BETWEEN
FRIENDS
with ESTHER
EtiQuette



The Do's and Don'ts of Pesach Madness
Esther Etiquette

Although I have never truly made an entire Pesach on my own yet (thanks, Ma!), for many years I have watched my amazing mother whip it up while keeping it all together. And like all things my mother does, it looks (I know it is anything but) effortless and stress-free. I have learned a lot from watching my mother clean the house, down to every box in the storage room that gets opened once a year for the Pesach dusting, while also making time to cook all that food from scratch – food that seems it will be enough for three armies but then is consumed in one sitting.

In all the years that I have spent Pesach at my mother's house, I have never heard her raise her voice, get annoyed, or say something out of anger. How, you might ask, does she manage such serenity with a large family of children and now grandchildren, guests and more guests? Honestly, I don't know. What I do know is that the way she carries herself and interacts with others deserves its own book. But in honor of Pesach, I will share with you a few tips I have learned from watching her that may help you bring out the best in yourself and those around you, and in turn ease some of the pre-Pesach stress.

1. My mother compliments her housekeeper. A lot. Especially during hectic times. She makes sure to acknowledge the chaos in the house and the increased workload, and frequently offers the housekeeper a drink and makes sure she sits down for meals. She uses phrases like, "We are going to get this done," which makes the housekeeper feel she is part of a team rather than a lone slave. After Pesach my mother buys the housekeeper a thoughtful gift to thank her for her hard work. No wonder a few of our housekeepers have tried to convert to Judaism!

2. Everyone is given a job that is appropriate for him or her. Even the little children are given a task that they can accomplish and feel good about, whether it is standing on a chair and peeling a potato (for an hour), or washing down the kitchen chairs outside with the hose in bathing suits. This keeps everyone busy and out of mess-making activities.

3. In the morning my mother greets us with a big smile and a big breakfast. There is always ready-to-eat food out, so no-one is ever hungry and grumpy.

4. When we kids get silly and start dancing in the kitchen, using our peelers as microphones and leaving mounds of potatoes to wait, my mother smiles and might even join in. She embraces the fun (I am working on this with my own children – it is hard when you are anxious for something to be finished already), and this keeps everyone in a joyous, light-hearted mood.

5. My mother never complains to us. Her children and grandchildren all feel that it is her greatest pleasure to host us in her home. My son (age nine) often tells me when he is upset, "I am calling Bubbe and asking her if I can live in her house. She just loves having me there."



6. Before the parade of children arrive, my mother and father child-proof the house. Any expensive and delicate pieces are moved out of the public areas (my parents' bedroom looks like an antique furniture shop). Low hanging picture frames, little art sculptures, and water-filled crystal vases: all gone. My father removes all the living-room couch pillows and places sturdy slip-covers on the furniture. Everyone is relaxed. My parents are not worried about milk bottles dripping on upholstery and I am not feeling like a jack-in-the-box jumping at every child's slightest movement for fear of them breaking something.

The truth is that an enjoyable Pesach is a partnership between the host and guest. No matter how gracious the host, a bad guest can create much misery for all. In my early years I most definitely fell under the category of bad guest. But I think that after ten years of marriage I have at least become tolerable. I knew how far I'd come when my sister told me that she overheard my mother say that she doesn't need "house rules" because her daughter is a pretty good house guest. I was puffed up with pride for a long time after hearing that. Here is what I try my best to do when we're at my parents' home:

1. No food outside the kitchen. My kids know that they may only eat at the table and must wash their hands when they finish eating.
2. Your stuff, your room. This one is harder for me. But I try my best and I am quite embarrassed to find my mother putting shoes, socks, sunglasses, shopping bags, bottles, iPads, etc. at my door. You do not want your host to have the additional burden of collecting your things from around the house.
3. Put your kids to bed! The house is crazy. The house is loud. The house is a mess. By 8:00 everyone is eager for the running, crying, yelling, jumping and even the cute chit-chat to end. At 7:30, pull yourself away from the party. Remember that you have kids and they're your responsibility. Put them to bed properly so that they stay there. Everyone, including you, will be grateful.
4. Do not expect or ask for help with your children. Your mother is overworked as it is. If you need an extra hand, hire a babysitter. If you have teenage sisters, be sensitive to the fact that your mother needs their help as well.
5. Clean up after yourself and your kids. If your kids had a snack, clean it up. They played with toys, put them away. Do it now. There is nothing more frustrating for a host than walking into a new mess that has been carelessly left the way it is. Do this even if it is not 100 percent only your children who snacked or played.
6. Be on time to meals and dress appropriately. Don't make your hosts wait, and keep in mind that even though you are on vacation from your reality, Pesach is still real and there is effort being put into making it Yom Tov'dik. Dress to show your respect for the Yom Tov and for the people working hard to create the atmosphere. It is my Pesach resolution for this year to be at the table ready for Kiddush before my father.

Wishing you all a perfectly proper and pleasurable Pesach.•