PESAH: Different types of Matsa

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Matsa (in English “Matzah”) is a special unleavened bread made of a flat dough. The dough is prepared with flour and water, without yeast. The flour normally comes from wheat, but technically, the Matsa could also be made from barley, oats, rye or spelt’s flour. The whole elaboration process from the time the flour gets in contact with water until the Matsa is baked takes less than 18 minutes.

There are different types of Matsot. In today’s halakha we will learn the differences between 1. Regular Matsa and Matsa Shemura, and 2. Hand-made Matsa and machine-made Matsa

Let us begin with regular Matsa and Matsa Shemura.

The difference between these two Matsot has to do with the level of supervision (shemira), more specifically, the point at which the supervision begins.

Regular Matsa: The supervision of the processing of this Matsa begins from the moment of the mixing of the flour with water. It is necessary to supervise that the flour to be used for the Matsot be kept in a dry place (humidity makes the flour Hamets). Furthermore, the water to be used to bake the dough should be at room temperature level, because warmer water would accelerate the process of fermentation. No dough, even a small piece, might be left unattended. Any piece of dough left unbaked for 18 minutes is Hamets. The machines should be cleaned after each production for residues of dough, water, etc. These are some examples of the supervision of the Matsa.

Matsa Shemura: In addition to all the rules for regular Matsa in the elaboration of Matsa Shemura the grain is supervised from the time of harvesting. For example: the wheat kernels are carefully examined to make sure that there are no grains which have split or that are sprouting. In those cases the process of Himuts would be triggered by a minimum moisture. The grain is also supervised when it is stored and transported, making sure that there is no humidity.

Certainly, both Matsot are Kasher for Pesah. But the use of Matsa Shemura is recommended particularly for the first two nights of Pesah (in Israel, the first night), when we say the Berakha ‘al akhilat Matsa. Why? Having Matsa Shemura during the nights of the Seder is a practice that we follow in attention to the pasuq (Ex 12:17) □□□□□ □□ □□□□□□ “and you shall guard (=supervise) the unleavened bread”.
During the other days of Pesah there is no obligation to use Matsa Shemura, because during the rest of the Holiday there is no requirement to eat Matsa but only to refrain from eating Hamets.

Matsa ‘abodat yad (hand made Matsa) vs Machine made Matsa:

In general, when making a religious article (or even one of its accessories) to be used for the performance of a Mitsva, this article must be done with the specific intention of being used for the fulfillment of that Mitsva. Example: we cannot use left-overs of leather, which were made originally for shoes, belts, etc. to make a Tefilin or its straps. The leather to be used for Tefilin has to be processed “explicitly” for the purpose of fulfilling the Mitsva of Tefilin. Thus, before processing the leather, the person in charge says: leshem mitsvat Tefilin, [“I’m processing this leather to be used…] for the mitsva of Tefilin”. The same principle applies, for example, with the threads used for the Tsitsit, they must be manufactured for that specific purpose. If they have been made for another purpose, or even with not specific purpose, these threads are unfit for fulfilling the Mitsva of Tsitsit.

Similarly, the Matsot that will be consumed during the first two nights of Pesah (matsot mitsva), must be elaborated with the explicit purpose of fulfilling the mitsva of eating Matsa. Now, unlike the case of leather left-overs or commercial made strings, Kosher for Pesah Matsot, are always made for Pesah.

In the case of the Matsot, therefore, the question is a little different, and it applies specifically to Matsot made by machine. The question is: Do we consider that the “human intentionality” extends from the man who activates the

machinery saying “leshem matsot Mitsva”, to the machinery itself, in which case the Matsot will be unquestionably fit? Or, is this “purposefulness” discontinued as soon as a non-human factor intervenes? The rabbis debated on this matter. Some rabbis assert that machine made Matsot could be used for the first two nights and perhaps they are preferable to hand made Matsot, because although the question of purposefulness still remains, machine Matsot are less exposed to human errors, and that factor supersedes the debate over purposefulness. However, many rabbis (among them rabbi Obadia Yosef, z’l) recommend to use for the first two nights of Pesah, when eating Matsa is mandatory, a Matsa elaborated by hand, with a reliable Rabbinic supervision. Following this last opinion, it is recommended to use hand made Matsot for the first two nights of Pesah, if one can find and/or afford hand-made matsot shemurot. If not, one can use Matsa shemura made by machine. For the rest of Pesah, it is unnecessary to use hand-made matsot .