

Keeping Passover in the Home

A Guide to the *Mitzvot* of Pesah

This guide to Passover observances and rituals explains the traditions and *halakhic* practices involved in observing Pesah in the home. This year, Pesah begins on *motz'ei* Shabbat, Saturday night following the end of Shabbat. As a result, a number of rituals are adjusted to accommodate observance of Shabbat alongside preparation for Passover. Each of these changes is noted below. For more information regarding the changes that this year's calendar entails, please see this year's "Getting Ready for Pesah" supplement. A *teshuvah*, or rabbinic responsum, on the idiosyncrasies of Pesah which begins on Saturday night can be found at: www.rabbinicalassembly.org/teshuvot/docs/19912000/abelson_saturdaynight.pdf. Please feel free to contact Rabbis Lerner or Jacobs with any questions regarding your Pesah observance.

I. Hametz

What is Hametz?

If one of the five grains mentioned in the Torah—wheat, oats, rye, barley or spelt—comes in contact with water after being cut off from the ground, it begins to ferment and becomes hametz. According to tradition, this fermentation takes 18 minutes. The term hametz-dik refers to dishes and utensils that have been in contact with hametz foods during the year.

Why do most *Ashkenazim* not eat *kitniyot* (legumes) such as beans, rice, corn, or peas on Passover?

Although these are not among the five species of grain that can become hametz, our tradition forbade their use because flour can be made from them. Rabbinic authorities felt that people might become confused and be tempted to use regular flour if they were allowed to use flour made from those sources. To avoid possible confusion, most *Ashkenazic* rabbis ordained that these not be used at all. For true vegetarians who consider *kitniyot* (such as rice, millet, legumes) essential and vital to their health, the Rabbinical Assembly commission on Jewish Law and Standards permits the eating of such foods on Passover (as does the Sephardic tradition). Every attempt should be made to find them under Passover rabbinic supervision.

What is the *Siyyum Bekhorim*?

In commemoration of the deliverance from Egypt during which the first born children of the Israelites were unaffected by the tenth plague, those who are the first born members of their families have an obligation to fast on the day preceding Pesah. It is the custom for synagogues to make a *siyyum* (a public completion of the study of a tractate of the Talmud or *sefer* of the *Mishnah*) on the morning before Passover. Since the *siyyum* is followed by a *seudat mitzvah* (a festive meal which follows the performance of certain *mitzvot*), a first born who is present may eat, and having eaten, need not fast that day. This year, *Shaharit* services, followed by the *siyyum* and *seudat mitzvah*, will be held on Thursday, April 17 at 7 am.

Why must we clean our houses so thoroughly before Pesah?

The rule against *hametz* on Passover applies not only to eating, but to enjoyment or financial benefit (*hana'ah*) and also involves removing all the *hametz* from one's home. No *hametz* is allowed even to be in your house. To facilitate this cleaning, the following rituals are part of Passover preparations. The text for the ceremonies can be found in a good *Haggadah*.

a. Mekhirat Hametz: We are not always able to destroy or get rid of all the *hametz*—it may even be economically disastrous—so our rabbis ordained that any remaining *hametz* be sold to a non-Jew who then sells it back to us after Passover. The *hametz* is then no longer “in our possession.” Please authorize Rabbi Lerner to do this for you by filling out the form on page 17. Incidentally, it is only necessary to give away or sell food; dishes and utensils are simply put away in storage for the duration of the holiday. *H*ametz may be transferred to Rabbi Lerner by signing the appropriate document available in this insert. *Ma'ot Hittim* (Charity) is then given (usually “*ha*”—\$18 or multiples thereof) to be distributed to the needy. The document of *hametz* sale will also be available at the Temple Office. The last day for sale of *hametz* is **Wednesday, April 16 at 12 noon.**

b. Bedikat Hametz (any time after sunset on Thursday, April 17): After the house has been cleaned, we search for any crumbs of *hametz* we may have

missed. We use a candle, a feather, and a wooden spoon. **This year, as Pesah begins on motz'ei Shabbat, on Saturday night following the end of Shabbat, we perform our search for hametz early, in order to preserve the spirit of Shabbat while preparing for Passover.**

This takes place on Thursday night. While normally we would at this point rid our homes completely of *hametz*, it is customary to retain enough *hametz* to recite *ha-motzi* for two Shabbat meals—Friday night and Saturday morning—i.e. a small amount of *hallah*. This *hametz* should be kept separate from other *pesahdik* items in the house. Since we hold onto this small amount of *hametz*, we do not recite the *Kol hamira* formula, which we use to “annul” the presence of any leftover crumbs of *hametz*. We will recite this formula on Shabbat morning, once we have finished our second Shabbat meal.

c. Bitul Hametz: A formula renouncing any *hametz* left that may have been inadvertently missed is said, canceling our responsibility for it, thus symbolically removing it from our homes. The formula for *Bitul Hametz* is recited this year on the morning of Saturday, April 19. This formula, which can be found in most *Haggadot*, is as follows: “May all leaven in my possession, whether I have seen it or not, be regarded as nonexistent and considered as mere dust of the earth.”

d. Bi'ur Hametz: While we do not officially “annul” our *hametz* until Shabbat morning, we still burn it on the morning following the search for *hametz*, this year on Friday, April 18. We treat this burning as we would the burning on any *erev Pesah*, and must complete it by the end of the fifth hour of the day, which this year occurs at 11:36 am.

II. Food that is permitted on Pesah

The Torah prohibits the eating of any *hametz* during the eight days of *Pesah*. This includes both foods that are obviously *hametz*, and foods that contain *hametz* in a mixture or as an additive. During the rest of the year, a prohibited item, such as *hametz*, can lose its identity in a mixture if it comprises less than 1/60 of the entire mixture (*batel b'shishim*). However, during

Passover, hametz can never lose its identity in a mixture—even if it only comprises an infinitesimal amount. Therefore, during Pesah, no foods that contain a small percentage of hametz (or that could potentially contain hametz, no matter how small the amount) can be purchased. While many of the foods we purchase on or for Passover require a *hekhsher* (supervision symbol) for Passover, others that could potentially contain hametz can be purchased prior to Passover, without a *hekhsher*—any hametz they contain, being less than 1/60, “disappears” before Pesah begins.

This year, since we dispose of our hametz on Friday morning prior to Shabbat, the only hametz that is permitted to be eaten after this point is hallah for two meals of Shabbat—Friday night and Saturday morning. All other food we eat from that point onward must be *pesahdik*.

**What foods do not require a *kosher l’Pesah* label
if purchased prior to Passover?**

The following foods do not require a *kosher l’Pesah* label if purchased prior to Passover: unopened packages or containers of natural coffee without cereal additives (however, be aware that coffees produced by General Foods are not kosher for Passover unless marked KP); sugar (not confectioner’s or brown sugar unless marked “kosher for Passover”); pure tea; salt (not iodized); pepper; natural spices; frozen fruit juices with no additives; frozen (uncooked) vegetables (except legumes or *kitniyot*); milk; butter; cottage cheese; cream cheese; ripened cheeses such as cheddar (hard), muenster (semi-soft), and Camembert (soft); frozen uncooked fruit (with no additives); baking soda, fresh fish, and fresh kosher meat.

What foods never require a *kosher l’Pesah* label?

The following foods do not require a *kosher l’Pesah* label at any time: eggs, fresh fruits & vegetables (except legumes).

**What foods require a *kosher l'Pesah* label
if purchased before or during Passover?**

The following foods **do require** a *kosher l'Pesah* label if purchased before or during Pesah: all baked products (matzah—check to make sure it is for this year, cakes, matzah flour, *farfel*, matzah meal, any products containing matzah), canned or bottled fruit juices, canned tuna, wine, vinegar, liquor, oils (except pure unadulterated safflower or canola oils), dried fruits, candy, noodles, jam, jelly, relishes, vegetable gelatin, shortening, chocolate flavored milk, ice cream, yogurt, soda.

**What processed foods require a *kosher l'Pesah* label
if purchased during Passover?**

The following processed foods (canned, packaged, bottled, or frozen) require a *kosher l'Pesah* label if purchased during Pesah: milk, butter, juices, vegetables, fruit, milk products, spices, coffee, tea, and fish, as well as all the foods listed in the above paragraph.

Passover Labels

A *kosher l'Pesah* label or tag without a product name and rabbinic signature is of no value. This applies to products made in America, Europe, and Israel.

**May canned or frozen fruits and vegetables
be used for Passover?**

Only with a *kosher l'Pesah* label.

May canned tuna and salmon be used?

Oil packing introduces an uncertain element possibly containing additional ingredients. Tuna, even when packed in water, has often been processed in vegetable broth and/or hydrolyzed protein. If it is 100% certain that the tuna is packed exclusively in water, without any additional ingredients or additives, it may be purchased without a *kosher l' Pesah* label; however, it is highly

recommended that the cans have a *kosher l'Pesah* label.

May milk without a *hekhsher* be used?

With automation used in milk production, there is little chance for milk to contain *hametz*. Milk produced and purchased before Passover is permitted. If purchased during Passover, it must have a valid rabbinic certification, a *kosher l'Pesah* label.

III. Using utensils, dishes & appliances on Pesah

Can any dishes and utensils used during the year be used on Passover?

It is preferable to have dishes and utensils specifically reserved for Passover and stored away during the rest of the year. However, since this is not always possible, certain types of utensils may be *kashered*, (rendered kosher for Passover use.) Earthenware, enamel, or porcelain utensils, if used during the year, may not be used for Passover.

How may utensils be *kashered* for Passover?

a. Silverware: knives, forks, spoons, made wholly of metal, if used during the year, may be *kashered* by scouring thoroughly, waiting 24 hours, and then immersing in boiling water. They are then *pesahdik* and *parve*. This process should be completed by Thursday night, April 17, at the latest.

b. All table glassware is permitted after thorough scouring. There is also a practice of soaking glassware for 72 hours before Passover. Some also immerse in boiling water; if you have a family custom, use it or call Rabbis Lerner or Jacobs with questions.

c. Fine translucent chinaware, if not used during the previous year, is permitted.

d. Metal pots and pans used for cooking purposes only (but not for baking), if made wholly of metal, may be used during Passover if first thoroughly scoured, waiting 24 hours and then immersed in boiling water. *Kashering* is done with water heated to boiling. Take the utensil, tie a string to it or hold it with another *kosher l'Pesah* utensil, and immerse completely in boiling water. For small items, cord netting can be used to dip several at once. Metal baking pans cannot be *kashered*, unless you have a blow torch (not recommended!).

How may the stove be *kashered*?

Every part that comes in contact with food must be thoroughly cleaned. After cleaning, wait 24 hours and then pour boiling water on those surfaces. Clean each burner, then wait 24 hours and then turn on high for half an hour. The oven should be cleaned—following cleaning, wait 24 hours and turn on the highest setting, usually the broiler, for half an hour. Make sure the grates and racks are kept in the oven for this. Self-cleaning ovens should be thoroughly cleaned (by hand and the self-cleaning cycle). Following cleaning, wait 24 hours and then self-clean them again.

How may the microwave and other electrical appliances be *kashered*?

Microwave ovens can be *kashered* by thoroughly cleaning the inside and internal parts, waiting 24 hours, and then placing a *kosher l'Pesah* pyrex cup (pint size) of water into the oven and allowing one half of it to boil out (one cup). A microwave/convection oven or one with a browning unit built in cannot be *kashered*. If the parts of other electrical appliances that come into contact with *hametz* are removable, take them out, clean them, wait 24 hours, and immerse them in boiling water. If these parts are not removable, they cannot be *kashered*. Toasters cannot be *kashered*.

How may a dishwasher be *kashered*?

It may be *kashered* by running the most thorough wash cycle, with detergent, waiting 24

hours, and then running another thorough wash cycle with detergent. These need not be full cycles—using a short cycle in order to conserve water is recommended!

How may a refrigerator be *kashered*?

Remove all *hametz* food and open packages. Clean thoroughly with water and scour the racks.

Other items?

Tables, closets, and cabinets should all be cleaned. If they come into direct contact with *hametz*, they should be covered if they are going to be used. Clean counters; then wait 24 hours and pour boiling water on them. Some also cover counters instead of pouring boiling water on them. Clean the sink, wait 24 hours, and pour boiling water in it. A new or kosher for Passover sink rack should be used, especially if you have a porcelain sink. Please remember to take all other dishes, utensils, etc. that are not kosher for Passover, separate them, and lock them up to prevent accidental usage.

What is *Ma'ot Hittim*?

It refers to money for flour to make Passover *matzah*. It is a *mitzvah* to collect funds so that the poor can purchase *matzah* and other Passover necessities. These funds are called *Ma'ot Hittim*.

Please feel free to contact Rabbi Lerner or Rabbi Jacobs with any questions. We wish you and your families a joyous, healthy, and Kosher Passover!