterrent. Since stealing took place on that night, the custom is to steal the *afikoman* as well.³⁷

Other Interpretations of the *Gemorah*

*Rashi*³⁸ on the *Gemorah* says that "grabbing" means that the *seder* plate should be lifted up so the children will ask about it, or that we should eat early.

Others explain that during the year the one who makes the *bracha* eats first, followed by the other participants.³⁹

"hatinokes," Sefer Matamim page 86:34 (new). Refer to Rambam Hilchos Chometz U'matzah 7:3. See Melei D'Avos 3:13. The Meiri Pesachim 108b "hatinokes," uses the word "gonev" – steal.

32. Hilchos Chometz U'matzah 7:3.

33. Chok Yaakov 472:2, Peas Sudcha O.C. 51:4, Sheilas Rav page 356:33.

34. Moadim L'simcha 5:pages 342-343.

35. Shemos 11:7. The Ben Ish Chai (tzav 39) says because of this one should not hit a dog on at least the first and second day of Pesach.

36. Mesechtas Pesachim 113a.

37. Minhag Yisroel Torah 2:page 291:16, Moadim L'simcha 5:page 345:footnote 12. Refer to ibid for other reasons as well.

38. Mesechtas Pesachim 109a "chotfin." Refer to Rashbam ibid.

39. Mesechtas Berochos 47a, Rambam Hilchos Berochos 7:5.

However, on the night of *Pesach* the guests can “grab” even before the leader eats in order that the children will ask and not fall asleep.⁴⁰ In addition, even those sources that explain the *Gemorah* literally make no mention of the children grabbing the *afikoman*.⁴¹ Therefore, some say that the custom to steal the *afikoman* is based on a mistaken reading of the *Gemorah*.⁴²

Why is Stealing Permitted?⁴³

Theft is normally prohibited, even if it is done for a joke, in order not to accustom oneself to steal.⁴⁴ In addition, it can be argued that telling children to steal the *afikoman* is bad *chinuch*.⁴⁵ However, if the thief is a member of the household then there is no concern because the owner of the house does not mind. Based on this, there is no concern of stealing the *afikoman* since this is part of the *seder*. This is not considered stealing for a joke.⁴⁶

We find for other *Yomim Tovim*⁴⁷ that certain actions which are generally forbidden are permitted on,⁴⁸ i.e. damaging someone else because of the joy of *Yom Tov*. So too, stealing the *afikoman* is permitted because of *simcha*.⁴⁹

40. Moadim L'simcha 5:page 343.

41. Moadim L'simcha 5:pages 342-343.

42. Otzer Dinim U'minhagim page 25, Otzer Taamei Haminhagim 2:page 267.

43. Refer to Vayagid Moshe pages 295-296.

44. Rambam Hilchos Geneivah 1:2. Refer to Shulchan Aruch C.M. 348:1.

45. Halichos Shlomo Moadim page 260:footnote 219 quoting the custom of Harav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt”l,

46. Refer to Shoneh B'shoneh 5746:pages 144-148 in depth on stealing of the *afikoman*.

47. Refer to Mesechtas Succah 45a, Rashi V'ochlin.”

48. Terumas Hadeshen 100.

49. Haseder Ha'uruch 1:page 338, Moadim L'simcha 5:page 344:footnote 11.

Not to Steal the Afikoman

Many frown on this custom since it is not the way of the *Torah* to let children steal even for a joke.⁵⁰ The *Mishnah Berurah* does not mention this custom, and it could be because he was not happy with it.⁵¹ This is the practice of the *Sefardim* and many *Chassidishe* sects.⁵² However, one who has this custom need not refrain.

Other Advice

Another potential problem is that the *afikoman* might be placed anywhere in the house, and the child might actually forget its location. It would not be considered watched (see above). Therefore, some *poskim* suggest that the child should tell his mother where he put the *afikoman* and then the mother will give him a prize.⁵³ This custom is not widely practiced.⁵⁴

“Grabbing” the Afikoman

Even those who follow the custom of stealing the *afikoman* should call it “grabbing” the *afikoman*, rather than stealing the *afikoman*.⁵⁵

50. Darchei Chaim V'sholom 597:page 190, Natei Gavriel Pesach 2:83:footnote 25, Haggadah Shel Pesach Harav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt”l page 266, Orchos Rabbeinu 2:page 78:75, Bais Avi 3:26, Teshuvos V'hanhugos 4:pages 490-491 quoting the custom of Rabbi Chaim Brisker zt”l, Halichos Shlomo Moadim page 260:footnote 219 quoting the custom of Harav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt”l, also quoted in Shalmei Moed page 400, opinion of the Chazon Ish zt”l (Haggadah of the Chazon Ish page 41), opinion of the Steipler zt”l (Orchos Rabbeinu 2:page 78:75, Haggadah of the Steipler page 144), opinion of Harav Moshe Shternbuch Shlita (quoted in Haggadah Tam V'Daas page 33), Shulchan Aruch Hamekutzar 3:page 56:7.

51. Pe'as Sudcha O.C. 51:4.

52. Natei Gavriel Pesach 3:83:footnote 25.

53. Teshuvos V'hanhugos 3:141.

54. Ibid.

55. Orchos Chaim Spinka 477:19, Piskei Teshuvos page 242 footnote 148, Halichos Shlomo Moadim page 260:footnote 219 quoting the custom of Harav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt”l, Piskei Teshuvos 473:26.

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Other *Halachos* Related to Grabbing the *afikoman*

As stated earlier, sometimes the child chooses a good hiding place for the *afikoman* and he forgets where it is. The *poskim* say in such a case one should just take a different *matzah* and use it for *afikoman*.⁵⁶

Where Not to Put the *Afikoman*

The child should be instructed not to hide the *afikoman* in the bathroom,⁵⁷ or a place which has water.⁵⁸ In addition, it should not be placed under a bed.⁵⁹

Asking for a Prize

When the *afikoman* is returned, the child asks for a prize. Sometimes this prize can be beyond the means of his father. There are many variables in this situation; therefore, one should discuss this matter with his *Rav* when the question arises.⁶⁰

Guests

If one's host does not follow the custom of stealing the *afikoman*, then he should tell his children not to take it.⁶¹

Segulos With the *Afikoman*

Hanging the *Afikoman*

The *Gemorah*⁶² states that hanging bread in a basket causes poverty. This *inyan* is brought by many *poskim*

56. Refer to Shulchan 477:2, see Vayivorech Dovid 1:58.

57. Vayagid Moshe 18:10.

58. Natei Gavriel Pesach 2:83:19.

59. Haggadah Minchas Osher page 32.

60. Refer to Halichos 121-122:pages 8-10, Vayivorech Dovid 1:58. Even a *muktzah* item because it is for a *mitzvah* (Refer to Vayivorech Dovid 1:58, see Magen Avraham 15, Shulchan Aruch Harav 306:15, Mishnah Berurah 33, Aruch Ha'shulchan 17.

61. Shoneh B'shonen 5746:page 147.

62. Pesachim 111b, see Rashbam "tlei." It is unclear if this applies to cake and to bread that is



as well.⁶³ Children routinely put their sandwiches in knapsacks, which are then hung on pegs on the wall in school. The *poskim* maintain there is no reason to refrain from hanging knapsacks in this manner.⁶⁴

Some people have a custom to place the *afikoman* as a *shemirah* on top of the door. This is not considered hanging bread.⁶⁵ Some *poskim* maintain that one should use the *matzah* of the second night for this purpose.⁶⁶ The piece of *afikoman* should be burnt at the burning of *chometz* on Erev Pesach.⁶⁷

Keeping the *Afikoman* all Year

Some have the custom to keep a piece of the *afikoman* around all year (not necessarily to hang it anywhere). A possible reason for this custom is that the word *matzah* in Hebrew is an acronym for *mikol tzara hizileiny*⁶⁸ – save me from all pain.⁶⁹

less than a *k'zayis* (Birchos Hashem page 334).

63. Ben Ish Chai Pinchus 2:12, Shulchan Aruch Harav Shemiras Haguf 9, Kaf Ha'chaim 180:14, 434:13, Y.D. 116:198, see Shemiras Haguf V'hanefesh 31:2.

64. Meor Ha'Shabbos 2:30:4;page 166:footnote 605 (Harav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt"l), Eitz Hasadeh 16:footnote 25 quoting the opinion of Harav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt"l and Harav Elyashiv zt"l, Vezos Ha'beracha page 18 quoting the opinion of Harav Shternbuch Shlita. Harav Chaim Kanievesky Shlita is stringent (Tzohar 7:page 150:14).

65. Refer to Pri Megadim M.Z. 477:1, Chok Yaakov 3, Elya Rabbah 1, Sharei Teshuva 4, Be'er Heitiv 4, Magen Avraham 500:7, Ben Ish Chai Pinchus 2:12, Shulchan Aruch Harav 477:11, Lekutei Maharich 3:page 532 (new), Shemiras Haguf V'hanefesh 31:footnote 4. The Birchos Hashem page 332:231 who says doing this is not a disgrace to the *matzah* since it is for a *mitzvah*. (Refer to Eitz Hasadeh 16:8:footnote 29). Harav Yisroel Belsky Shlita does not have this custom (Refer to Shalmei Moed page 401 who says Harav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt"l did not have this custom either, see Natei Gavriel Pesach 2:97:footnote 44). See Otzer Dinim U'minhagim page 25 who says this custom is a mistake.

66. Mishneh Sicher 1:122. Refer ibid regarding Eretz Yisroel where they only have one *seder* on Pesach.

67. Mishneh Sicher 1:122.

68. Tehillim 54:9.

69. Yufei Leleiv 7:477, Otzer Taamei Hamin Hagim 2:page 268.

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In addition, the *afikoman* is eaten in place of the *korbon Pesach*. We watch the *afikoman* to make sure it is eaten properly. Since the *afikoman* is watched, we use it as a *remez* for the *matzah* to protect us all year round.⁷⁰

70. Refer to Erech Shai O.C. 477.

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