

Some Questions & Answers for Proper Passover Observance in the Home 5778-2018

Pesach is celebrated this year from Friday evening, March 30th through Saturday evening, April 7th with the *sedarim* (seders) being held Friday and Saturday evenings, March 30th and 31st.

1. *What is Hametz?*

Good question. *Hametz* (fermented grain) 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 (previously baked) 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 many Ashkenazim not eat beans, rice, corn, or peas on Pesach?*

Although these substances (known collectively as "*kitniyot*" in Hebrew) are **not** among the five species of grain whose flour can become *hametz*, Ashkenazi (Eastern European) rabbis since the 13th century have declared them off limits on Pesach. It is unclear precisely why, but it may be because flour was made from these substances. Many Ashkenazi authorities permit certain *non*-flour products of these substances if they are prepared under rabbinic supervision and properly certified. **For a recent (2016) development within the Conservative movement concerning the consumption of *kitniyot* on Passover, see the end of this Guide, pp. 7-8.**

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

First-born Jews are called upon to fast on the morning before Pesach to commemorate first-born Israelites being spared the fate of first-born Egyptians. (Traditionally, only first-born males have observed this custom, but some first-born females are now observing it as well.) However, according to traditional Jewish practice, first-borns *may* eat if they are participating in a *seudat mitzvah*, a festive repast which accompanies the performance of certain *mitzvot*. One such *mitzvah* is *Talmud Torah* (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 Friday morning, March 30th, following a morning *shaharit* service, which will begin at 7:00 am. Note: at the completion of the *siyyum*, we will carry out *bi'ur hametz*, the burning of the hametz. (See the answer to question 4 (c), below.)

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 against keeping it at one's house or place of business. But during Pesach, not only must we refrain from eating or making use of *hametz*, it must also be out of sight in our homes. [*Lo ye-ra-eh se'or bechol gevulecha*] (Ex 13:7). Indeed, 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 (i.e., Thursday evening, March 29th), 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: *Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler 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 Thursday 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) ***Bi'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 Friday morning, March 30th. 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 deemed ownerless -- just like 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-Jewish person 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 18th or 25th, or you may return the form published in our e-letter to the synagogue office by 9:30 am on Friday, March 30th. All such sold *hametz* will once again be available for use by 9:00 pm on April 7th.

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?***

As discussed above (see question 2), since the 13th century, Ashkenazi authorities have added *kitniyot* (loosely and imprecisely translated as “legumes”) to the list of foods that are not permitted on Pesach. *Kitniyot* include rice, corn, millet, beans and peas. Some Ashkenazi authorities permit, while others forbid, the use of *kitniyot* 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.) **For a recent (2016) development within the Conservative movement concerning the consumption of *kitniyot* on Passover, see the end of this Guide.**

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 *kitniyot*. 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, baking soda, dish detergent and scouring powders. All these items should be acquired before Pesach and left unopened until the holiday 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 contact Rabbi Perkins regarding 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 it, rinsing it with boiling (or very hot) 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 (or very hot) 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!

A SPECIAL NOTE ON *KITNIYOT*
March 2016; republished in March 2018
Rabbi Carl M. Perkins

Dear Friends,

During the past several months, three *teshuvot* (responsa) on Passover have been issued by the Conservative Movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. They concern the permissibility of eating *kitniyot* (i.e., rice, millet, corn, beans, peas, and similar substances, sometimes loosely and imprecisely translated as “legumes”) on Passover. Two of these reach the conclusion that the traditional practice of refraining from eating *kitniyot* on Passover should no longer remain in force. The third *teshuva*, a dissent, urges that the practice remain in force.

In general, I believe that there is value in maintaining long-standing customs. However, the first two of these *teshuvot* offer several compelling reasons to put aside this long-standing avoidance of *kitniyot* on Passover. For example, the practice maintains an arbitrary, divisive distinction in Jewish practice between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews; it can add to the expense of keeping Passover; and, given the obscure reasons for the practice, it can lead one to disregard the more serious prohibition against eating *hametz*. Moreover, these *teshuvot* point out that the reasons that have traditionally been offered for refraining from *kitniyot* on Pesach are very weak. On the other hand, the dissenting *teshuva* argues that, notwithstanding these considerations, the custom should be maintained.

Ever since I learned, years ago, that not eating *kitniyot* was an Ashkenazi custom, not a law binding on all Jews, I have not considered it an important practice. And I've supported eating *kitniyot* on Passover in Israel ever since 1989, when Rabbi David Golinkin published a *teshuva* authorizing that. Based on the current *teshuvot*, it seems to me that if there are compelling reasons for people to eat *kitniyot* on Pesach, the long-standing Ashkenazi custom should certainly give way. For example, if someone is vegan or allergic to many kosher-for-Passover foods, I would consider it reasonable to eat protein-rich *kitniyot* (foods like tofu or other soybean products)—and would certainly support such a choice over eating *hametz*. On the other hand, people who feel an attachment to the custom needn't feel obliged to disregard it.

Given the many issues raised in these three *teshuvot*, I believe that everyone should study them in depth. I would be happy to discuss them with you, and to help you determine what practice makes sense for you. Within our congregation, since our tradition has been to refrain from *kitniyot*, we will continue to do that when we serve food at the synagogue during Passover, though I would like to reflect on this question during the coming year.

In the meantime, here are links to the three *teshuvot*. I hope you find them interesting and informative:

1. The first *teshuva* is by Rabbi David Golinkin. Originally written and published in Israel in 1989, and intended to apply only to Jews living in Israel, it was recently updated and rendered applicable to Jews all over the world. The *teshuva* is available here:

<http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/2011-2020/Golinkin-Kitniyot.pdf>

2. The second *teshuva* was authored by Rabbis Amy Levin and Avram Reisner here in the States and permits Ashkenazi Jews living here in America to disregard the custom and to eat *kitniyot* on Passover. It is available here:

<http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/2011-2020/Levin-Reisner-Kitniyot.pdf>

3. Finally, here is the dissenting opinion written by Rabbis Miriam Berkowitz, Noah Bickart, Baruch Frydman-Kohl, David Hoffman, and Micah Peltz:

<http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/2011-2020/Dissenting%20opinion%20-%20FINAL%20-%20Kitniyot.pdf>

Enjoy your reading. In the meantime, let me wish you and your families a joyous and kosher Passover!

Sincerely,

Rabbi Carl M. Perkins