MADE SIMPLE: A Guide for the Laws of Pesach 2021/5781

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THE EIGHT MITZVOT OF PESACH

In his introduction to Mishne Torah Hilkhot Pesach, Maimonides lists and describes a total of **eight biblical Mitzvot** related to Pesach. This list does not include the Mitzvot that have to do with the Pesach sacrifice (Korban Pesach).

There are **three** positive commandments and **five** prohibitions related to Pesach.

Three Positive Commandments:

AKHILAT MATZA 1. The first biblical positive commandment is to eat Matza on the first night of Pesach. In the Diaspora, this obligation automatically extends to include the second night of the holiday. For the rest of Pesach, it is forbidden to eat Chametz, but there is no formal obligation to eat Matza.

2 **VEHIGADTA LEBINKHA**. The second positive commandment is to tell our children the story of our slavery in Egypt and our miraculous redemption during the first night of Pesach. We do this during the Seder (once in Israel and twice in the diaspora). This story is narrated and explained in the Haggada of Pesach. This Mitzva includes many other Mitzvot and traditions, such as drinking the four cups of wine, eating the maror, etc.

3 **HASHBATAT CHAMETZ**. The third positive Mitzva is renouncing the possession of our Chametz on the eve of Pesach, that is the 14th of Nisan before noon

Five Biblical Commandments:

4 **ISUR AKHILAT CHAMETZ.** The first prohibition is that of eating Chametz during Pesach (the next section defines Chametz). This prohibition also includes se-or, or natural yeast.

5 **ISUR AKHILAT TAAROBET CHAMETZ.** The second prohibition is against eating any food containing Chametz or a combination of Chametz during Pesach. The Gemara mentions as examples of food containing Chametz the *Kutah haBabli*, a type of cottage cheese (cottage= □□□□?) which contained bits of bread, and *shekhar haMadi,* an alcoholic beverage made from grain, like beer.

6 **BAL YERAE.** The third prohibition is that of owning Chametz during Pesach. This prohibition takes effect regardless of where the Chametz is found.

7. **BAL YIMATZE**. The fourth prohibition is of owning Chametz during Pesach. This and the previous prohibition are in fact identical, there is no difference between them and they apply in exactly the same way. This is an exceptional case in the entire Tora.

8 **ISUR AKHILAT CHAMETZ BE'EREB PESACH ACHAR CHATZOT:** The fifth prohibition is that of eating Chametz from noon on Pesach eve. The rabbis extended this prohibition to two hours before noon, meaning that Chametz can only be consumed until the end of the fourth hour of the day. In our community (Great Neck, NY) this year we set this time on Friday, April 15th at 10am.

WHAT IS CHAMETZ?

Out of the eight Mitzvot of Pesach we mentioned, six are related to Chametz. During Pesach we are not allowed to eat, benefit from or own Chametz.

What is Chametz?

Chametz is any fermented substance, solid or liquid, which comes from one of the following five grains: wheat, rye, spelt, barley and oats. These are also the five grains which are generally used to make bread, pastries, cakes, cookies, pizza, pasta, baked products, many candies, and other edibles.

Liquid Chametz

The fermentation process does not only affect products with "flour" that come from these grains. It also affects liquid types of Chametz. Beer for example, is made from barley grains, which are soaked in water to ferment. Beer (like whiskey and many other alcoholic beverages made out of one of these grains) is considered Chametz, although the grain was never converted into flour.

Other Fermented Foods

A fermented food which does not come from or contain any of these five grains does not become Chametz, even if it undergoes a fermentation process. For example, wine goes through a fermentation process, but it is not Chametz since it is made from grapes. The same applies to other alcoholic beverages, for example, sake (known in Japan as "rice wine"), when made exclusively from fermented rice.

Non-fermented Bread: Matza

Finally, not everything that comes from these five grains is Chametz. In fact, Matza, which is considered "bread", should

only be made from one of these five grains. Matza is called the “bread of poverty” or LECHEM ‘ONI. In English it is called “unleavened bread”.

HOW DO CHAMETZ AND MATZA DIFFER?

1. **Time**

Bread and Matza are made with the same basic ingredients: flour and water. The difference is that when preparing Matza, once the flour is mixed with water, the dough cannot be left to rest. The dough must be kneaded and baked in less than 18 minutes. If the dough it is left idle for 18 minutes or more from the time that the flour comes into contact with the water, the dough “ferments” and becomes Chametz .

2. Water

If the flour, made from one of the five grains, is mixed exclusively with fruit juice, honey or eggs (without any water) fermentation/ Chimutz will not take place. Technically, if you make a dough by mixing wheat flour with “pure” fruit juice, and you bake the dough, this will be called Matza Ashira, “enriched Matza”, and it is not considered Chametz.

3. Se-or

Yeast (Heb: se-or/ se-or) is part of the biblical prohibition of Chametz, even though yeast is not an edible food by itself but an additive. Today we mostly use commercial yeast which is bought in a supermarket and which many of us use mainly to bake Halot for Shabbat. Until a century ago, however, yeast was usually produced at home. How is yeast prepared at home? Flour and water are mixed and then kept for a period of four days. This mixture becomes “sourdough”, it smells like alcohol and is known as “natural yeast”. Sourdough is used as the

catalyst for the process of fermentation in making home-made bread. In other words, when preparing bread, if we introduce this yeast into the dough, the fermentation process accelerates and the dough grows bigger and more spongy, resulting in a softer and tastier bread. All the restrictions around Chametz –regarding its use, possession and benefit– also apply to se-or, natural or commercial yeast.

RICE AND KITNIYOT

Based on the definition of Chametz, it is clear that rice is not included in its prohibition.

The Talmud records a minority opinion from Rabbi Yohanan ben Nuri (First Century CE), a sage from Eretz Israel, who argued against consuming rice during Pesach. The Gemara also records the case of Rabbah, a famous Amora from Babel, who used to eat rice in the Pesach Seder in front of Rab Huna, perhaps to show that rice is completely allowed in Pesach. The Gemara concludes that rice is not Chametz and that it can be eaten in Pesach (Pesachim 114b).

The Ashkenazi custom, however, is to refrain from consuming rice on Pesach. This is not because Ashkenazi authorities consider rice Chametz but because it is fairly easy to confuse -visually – rice with wheat, in terms of ears, grains and flour.

Firstly, the fields where rice was harvested used to be near the same fields where wheat or barley was harvested. Because of this, some grains of wheat could be mixed in with rice. As will be discussed below, the prohibition of Chametz during Pesach is so strict that a single grain of wheat would turn a whole plate of rice into Chametz. All these elements contributed to the custom of abstaining from rice on Pesach.

Moreover, until a few decades go, a century ago, food products

were not sold packaged in the shelves of supermarkets or grocery stores. Food was sold in street markets by weight, and the seller would usually use the same pallets, bags, scales and areas to store and sell wheat or barley and rice and all other grains. Under these conditions, it was not uncommon to find grains of wheat which were accidentally mixed with grains of rice.

It is worth noting that prohibiting rice on Pesach is not an exclusive tradition of Ashkenazi Jews. Sephardic Jews are divided on the question of rice. Moroccan Jews and Jews from other North African communities (except Egypt) also avoid consuming rice during Pesach. Generally, Jews from Israel, Iran, Iraq, Syria and other Middle Eastern countries consume rice during Pesach. To avoid the possibility of the accidental presence of a grain of wheat in rice, the custom of Middle Eastern Jewish communities that allow rice on Pesach is to check it carefully three times before using it.

Ashkenazi tradition prohibits the consumption of many other things which are not Chametz such as legumes, beans , corn, etc. These foods are known as **Kitniyot**.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, a known Ashkenazi rabbinic authority in Israel and author of the book Penine Halakha, points out that although the Ashkenazi custom is to avoid the consumption of Kitniyot products during Pesach, this rule applies when the legumes are or constitute the majority of that food item (see Mishna Berura idem, 9). But if the kitniyot are present in a small proportion, and/or if the kitniyot are used as a food additive (like: corn fructose, corn starch, etc.) that food is not forbidden for consumption during Pesach, even for those who refrain from kitniyot during Pesach.

Now, even those who follow the tradition of refraining from consuming rice, corn and other legumes (kitniyot) during Pesach, can keep these products in their possession during Pesach. There is no need to discard or sell these foods before

Pesach (Shulhan Arukh, Rama, 453:1).

NON-EDIBLE CHAMETZ & MEDICINE

Non-edible Chametz is permitted to own and use during Pesach. This includes any product that is not suitable for human or animal consumption, even if these products may contain Chametz. Examples of non-edible Chametz are: Cosmetics, glue, shampoos, deodorants, soaps, detergents or other cleaning products, etc. In all these cases it is not necessary to ensure an absence of Chametz in these products, nor do they need to have a special rabbinical seal or certification for Pesach (Rabbi Obadia Yosef, Yalqut Yosef, 360: 31, 361: 68).

For Sephardim, it is also allowed to use medications that come in the form of non-chewable capsules or hard pills, that is, pills that are swallowed with water. The reason for this is that when a medicine comes in the form of a hard capsule or a non-chewable tablet, it is considered “inedible”. Therefore, even if that medication contains a Chametz element (like wheat starch, which is nowadays highly unlikely – see below), it can be consumed during Pesach (Yalqut Yosef Mo’adim, 362: 40).

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed explains that today many Ashkenazi rabbis follow an Halakhic criterion similar to that of Rabbi Obadia Yosef’s in this area (see Penine Halakha Pesach p. 102, 103). Additionally, on the subject of non-chewable pills Rabbi Melamed makes an important practical observation: nowadays, virtually all medical hard pills are made with potato or corn starch –whose consumption in Pesach would still be allowed even for the Ashkenazi criteria– instead of wheat starch. This is, among other reasons, because wheat protein, gluten, is harmful for those with celiac disease.

It is still advisable when possible, to ask your doctor to

prescribe medication in the form of non-chewable pills for consumption on Pesach. Needless to say, in the case of a serious medical condition, one should take any medication that is necessary.

Stricter Opinions:

Many prominent Ashkenazi halakhic authorities also say that any non-chewable medication should be allowed for Pesach. But in their opinion, vitamins should not be part of this category. According to these opinions, vitamins, even if they come in the form of non-chewable capsules or pills, cannot be used in Pesach unless one verifies that they do not contain Chametz. Some Sephardic Rabbis also agree with this criterion. Many Ashkenazi rabbis also adopt a stricter stance on the use of non-edible Chametz for Pesach (cleaning products or perfumes made from wheat alcohol, for example).

Liquid/Chewable Medicine

Powdered vitamins, food supplements or syrups should have Kosher for Pesach certification to be consumed during Pesach, or one must be absolutely sure that they do not contain any Chametz ingredient in their composition. Bear in mind that many dietary supplements and vitamins are made with elements that are 100% Chametz (eg, grain fibers, wheat germ, etc.).

Rabbis, Ashkenazi and Sepharadic, are also divided on the question of personal hygiene oral products that have a pleasant taste: If they have to be certified Kosher for Pesach. See below the UMJCA Pesach List for a more lenient opinion

CHAMETZ MIXED IN YOUR FOOD

What is the difference between the prohibition of consuming Chametz and consuming any other non – kosher food? (for example, bread during Pesach vs. a non-kosher meat during the

rest of the year).

One of the main differences relates to the percentage of Chametz that when mixed in a food renders that food forbidden.

Normally, if a food contains a non-Kosher product in a proportion that is **less than 1/60** of that food, the food is still Kosher. For example: what is the status of a meat stew into which you accidentally drop a few drops of milk? If you assess that the milk that fell into the stew constitutes less than 1/60 of the total stew (less than 1.6%), then the stew is Kosher.

During Pesach, however, **any quantity of Chametz renders the food forbidden**. Even if one small grain of wheat or a little bit of flour falls into a large stew it renders the stew not kosher for Pesach. In other words, even if the Chametz elements are less than 1.6% of the food it renders it all forbidden.

As such, since even a minimal amount of Chametz can cause a large meal to become non kosher for Pesach, the possibility of "accidental" Chametz contamination during Pesach is very real. Therefore, any meal that is made during Pesach must adhere to strict standards. Hotel and restaurants kosher for Pesach, for instance, make sure not only that all the food's constitutive elements are Chametz-free but also, that none of the workers involved in food prep are bringing any Chametz to the premises where the food is being processed, etc. Even a small bread crumb that accidentally falls from a worker's meal can render an entire Kosher meal as non kosher for Pesach.

Exceptions

For Sephardi Jews, the rule that we just mentioned applies in a situation where the Chametz element was mixed into the non Chametz food **during Pesach**. However when a food was made **before Pesach**, we go back to the normal Kashrut rule: the non

Kosher for Pesach element must be present in a quantity above 1.6% to render the food as not Kosher for Pesach.

Before Pesach begins, therefore, we can purchase normal non-Chametz food, even without a specific Kosher or Pesach supervision certificate, and use it for Pesach. Obviously, fresh fruits and vegetables; fresh fish; fresh meat and poultry do not need any special supervision for Pesach. And we can also use during Pesach some simple processed foods like regular tea, pure sugar, regular salt, and many other foods that do not contain any Chametz ingredient in their composition.

In many Sephardic communities Rabbis write a list of common food products, like jams, coffees, potato chips, ketchup, mayonnaise, that were not made under a specific Pesach supervision. Through this list, which is a result of careful research, the community rabbis verify that no Chametz element in a proportion higher than 1.6% was used in the basic composition. Usually, the list would clarify that these products should be bought before Pesach.

See here the list for Kosher LePesach foods and articles that the UMJCA Religious Council put out this year 2021.

All what we just said, it is according to the Sephardic tradition. According to the Ashkenazi custom, however, any food that is to be consumed during Pesach has to be prepared or manufactured under special rabbinical supervision for Pesach, because **even before Pesach**, any amount of Chametz renders that food as non Kosher for Pesach (chozer ve'neor).

Chametz Machinery

Another major difference between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Halakhic approaches to Pesach concerns food that does not contain a Chametz ingredient in its composition and might have been processed in Chametz machinery. For Ashkenazim such foods are forbidden for Pesach and for Sephardim allowed.

Why? The Sephardic tradition follows the rule "*Noten Taam bar Noten taam DeHetera Mutar Lekhatechila*". This means that when the (non tangible) particles of a prohibited substance are absorbed in the machinery and then these particles get reabsorbed in the non-Chametz food, it results in a kind of a "Chametz cross contamination". And if that substance was considered Kosher at the time that the absorption took place, since Chametz before Pesach is allowed, the final product is Mutar (permitted).

Because of the strict Biblical prohibition of Chametz, many Jews impose upon themselves extra restrictions or Humrot. It is important to know that these restrictions should be taken as an individual matter (*Iachmir leAtzmo*) and it is **forbidden to teach or instruct people to follow Humrot as if they were the actual Halakha.** This includes, for example, instructing Sephardic Jews to follow restrictions of the Ashkenazi Minhag or vice versa. Rabbi Obadia Yosef (Yechave Daat, Alef, 11) has written extensively about the severity of teaching extra restrictions, especially regarding the Laws of Pesach.

A SIMPLE GUIDE: MAKING YOUR KITCHEN KOSHER FOR PESACH

During Pesach we do not use the same utensils or the same dishes we use throughout the year for Chametz. Although the utensils in which we cook might be completely clean of Chametz, without any visible remaining food, the surface's pores of these utensils absorb the flavor of the foods cooked in them. For example: if I cook meat and then in the same pot (even after I clean it) I boil eggs, the eggs would absorb some of the taste of the meat. Likewise, when we cook something in utensils used for cooking Chametz, some Chametz flavor will be reabsorbed in the food we prepare for or during Pesach.

It is customary and recommended, therefore, to have a set of dishes, plates and utensils to be used exclusively for Pesach.

When this is not possible, we might use for Pesach the same utensils we utilize throughout the year for Chametz, after they go through a process known as hag'ala, (a kind of sterilization) to remove non-visible residual Chametz that may be absorbed within the walls and pores of these utensils.

Before making the Hag'ala we need to make sure that those utensils are thoroughly cleaned of any visible of Chametz (□□□ □□□□). The Hag'ala then ejects the Chametz absorbed (□□□□) in the walls of the utensil. Eliminating these adsorbed particles takes place under the same conditions the absorption of these substances occurred (□□□□□ □□ □□□□□□). The pores of a metallic surface open up when exposed to heat, and that is when absorption occurs. Consequently, the expulsion of these particles would also occur by exposing these utensils to heat.

Now, when a utensil is used throughout the year to serve or prepare cold Chametz food, it can be used during Pesach after cleaning it thoroughly from any visible rests of Chametz. These utensils don't need to undergo the Hag'ala process since absorption of Chametz only takes place at high temperatures. Examples of these types of utensils are: plastic cups and containers, and trays that are used mainly (□□□□□□ □□□) to serve cold food.

Examples of hag'ala:

Metal: Metal cutlery such as forks, spoons or knives, must be first cleaned of all visible residue of Chametz. Then, they must be immersed in a pot of boiling water. Then we wash them with cold water, and they may be used for Pesach. Hot water opens the metal pores, allowing the ejection of any absorbed Chametz. The cold water closes the pores again.

Glass: According to the Sephardic tradition, glassware, cups, plates, etc, used throughout the year forChametz, should be

washed thoroughly and can be used for Pesach without having to undergo the Hag'ala process. Glass is sterile, and it does not absorb any food substance through its pores, and therefore there is no Chametz to remove from its walls. This applies even for those glass utensils that are used at high temperatures for cooking or serving hot Chametz food.

Notice that this Halakha is very different in the Ashkenazi tradition. Some Ashkenazi rabbis like the Rama say that since glass is made from sand, glass utensils should be regarded as clay utensils, which are not susceptible to Hag'ala, and therefore cannot be used on Pesach because Hag'ala is useless for them. Other Ashkenazi Rabbis allow an Hag'ala process for glassware. Consult your community Rabbi.

Clay utensils, pottery and porcelain (Kele Heres): If these items were used for Chametz, they cannot be used for Pesach, because they are not susceptible to Hag'ala. The Rabbis explained that unlike metal or other utensils, clay utensils eliminate the substances absorbed in their walls in an erratic and inconsistent way. That is, sometimes they would expel an absorbed flavor and sometimes they will not. Because we cannot rely on the Hag'ala process to sterilize these types of utensils completely, they cannot be used for Pesach. Most contemporary rabbis believe that regular porcelain utensils should be considered of the same category as clay utensils. However, there are many other considerations to take into account which can allow for exceptions to this. Some factors which might indicate a more lenient opinion in time of need are: whether these utensils were used for cooking or for serving food; the temperature of the food served; whether the china was not used for a long time; whether it is common porcelain or glass coated, etc.

If you have further questions about this and other types of utensils that are mentioned in this brief section, please consult your community rabbi.

Sink and countertops: The sink, metal or porcelain, should be cleaned of any food residue and then pouring on it boiling water. Countertops and tables, if possible, should be cleaned and then by pouring on them boiling water. If pouring hot water is not possible because of the material they are made of (a wood table or countertop, for example) they should be cleaned and covered for Pesach. If you are using a regular table, clean it carefully and then place on it a Pesach or a new tablecloth.

Dishwasher: Before Pesach begins, after the dishwasher is completely clean and empty, it should run on an empty cycle with detergent. After this, it will be suitable for Pesach.

Oven: The oven should not be used for 24 hours and then cleaned thoroughly afterwards. If it is a self-cleaning oven, it should go through one self-clean cycle, and then it becomes Kosher for Pesach. If the oven does not have a self-cleaning feature, after it is thoroughly cleaned it should run on its highest temperature setting for half hour (including the oven racks). Following this the oven is Kosher for Pesach.

Microwave: Fill a microwave-safe bowl with water and some detergent. Insert it in the microwave and turn it on until the microwave walls are filled with its steam. The vapor penetrates the walls rendering the microwave Kosher for Pesach.

Check out these videos with clear instructions for Hagalat Kelim (Ashkenazi & Sephardic).

KEEPING AND OWNING CHAMETZ

One of the elements that makes the Biblical prohibition of Chametz so unique is that, unlike any other forbidden foods, we are not allowed to **own** Chametz.

There are three Mitzvot in the Tora related to this

prohibition:

1. □□□□ □□ **"**Your Chametz shall not be seen in your property" (Exodus 13:7);

2. □□□□ □□**.** **"**Your Chametz shall not be found in your premises" (Exodus 12:19).

3. □□□ □□□□□ "You shall end [ownership of] your Chametz on Pesach eve" (Exodus 12:15).

The Tora sheBe'al pe, the authoritative (halakhic) Jewish tradition, explains that the first two verses, the two prohibitions, are considered one single restriction, that is: "having" or "owning" Chametz during Pesach. It is forbidden to own Chametz, even when that Chametz is not physically in your house or premises.

Maimonides explains this concept in his Mishne Torah: In Chametz u'Matza Halakha 4:2 he writes "Chametz [food] belonging to a Jew…even though it is buried, or located in another city, or is entrusted to a gentile, causes him to violate [the commandments]: "[Chametz] shall not be seen" and "[hamets] shall not be found."

We also have a third Mitzva called "tashbitu" which our oral tradition interprets as actively disowning our Chametz before Pesach begins.

In sum, there are two identical prohibitions (a unique case in the Tora) and one affirmative commandment, virtually for the same matter: **the prohibition of owning Chametz** during Pesach.

Strictly speaking, (and following Maimonides' opinion) these three Mitzvot would be fulfilled at once by performing one single act: the **'bitul Chametz':** verbally and wholeheartedly renouncing the ownership of any Chametz that belongs to us, regardless of where that Chametz is located.

By declaring the Chametz ownerless, one fulfills the Mitzva of

not owning Chametz and avoids transgressing two prohibitions. This is even if – accidentally – we have kept Chametz in our premises.

Why, then, can't we just declare all our Chametz ownerless through the 'bitul', and keep Chametz at our homes? Why do we still have to search and remove it from our homes? Our Rabbis in the Mishna instructed us to physically get rid of all our Chametz before Pesach begins, and to renounce the ownership of any Chametz we might still have and have not found ("bitul Chametz"). This is because there are some practical complications with just "declaring" our Chametz ownerless while keeping it at home. First, if we possess valuable Chametz, such as expensive whiskey, we might not mean wholeheartedly that we renounce its possession. Secondly, Chametz is the most common food. So even if we declare our Chametz ownerless, while keeping it at home, we might end up consuming Chametz accidentally.

Following the Rabbis' instructions this is what we actually do:

(1) We should clean our home, cars, offices and any other properties before Pesach to **identify and remove** all Chametz from them.

(2) We run a **final and formal search** of all our properties to make sure that we have removed everything Chametz from them (Bediqat Chametz, the night before Pesach).

(3) We **physically dispose** of or get rid of any Chametz found in our properties before and during the search (Bi-ur Chametz). There are many ways to dispose of our Chametz: We can give our Chametz as a gift or charity to a non-Jew; or if we have bread leftovers, for example, we can throw it to the birds or to fish, or burn it or dispose of it in a garbage outside our premises.

(4) Then, after we get rid of ourChametz, we **recite the kal**

hamira –that is the formal Bitul Chametz- saying: ”whatever Chametz we may still own anywhere, which was not detected during the bediqa and/or was not removed by us, does not belong to us anymore, and from now on it should be considered ownerless (hefqer) as the dust of the earth”.

SELLING CHAMETZ

In general, you only have to get rid of Chametz which is suitable for human or animal consumption.

In terms of food items, one can keep anything so long as one makes sure that it does not contain any of these five grains: wheat, barley, oats, rye, spelt (note that anything which contains gluten, is Chametz).

You do not need to sell your pots and pans, or anything that might contain “invisible” Chametz (Chametz balua’). Just put those utensils away during Pesach.

Medical pills, perfumes, cosmetics or any non edible items could be kept, regardless of their composition.

Nowadays, most communities, Ashkenazi and Sephardic, arrange a Chametz-selling system in which community members give their rabbi a power of attorney to sell their Chametz.

This procedure is an Halakhic leniency done in order to avoid the loss of expensive Chametz items like expensive whiskeys, etc.

Historically, Sephardic Jews did not practice a mekhirat Chametz (=selling of Chametz) procedure. They simply got rid of their Chametz before Pesach. The only exceptional case in which Sephardic rabbis authorized selling the Chametz was the case of a food-store owner, to avoid a very significant loss. In this case, a non-Jew would make a down payment for the total of the merchandise and from the moment the non-Jew made

that payment, the Chametz merchandise would belong completely to the buyer.

Normally, I would encourage Sephardic Jews to preserve our ancient Minhag and not sell their Chametz, getting rid of it instead. But last year and for some also this year **(2021)** under the current pandemic situation of quarantine many people might be in isolation or in other challenging situations so they **can rely on selling their Chametz, and B"H next year, we will go back to follow our traditions.**

Click here for the UMJCA Sale of Chametz form.

WHEN THE EVE OF PESACH FALLS ON A SHABBAT

A SINGULAR YEAR

As Pesach approaches we will begin by exploring an unusual Halakhic situation that we have this year 5781 / 2021. Pesach will begin Saturday, March 27th at night. And the eve of Pesach, therefore, will fall on Shabbat, Friday night, March 26th and Saturday, March 27th. The last time this happened was in 2008. And the next time this will happen is in 2025, and then again in 2045. In this situation, we make some adjustments. On the one hand, we want to keep the sanctity of Shabbat intact and, on the other hand, we also want to fulfill all the Halakhic principles of Pesach in the best possible way.

FAST OF THE FIRSTBORN

According to some rabbinic opinions, when the eve of Pesach occurs on a Shabbat like this year, the firstborns are exempt from fasting. However, it is worthwhile to partake on commemorating the finishing of a Talmudic treatise on the morning of Thursday, March 25th, as we do every year, and then

participate in a Se'udat Siyum (a celebratory meal in honor of this event. You can participate in person or by Zoom).

LAST INSPECTION OF CHAMETS

Typically, we search for Chamets (Bediqat Chamets) the night preceding the Seder night However, when Pesach Eve falls on Shabbat, the final inspection of the Chamets should be done "two nights" before the Seder: this year on Thursday night, March 25th.

What we do the next day, Friday, March 26th, depends on which of the following two options we will follow: to eat or not to eat "bread" during Friday night and Shabbat?

OPTION 1: HAVING BREAD UNTIL SATURDAY MORNING

Technically, one could have bread and Chamets during Friday night meal and on Saturday morning until mid-morning (around 10.00 am, NYT), because the prohibition against eating Chamets only starts from that hour (Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 444:1).

Most Ashkenazi Jews and many Sephardic Jews would follow this option: All food to be consumed during Shabbat shll be Kosher for Pesach, except for actual bread that will be used with extreme caution for HaMotsi Friday night, and Shabbat morning before 10.00am. You will have to pray earlier than usual and dispose of the Chamets, before 11.00, in a way that is permitted to do so on Shabbat. For more details regarding this option see for example here or here.

2. THE NO-BREAD OPTION

However, as a practical advice, many contemporary rabbis (particularly Sephardic rabbis like rabbi Obadya Yosef z"l) recommend to completely avoid the consumption of Chamets during this Shabbat. Why? Among other things for fear that because it is Shabbat, either one will be unable to properly

dispose of any leftover Chamets, or could inadvertently come to transgress Shabbat or any of its restrictions in the process of actually trying to eliminate or get rid of the Chamets.

For those who want to follow this second option, these are some practical takeaways:

FRIDAY MORNING
Stop eating Chamets at the end of the fourth hour of the Friday, March 26th in the morning (around 10.00am, see the exact times here) as we do every year). All Chamets that was found Thursday night in Bediqat Chamets should be disposed off by burning it or by throwing it away, etc. by the end of the fifth hour (Friday around 11.00am). The selling of Chamets and Bitul Chamets (*kal chamira*, the declaration that we do not own Chamets anymore) should also be done by the end of the fifth hour (although technically all this may be done even later, as a practical matter, it is advisable to do all this at the same time that we do it every year). All food that we will consume from now on should be Kasher LePesach.

FRIDAY NIGHT AND SHABBAT LUNCH
For Shabbat meals we still must say the beracha "HaMotsi". Now, is there a way to have a meal with HaMotsi without having actual bread? One way would be to substitute bread with regular Matsa, but this is not allowed, as it is not permitted to have regular Matsa on Pesach eve (technically, from the morning), as our rabbis indicated that the taste of the Matsa should be reserved for the Seder night. So the best and easiest alternative would be to use a "modified Matsa" that is, a Matsa that would not be fit for the Mitsva of eating Matsa at the Seder, but would still be good for reciting the HaMotsi, as if it was bread. One such kind of Matsa is a "cooked' or "fried" Matsa. So, before Shabbat begins we should prepare some of these Matsot to be used as "bread" for all Shabbat meals (see below).

SEUDA SHELISHIT

For Se'uda Shelishit, the third meal of Shabbat –which this year should take place earlier than usual– we could also use Matsa 'ashira (also known as egg Matsa) and recite the blessing "mezonot". If that is not possible, this Se'uda can be made alternatively on the basis of meat, fish, fruits and/or vegetables, without reciting Mezonot or Hamotsi.

OPTION 2: REPLACING BREAD WITH MATZA

Many rabbis recommend that in order to avoid any inconvenience with the handling of Chametz during Shabbat, the best option would be to consider Friday, March 26 (Nisan 13) as if it were the eve of Pesach (Nisan 14). Therefore, Friday, March 26 before 10.00 a.m. (N.Y. time, 9:02 Israel time. See here the exact hours according to your city of residence) we must stop eating Chametz. And before 11.00am (idem.) We should have done: 1. The selling of Chametz (Mekhirat Chametz), 2. The elimination of Chametz (Bi'ur Chametz, usually by burning it) and 3. The verbal renouncement of any Chametz that may have remained in our possession (Bitul Chametz). Once we are done with Chametz, we have to solve the following question: How do we replace bread and recite HaMotzi during this Shabbat meals? (This information is very technical. I have tried to convey it in the simplest way possible. For any further questions write to "rabbibitton@yahoo.com").

FRIDAY NIGHT, MARCH 26

Obviously all the food that will be prepared for this Shabbat must be kosher for Pesach. Regarding the replacement of bread by Matza, there are three possibilities.

1. **Using regular Matzot.** Matza should not be eaten the day before the first Pesach Seder, so that one can maximize the

enjoyment of the taste of Matza on the Seder. But this provision takes effect in the morning of Pesach's eve. Therefore, on Friday night bread could be replaced by regular machine Matza. One regular Matza per person will be more than enough (considering the volume: 1/3 of a machine Matza is kazayit. See here).

2. **Using a "modified" Matza**. There are many families who are used to not consuming Matza from the first of Nisan. The HaMotzi can be recited also with "fried" or "cooked" Matza ("fried" is recommended so that the Matza remains in one piece). By having a different flavor this Matza is different from the Matza that we will use in the Seder, but it still qualifies for HaMotzi (The amount to be consumed is similar to the previous case). Fry the Matza with oil, without eggs or additives, whole).

3. **Using Matza Ashira**. This Matza is made with fruit juice, or eggs, etc. and without water. Its status (berakha) is "mezonot" and therefore it is not valid for the Seder. However, as is the case during the rest of the year, when we eat a considerable amount of Mezonot to replace the bread (qobea 'se'udá) we say HaMotzí and Bircat haMazon. That is why if we want to use these Matzot we should use at least TWO (2; not three) Matzot to meet this requirement (there are more flexible opinions. See here, p. 12). Matza Ashira (also known as Egg Matza)

SHABBAT LUNCH (Saturday, March 27) As we explained above, we cannot use the regular Matzot during the day of Pesach eve. We then have option 2, using fried (or cooked) Matza or 3, using Matza Ashira in the amount that we explained above.

SEUDA SHELISHIT Normally, the Seuda Shelishit, the third meal of Shabbat, takes place closer to sunset. But on this occasion, as we must reserve our appetite for the Pesach Seder that will take place in the evening. This meal therefore will take place earlier than usual and for this meal we can also

use Matza Ashira and in a smaller amount (at least half a Matza, following “volume” and not “weight”) and recite the “mezonot” blessing for it. Alternatively, you can also make a lighter meal with fish or meat or vegetables or fruits, without HaMotzi or mezonot.

THE EVE OF PESACH: BEDIKAT CHAMETZ

As we’ve explained, one of the biblical prohibitions of Pesach is to own Chametz. To prevent this, we clean our houses and other properties (car, office, etc) before Pesach and remove any Chametz found. Then, the night before Pesach, when the first stars come out (**this year, 2021, Thursday March 25, at approximately 8.00pm**) we do the Bedikat Chametz. Bedikat Chametz is a formal search of our properties to look for any Chametz food that might have been left inadvertently.

How do we do the Bedikat Chametz? Customarily, we hold a candle or a flashlight and we search every place where we could have brought, eaten or stored food. We should pay special notice in our search to the kitchen and all food storage spaces, such as the pantry, refrigerator, freezer, etc. Remember that our mission is to look for “Hamets food”: sweets, wafers, cookies, pastries, frozen foods, fiber drinks, cereals, and alcoholic drinks made from grain (beer, whiskey, most vodkas, etc).

Before beginning the search we say this berakha:

“Barukh Ata A- donay, E-lohenu Melekh ha’Olam Asher Quiddeshanu beMitSvotav veTsivanu Al Bi’ur Hamets”.

Then we say the first Kal Hamira, the formula to formally and legally renounce the possession of any Chametz that belongs to us and we have not found in the Bedika. The text (for

Sephardic Jews) is as follows:

“Kal Hamira Deika Birshuti, Dela Haziteh Vedela Biarteh, Libtil Veleheve Hafquer Ke’afra Dear’a.”

“All Chametz or leavening substance that belongs to me, that I have not seen or eliminated, should be considered ownerless as the dust of the earth”

At the end of the bedika we keep in a safe place the Chametz that we are going to consume or discard the next morning.

What happens if you spend Pesach out of town?

When one spends Pesach away, the searching for *Chametz* at home should be done the night before leaving home. So, this year, this would be true if you leave before Thursday, March 25 at night. This early Bedikat Chametz should be done without reciting any blessing. Upon arriving at your new Pesach residence (usually, your hotel room), you should search for Chametz once again, on Thursday, March 25th at nightfall. For this second search you should recite the blessing “…*asher qiddeshanu bemisvotav vesivanu ’al bi’ur hames*.” You should search for Chametz in your room (even if it is clean), your suitcases, your bags, making sure to go carefully through any snacks in your room, or those you might have brought, etc. In a hotel room, we recommend using only a flashlight for the search.

TA’ANIT BEKHOROT

On the eve of Pesach , this year 2021, Thursday, March 25 in the morning, we will observe the fast of the firstborn. Firstborn men who are in good health should fast as a recognition of the protection of HaShem, who guarded the Jewish firstborn when all the firstborn of Egypt died. Since this is not a mandatory fast (it was not promulgated by the Tora or by the Rabbis of the Gemara), many avoid it by

participating in a festive religious ceremony (for example a Berit Mila or a Pidion). Since these occasions cannot be anticipated, it is customary for communities to organize a Siyum Masekhet, a conclusion of a Talmudic treatise, Mishna or Gemara. This *siyum* is considered a festive event and meritorious enough to avoid this fast. After participating in this *siyum* the first-born may eat on the eve of Pesach.