

Some Questions & Answers for Proper Passover Observance in the Home

5770 - 2010

Pesach is celebrated this year from Monday evening, March 29th through Tuesday, April 6th. The Sedarim are held Monday and Tuesday evenings, March 29th and March 30th.

1. *What is Hametz?*

Good question. *Hametz* is formed when one of the five Biblical grains -- wheat, oats, rye, barley or spelt -- ferments. This can occur when, after being harvested and made into flour, the grain comes in contact with water. Unless the resulting dough is quickly put into an oven, it will begin to rise and form *hametz*. (All ordinary breads and cakes consist of *hametz*.) In order to avoid producing *hametz*, matzah is prepared by mixing flour and water together and baking the mixture within 18 minutes. *Pesahdik* (kosher for Passover) baked goods are made not from raw flour, but from a "flour" formed by grinding up matzah. The term *hametz* (or the Yiddish adjective, *hametzdik*) is also applied to dishes and utensils which have been in contact with *hametz* food during the year.

2. *Why do most Ashkenazim not eat beans, rice, corn, or peas on Pesach?*

Although these are not among the five species of grain whose flour can become *hametz*, Ashkenazic rabbis have forbidden their use because, in the past, flour was made from them. They felt that people might become confused and mistakenly use regular flour if they were allowed to use flour made from these substances. To avoid possible confusion, most Ashkenazic rabbis ordained that these not be used at all. Non-flour products of these substances may be used if they are prepared under rabbinic supervision and properly certified. (String beans are not included in this list and are permitted by all authorities.)

3. *What is Siyyum Ha B'chorim (The Fast of the First Born)?*

Generally, the first born of our people fast on the morning before Pesach to commemorate their being spared the fate of the first-born Egyptians. (Traditionally, only first-born males have observed this custom, but some first-born females are now observing it as well.) First-borns *may* eat, however, if they are participating in a *Seudat Mitzvah*, the festive repast which accompanies the performance of certain mitzvot. One such mitzvah is *Talmud Torah* (study). When the study of a significant portion of material is completed, it is customary for all present to celebrate with a meal. All first-borns who participate in the ceremony may eat. This is known as the *Siyyum Ha B'chorim*. The *Siyyum Ha B'chorim* will take place this year on Monday morning, March 29th following the morning service which will begin at 6:45am.

4. *Why must we clean our houses so thoroughly before Pesach?*

The laws regarding *hametz* on Pesach are much stricter than the laws of Kashrut during the rest of the year. Throughout the year, non-kosher food may not, of course, be eaten, but Jews may buy or sell such food, and there is no prohibition of keeping it at one's house or place of business. Not only must we refrain from eating or making use of *hametz* during Pesach, it must also be out of sight in our homes. [*Lo yeraeh se'or bechol gevulecha*] (Ex 13:7). Not only must it be out of sight, but we must take all possible steps to remove it from our homes. [*tashbeetu se'or mebateichem*] (Ex 12:15). Traditionally, this is accomplished in the following ways:

- a) ***B'dikat Hametz - The Search for Hametz:*** On the night before Passover begins (this year on Sunday, March 28th), after the house has been thoroughly cleaned, and after it is dark enough for us to benefit from the light of a candle, we search for any crumbs of *hametz* we may have missed. We use a *B'dikat Hametz* kit, which consists of a candle, a feather and a wooden spoon! Before beginning the search, we recite: *Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us by commanding us regarding the removal of hametz.* After the search, we proceed to:
- b) ***Bittul Hametz - (The Nullification of Hametz):*** This is the recitation of a formula (found in most *haggadot*) declaring that all *hametz* has been removed from the house, and that whatever remains (other than what one has set aside to be eaten for breakfast the next day) should be deemed "dust of

the earth" (in Aramaic, *afra d'ar'a*). We recite the nullification formula after the search for *hametz* (*b'dikat hametz*) on Tuesday evening: *All hametz in my possession which I have not seen and have not removed shall be nullified and be ownerless as the dust of the earth.*

- c) ***Be'ur Hametz*** – (*The Burning of Hametz*): On the morning after *B'dikat Hametz* we burn the *hametz* that has been found during the search of the night before. This ceremony takes place this year on Monday morning, March 29th. We recite an unconditional version of the nullification formula (*bittul hametz*): *All hametz in my possession, whether I have seen it or not and whether I have removed it or not, shall be nullified and be ownerless as the dust of the earth.*
- d) ***Mechirat Hametz*** - (*The Sale of Hametz*): We are not always able to destroy or get rid of *hametz* in our possession. It could be economically disastrous. Hence, the rabbis ordained that *hametz* may be sold to a non-Jew in the community who then sells it back to us after Pesach. The *hametz* is then no longer "in our possession" during Passover. This is normally done by the rabbi acting on behalf of the entire congregation. Such foodstuffs and dishes and utensils used during the rest of the year should be locked away in storage, not to be touched for the duration of the festival. This year the *hametz* may be sold on Sunday mornings, March 21st and March 28th, or you may return the form published in our newsletter and on-line to the Temple office by 9:30am on Monday, March 29th. All such sold *hametz* will once again be available for use by 9:00pm on April 6th.

5. ***What foods may not be used during Pesach?***

All these foods are considered *hametz* and may not be used during Pesach: leavened bread, cakes, biscuits, crackers, cereals, wheat, barley, oats, dry beans, coffee with cereal derivatives in it, and liquids which contain ingredients made from grain alcohol.

6. ***What is the legal status of legumes? Can they be used on Passover?***

Most Ashkenazic authorities have added to the list of foods that are not permitted: rice, corn, millet, legumes (beans and peas, but not string beans which are permitted. See question #2 above.) Some Ashkenazic authorities permit, while others forbid, the use of legumes in a form other than in their natural state, for example, corn sweeteners, corn oil and soy oil. Sephardic authorities permit the use of all of the above. Consult Rabbi Perkins with specific product questions (or wait until after Pesach to indulge.)

7. ***What about peanuts?***

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative Movement has ruled that peanuts and peanut oil are permissible, as peanuts are not actually legumes. Nonetheless, many Ashkenazim refrain from eating peanut butter or peanuts on Pesach because of the long-standing custom to do so.

8. ***What foods require no certification if purchased before Pesach?***

Fresh meat, fresh fish, eggs, fresh fruit, fruit juice with no additives, frozen (uncooked) vegetables, dried fruit, milk, butter, cottage cheese, cream cheese, ripened cheeses such as cheddar and muenster, vegetables (other than beans and peas; see question 6), pure natural coffee - instant or ground, sugar (not confectioner's or powdered, to which corn starch may be added), brown sugar, honey, Hershey's cocoa, saccharin, tea, salt, pepper, pure garlic and onion powder, (other natural spices), pure unadulterated safflower oil, nuts (except legumes), baking soda, dish detergent and scouring powders. All these items should be bought before Passover and left unopened until Pesach begins.

9. ***What foods require rabbinic supervision when purchased before or during Pesach?***

Matzah, noodles, farfel, candies, cakes, all baked products (matzah flour, matzah meal), canned and processed foods, ice cream, yogurt, cheese, jam, jelly, relishes, soda, wines, salad oils, vegetable oils, gelatin, shortening, vinegar, and chocolate flavored milk.

10. ***May canned or frozen fruits and vegetables be used for Pesach?***

Fruits and vegetables normally permitted for Passover use, when packed in water or their own juices, may be used. Avoid cans or packages containing added ingredients.

11. ***May tuna and salmon be used?***

Oil packing introduces an uncertain element possibly containing additional ingredients. Therefore, use a certified kosher water packed variety, purchase it before Pesach, and do not open it until Passover begins.

12. ***May milk without a hechsher be used?***

With automation used in milk production, there is little chance for milk to contain any *hametz*. Milk produced and purchased before Pesach is permitted.

13. ***What do I do about detergent?***

If permitted during the year, powdered and liquid detergents do not require a *kosher le-Pesach* label.

14. ***What do I do about medicine?***

Hametz binders are used in many pills, but if the medicine is required for life-sustaining therapy, it may be used on Passover. If it is not for life-sustaining therapy, rabbinical opinion is divided. In all cases, capsules are preferable. Please call Rabbi Perkins to ask specific questions.

15. ***May any dishes or utensils used during the year be used on Passover?***

It is preferable to have dishes and utensils specifically reserved for Pesach and stored away during the rest of the year. However, as this is not always possible, the rabbis ordained that certain types of utensils may be "kashered", specifically prepared for Pesach. However, earthenware, enamelware or porcelain utensils, if used during the year, may not be used during Pesach.

- a) Silverware, knives, forks, and spoons made wholly of metal, if used during the year, may be kashered by scouring thoroughly and then immersing in boiling water.
- b) All table glassware is permitted after thorough scouring. There is also a practice of soaking glassware for 72 hours before Pesach, changing the water every 24 hours.
- c) Fine translucent chinaware, if not used during the previous year, is permitted. However, it first must be scoured and then cleaned in hot water.
- d) Metal pots and pans used for cooking purposes only (but not for baking), if made wholly of metal, may be used during Pesach if first thoroughly scoured and immersed in boiling water. Kashering is done in the following way: fill a large pot with water and heat to boiling. Take the utensil, tie a string to it and immerse completely in the boiling water. For small items, a cord netting can be used to dip several at once. This process renders utensils *pesahdik* and *parve*. Other utensils, also wholly made of metal, but used with fire like a spit or a broiler must be thoroughly scrubbed, cleaned and then made as hot as possible.

16. ***How may the stove be kashered?***

The stove is prepared by thoroughly scrubbing and cleaning all parts and turning on full flame or the clean cycle in the oven and all the grates for half an hour.

17. ***How may a microwave be kashered?***

Microwave ovens present a special case, as the inside surfaces do not become hot. A microwave oven should be cleaned thoroughly; then a dish of water should be placed in the oven and allowed to boil. Convection microwave ovens, however, may not be kashered for Passover.

18. ***How may a dishwasher be kashered?***

After not using the machine for a period of 24 hours, a dishwasher may be used for Pesach after thoroughly cleaning and rinsing with boiling water and then running it empty for two cycles, one with soap and one without.

19. ***How may a refrigerator be kashered?***

Remove all *hametz* food and opened packages. Clean thoroughly with boiling water and scour the racks. In a freezer, frozen *hametz* foods should be put in a special closed-off section, not to be consumed until after Pesach and should be sold with other *hametz*.

20. ***How do I prepare my sink?***

A metal sink may be kashered by a thorough cleaning and by pouring boiling water over it. A porcelain sink cannot be kashered; it should be cleaned and a sink rack used.

21. ***How do I prepare my tables, closets, and counters?***

If used with *hametz*, they should be thoroughly cleaned and covered, and then they may be used.

22. ***Is there anything else I should do?***

Non-Passover dishes and pots, and *hametz* whose ownership has been transferred, should be separated, locked up or covered, and marked so as to prevent accidental use.

23. ***What are Ma'ot Hittim?***

A collection is taken up before Pesach to provide money for matzah and other Passover essentials for needy Jews. This is called *Ma'ot Hittim*.

24. ***What will you have if you follow the above rules?***

A "*Pesahdik*" home and a joyous, healthy and happy Pesach!