KIDDUSH: Can we eat before reciting Kiddush?

Today is the 8th of Sivan, 5770 (Isru Chag)

Friday evening, once Shabbat has started, we are not allowed to eat anything before reciting Kiddush. If one inadvertently ate before the Kiddush, he must still recite the Kiddush before eating any more.
During the day, however, before the services (Shacharit) begin it is permitted to have some coffee, tea or a very light snack. Some people need this to set their minds at ease in order to pray properly.
After Musaf on the other hand, the rule is the same as at night, one is forbidden to eat or even drink anything before Kiddush.
After Shacharit and before Musaf, however, it is customary in our community to allow people to have a coffee or a tea, even without Kiddush.
If for some reason, one wants to have a full meal before Musaf he has to do the Kiddush. We have this situation during Simchat Torah: due to the "Kavods", the dancing, etc, we have a sandwich before Musaf, so we recite the Kiddush before that.
When we do Kiddush Friday night, the bread should be covered. This is in remembrance of the Man (manna) the heavenly food that the People of Israel ate in the dessert for 40 years, which was covered with a layer of dew both below and above.
Another reason is that if the bread would be left uncovered it will be inappropriate to say a blessing first for the wine and not for the bread. Since bread is man's primary food it should take precedence over wine.
(Adapted from Meam Loez, Book 6)

KIDDUSH: The Laws of Kiddush

Today is the 1st day (ROSH CHODESH) of Sivan (45 days of Omer. 6 weeks, 3 days)

“Zakhor et Yom haShabbat leKaddesho… “ Remember the Shabbat to sanctify it.
Last week we explained that the fourth Commandment is performed by the recitation of the Kiddush. In its text we remind ourselves the foundation of Shabbat: our testimony that God Almighty is the Creator of the world.
There are two times that we say Kiddush: first, Friday night, before Shabbat dinner and the second time before Shabbat lunch.
Although both ceremonies are called Kiddush they are not the same.
A couple of examples: at night most Sephardic Jews say the Kiddush standing. The reason for it is that we are giving testimony and according to judiciary procedures, when testifying in court a witness must stand. The Kiddush of Shabbat lunch is said while seated.
Both Kiddush are performed with wine. However if wine or grape juice is not available, at night it can only be replaced by bread. For the Kiddush of the day, however, one can use any alcoholic beverage (beer, vodka, Arak, etc.) but not bread.
When saying the Kiddush with bread, we should first do Netilat Yadaim, say the first part of the Kiddush, replace “bore peri hagefen” for “hamotsi lechem min haarets” and at the end, eat a piece of bread.
We obviously don’t need to do Netilat yadaim or hamotsi” a second time.

See this link to learn the recitation of Kiddush: https://download.yousendit.com/bFFNTkZuQVN3TGhFQlE9PQ

ELOKE ABRAHAM “The God of Abraham” (Part 2)

Today is the 27th of Iyar, 5770 (42 days of Omer. 5 weeks)
(See last week’s HOTD)
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2. Abraham Abinu believed that God is “One”, which does not imply a mere mathematical reduction of the number of “gods”. It goes way beyond that…
Abraham lived in a society ruled by a tyrant king named Nimrod, who did whatever it pleased him pretending to have received a message from “god A” or “god B” . So, if Nimrod didn’t like you, the “god of death” would reveal to him that today it is a Mitzva to kill you. And if Nimrod liked your wife, the “god of lust” would reveal to him that he must take her from you. Right or wrong depended exclusively on the whims of Nimrod and his cynical manipulation of the various “gods”.
When Abraham Abinu spread the idea of “One God” he was considered by Nimrod and his entourage an extremely “dangerous individual” not because of his philosophical ideas but because it was ruining Nimrod’s play!
The idea of only “One God” would imply that there is an objective right and wrong. That whatever is wrong today is wrong tomorrow, for the simple citizen and even for the powerful Nimrod….
Abraham was persecuted and he would have been executed by Nimrod if not for God Almighty’s protection (Magen Abraham) who saved him from the tyrant’s hands.
The belief in God’s unity, initiated by Abraham Abinu, has a greater impact in man’s morality than in man’s theology.

Lending money or giving merchandise in “good faith”

Today is the 26th of Iyar, 5770 (41 days or Omer. 5 weeks and 6 days)

In the times of our Talmudic rabbis money was called ZUZIM, which comes from the Shoresh z/u/z which means “to move” , “revolve”.
They explain that the nature of money is that it constantly moves from hand to hand and that, especially in the financial aspect, ours is a revolving world. Having in mind this fact they established many laws to protect us –the lenders and the borrowers- from the uncertainties of the future.
One example: Our rabbis forbade to borrow or lend any amount of money when not in the presence of two witnesses or without having a signed document. Even if one borrows money from a good friend, or even a relative, somebody he knows from childhood, somebody he trusts and sees every day, even if it is a small amount of money, the debt must be documented. There is no need for a formal printed document. Any clear written statement where it states that A owes such and such amount of money to B, dated and signed by A is good enough. One should refuse on Halakhic grounds to lend or borrow money without such documentation.
There are too many true stories of good people who unfortunately ignored -deliberately or not- this simple rule and lent money or gave merchandise in good faith to friends or relatives without thinking about the uncertainties of the future or the complexity of human nature, and when they realized the wisdom of our Rabbis’ guidelines, it was already too late.

SHABBAT: Understanding the Fourth Commandment

Today is the 23rd of Iyar, 5770 (38 days of Omer. 5 weeks, 3 days)

“Zakhor et Yom haShabbat leKaddesho… “ Remember the day of Shabbat to sanctify it.
This is the fourth of the Ten Commandments: our duty to remember the day of Shabbat and to consecrate it as a “special” day.
How do we perform this important Mitzva, remembering and sanctifying the Shabbat?
Meam Loez explains that there are 4 ways in which we perform this Mitzva.

1. Reciting the Kiddush, thus, reminding ourselves the foundation of Shabbat: the day God ended Creation. When saying the Kiddush we are giving testimony that we and our planet are not here by a cosmic chance but that it was God Almighty the One who created the world, life and us-intelligent life.
2. Remembering the Shabbat in our Tefilot (prayers) and especially in Birkat haMazon, when we add Retze veHachalitzenu… a text in which we mention the importance of Shabbat and we ask God to help us and allow us to live this day with joy, pleasure and peace.
3. Adding (=sanctifying) some extra time at the beginning and at the end of Shabbat. We should receive Shabbat before it officially starts (before sunset) and we should end Shabbat after it officially ends (after we see 3 stars).
4. Reciting the Habdalah, stating officially that Shabbat has ended and acknowledging the difference between the holiness of Shabbat and the rest of the week.
Next Friday, BH, we will talk about Kiddush.
Shabbat Shalom!!!

OU “The Orthodox Union”

21th of Iyar, 5770 (36 days of Omer. 5 weeks, 1 day)

In the coming weeks –on the Wednesdays’ Kashrut section- I would like to introduce the readers of Halakha of the Day to the world of “Kosher certified foods”.
I get very often many questions on this area and I believe that we need to learn what a Kosher certification means, what do they certify, what are the more common and reliable Orthodox Kosher certifications, what products need and what products do not need a Kosher certification, etc, etc.

My goal is obviously to promote a better understanding and observance of Kashrut. However, I’ve no intention whatsoever to endorse or sponsor any specific Orthodox Kashrut certification over the other.During the following weeks I will introduce the readers to a few Kashrut organizations –limiting myself to a small sample of institutions, especially those who have a Web site- with a strict educational goal.

I would like to start by introducing the most popular Kosher certification in the US: the OU. O.U. stands for “Orthodox Union” an Institution whose mission statement goes way beyond Kashrut certifications.

See for yourself visiting their web site at www.ou.org I recommend this page to learn about Kashrut issues: http://www.oukosher.org/index.php/consumer/videosThe basics of Kashrut are here: http://oukosher.org/index.php/consumer/videos/kosher_kidz/OU also has a very effective Q&A link for Kashrut questions.

Try them and see if you get an answer. http://www.oukosher.org/index.php/consumer/ask

ELOKE ABRAHAM “The God of Abraham” (part 1)

Today is the 20th of Iyar, 5770 (35 days of Omer. 5 weeks)
The first Berakha of the Amida is known as “Birkat Abot”, the Berakha in which we mention our forefathers, Abraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akob.
By mentioning them, we first assert that we are not praying to a God who is the fruit of our own imagination or interests, but to the God of the Hebrew Bible, the same God our forefathers pray to. Abraham, as everyone knows, arrived to the knowledge of God (EMUNA) by his own reasoning and intellect.
When I say in this Berakha “The God of Abraham” I remind myself of the three major things Abraham taught us about God Almighty.
First, Abraham discerned that God has no body. We can see His actions, we might infer His amazing powers, but God remains invisible. He cannot be pictured or even represented by any image or figure.
Maimonides explains that at the beginning of humanity, people knew this fact and they considered the powerful sun and the enigmatic moon and the stars as God’s ministers, but then, manipulated by wrong leaders, men begun to attribute to the sun, moon and stars divine powers, built for them sanctuaries and worship their images, so much so that they completely “forgot” of God Almighty.
Abraham Abinu brought back to humanity the idea of the Almighty “invisible” God.
Abraham also discovered that God is One. We will talk more about the impact of Abraham’s idea about God’s unity, BH next Tuesday.

Ribbit, borrowing/lending with interest

Today is the 19th of Iyar, 5770 (34 days of Omer. 4 weeks, 6 days)

There are some things which would not technically qualify as Ribbit, yet Chakhamim still forbade them because they are loopholes ("Abaq Ribbit") that people may come to abuse. With these loopholes, the apparent objective of the Tora—that all Jews rely on each other financially when they need, without worrying about interest—would be evaded.
Some examples follow: It is forbidden to lend money in the form of an overpriced object.
Illustration: Nick asks Walter for a loan of $100. Walter suggests: "I don't have $100 but I could 'lend' you my watch that is worth $100. Tomorrow you can sell it back to me for $95."

Although this is not, strictly speaking, "Ribbit" it is nonetheless forbidden. It is likewise forbidden to "lease" cash. Leasing/renting objects is clearly permitted; however, because this can obviously serve as a loophole to evade the laws (and objectives) of Ribbit, Chakhamim forbade renting coins or bills.

Illustration: Nick needs to borrow $100. Walter tells him: "I will not 'lend' you the money. I will instead 'rent' you this $100 bill, for $5. You will return it to me when your 'lease' ends a month from today."

Nick would really be paying $105 for a loan of $100. This is forbidden.

Note: the laws of "Ribbit" are very complex, especially in

today's corporate world of sophisticated financial and legal structures. Ours is a basic overview of the Halakha as found in Maimonides's Mishne Tora and in Shulchan 'Arukh. Please consult your rabbi with any practical questions (Halakha leMa'ase).

What is Lag laOmer?

16th of Iyar, 5770 (31 days of Omer. 4 weeks, 3 days)

33 of Omer

Lag BaOmer (for Sephardic Jews is more accurate to say: "Lag laOmer") means the 33rd day of the count of the Omer. The restrictions of mourning are lifted on this day and weddings, parties, etc are permitted from this day on.
This year it will fall this coming Saturday night/Sunday.
During the time of Rabbi Akiba (approx. 150 of the Common Era) 24,000 of his students died from a divine-sent plague during these days of the Omer. The Talmud says that this was because they did not show proper respect to one another. The 33rd day of the Omer this plague ended. Another interpretation is that the students fell as they participated in Bar Kokhba's revolt against the Romans (Rabbi Akiba was known for his support of bar Kokhba's revolt).
Some of rabbi Akiva students survived, among them Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai who became one of greatest teacher of Torah in his generation and who is mostly known for authored the Sefer haZohar, "The book of splendor" the main book of Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism).

According to tradition, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai passed away on the 33rd day of the Omer. Lag laOmer is known among Sepharadic Jews as the Hillulah (wedding) De Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Very briefly: During his lifetime –which included 12 years of

isolation- Rabbi Shimon achieved the highest possible level of human attachment to God. The rabbis of the Kabbala called this level metaphorically “engagement” (Irusin) which is when a Jew is totally, passionately and exclusively dedicated to God. If during his lifetime, the Rabbis of the Kabbalah explain, one has achieved this superior level, then his departed soul will be “married” (I insist: metaphorically), in other words, intimately connected to the Ziv haShekhina (the Almighty’s Splendorous Presence).

PESACH SHENI

Today is the 14th of Iyar, 5770 (29 days of Omer. 4 weeks, 1 day)
Thirty days after Pesach we commemorate Pesach Sheni or The Second Pesach. Pesach Sheni is not a formal holiday. No resting from melakha (work, etc) or Kiddush , etc is commanded today.
Pesach Sheni is mentioned in the Torah in Bamidbar 9:1-14 when Moshe announced that the Korban Pesach (Pesach sacrifice, a lamb) may only be offered by people who are ritually pure. Men came to Moses, complaining that some people, who came into contact with a dead body, were ritually unclean. God then indicated Moshe that anyone who was unable to offer the Korban Pesach on its due time, the 14th of Nisan, due to defilement or inability to journey to the place of sacrifice in time, would perform the sacrifice on the 14th of Iyar, a full month later.
In modern times, there is no practical observance of Pesach Sheni because baravonotenu haRabbim, after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem we are unable to perform the Pesach sacrifice anyway.
In our community, and in most communities, we remember Pesach

Sheni by 1. Eating Matza, which symbolizes the Korban Pesach, some time during the day saying mezonot not hamotzi for it. There is no minimum requirement of Matza to eat and we can also eat regularly Chametz. 2. Saying yehi shem instead of the regular viduy (or confession, is a prayer which is suspended on joyous occasions) from Mincha of the previous day.