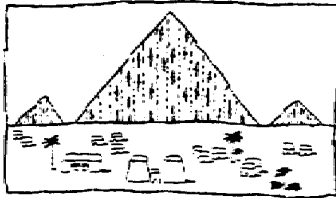

PASSOVER PREPARATIONS: **A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED**

by Rabbi Joshua Hammerman

I. What is Hametz?

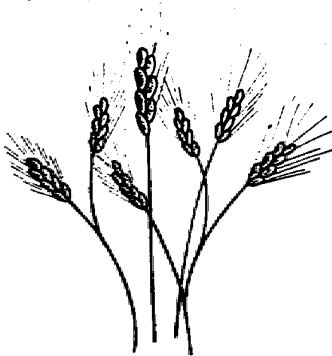


The basic rule which underlies the dietary laws of Passover is that during this holiday a Jew must not eat, own or derive benefit from Hametz. Hametz refers to the five species of grain - wheat, barley, spelt, rye and oats - which have been subjected to a leavening process. In their unleavened states, these same five grains can be used to make Matzah. The word "Hametz" itself refers to fermenting or souring. Dough (flour and moisture) can rise by just sitting (sour dough) or by a leavening agent being added.

Hametz includes not only bread, crackers and macaroni, but items formed of fermented grain used in other ways - such as beer, whiskey and grain vinegar.

The elaborate cleaning ("Kashering") process, involving putting away "regular" foods and dishes, renouncing ownership of leaven, and buying special foods, are all steps to ensure that no Hametz is found in places where it might be used. Any presence of Hametz, however minute, is forbidden on Passover. The rabbis made an exception to this very strict rule: If an accidental mixture took place before Pesach began, it can be considered negated if Hametz is less than 1/60 of the whole mixture. This is why it is safer to purchase various foods (e.g. milk) before the holiday begins. If you buy milk before Passover, no special "Hechsher" (certification of Kashrut) is necessary, but if such items are bought during the holiday, they do require a "Hechsher." (Shopping for most things before Pesach will also increase the number of items you can economize on).

II. What about legumes?



In our definition of Hametz, rice, millet, corn, peas and beans weren't mentioned ("Kitniyot," in Hebrew). All agree that these are not Hametz. Sephardic Jews generally follow the practices of the Talmud and Shulchan Arukh (16th century law code) permitting these items on Passover. Ashkenazim (European Jews) followed the custom of prohibiting these items, either because of fear of "contamination" (e.g. rice might have grain mixed in) or confusion (e.g. because beans can be ground into a flour-like substance, it might be confused with grain flour). Custom plays an important role in Jewish life, but one should be aware that there is a significant difference between eating soda crackers (100% Hametz) and soy beans. Many Ashkenazic Jews eat string beans because the kernel has not been formed, and there are differences of opinion regarding peanuts and a variety of seeds (sunflower, safflower, cottonseed, etc.). Chocolate used to be a problem for Ashkenazim, because lecithin, used as an emulsifier, comes from soybeans. Today, most Israeli chocolate factories use a substitute emulsifier, from rapeseed, for Passover, and can label their chocolate l'lo hashash kitniyot (without suspicion of Kitniyot).

III. How do you get rid of Hametz?

- A. Eat it up before Passover.
- B. Give it away to a non-Jew.
- C. Renounce ownership by selling it - this is usually done by making a rabbi your agent, signing a document, allowing him to sell it to a non-Jew for a token down-payment. After the holiday, when the purchaser discovers that he really doesn't want all the leftover graham crackers in your closet, he normally sells it back and the down-payment is returned. This is legal fiction, but it solves the problem of what to do when you have too much Hametz to merely give away.

ALL HAMETZ SHOULD BE TAKEN CARE OF BY 10:00 AM ON MARCH 29.

IV. Why go through all this bother?



Ultimately, as with all rituals, the meaning you derive from it is a very personal matter and often it cannot be explained rationally. Here are some possibilities:

- The cleaning out of Hametz symbolizes the cleaning out of the old ways of slavery as our ancestors had to do to leave Egypt. It can symbolize our desire to cleanse ourselves of our "evil inclinations," the "Hametz of the heart."
- It is a "spring cleaning," a chance to air out our houses, and ourselves, after the long winter's hibernation. In the spring, we are spiritually and physically reborn. In this sense, the themes of Passover and Easter are very similar.
- The more effort we put into preparing for a holiday, the more intense are our feelings and memories associated with it. This is why Passover has maintained such a powerful hold on even the most assimilated of Jews, while other celebrations have fallen from favor. We all have vivid memories of childhood Passovers, and they are so vivid because of all the work that went into the preparation. On Passover, we simultaneously recall the infancy of our people and of ourselves. We are transported both to Egypt and to wherever we grew up. But such a moving experience does not come for free: we must earn it the old fashioned way - by removing leaven.

V. When do we start eating Matzah?

Matzah can be eaten all year round. But we should avoid it for 24 hours before the first Seder so that its taste is fresh. It probably is a good idea not to eat much of anything during the afternoon before the first Seder. Some don't eat Matzah for two weeks prior to the holiday.

VI. How do I clean my house for Passover?

Areas where eating takes place should be cleaned thoroughly. Also, check places like briefcases, purses, desks and coat pockets, if you occasionally put food there. Offices, lockers in school, and automobiles should also be cleaned. There is no need to go overboard with this, however. The house can still be Kosher for Passover, even if every window isn't washed and the bathtub isn't scrubbed.

VII. What about (oy,gevalt) the kitchen?



Shelves, counters, tables and drawers should be well cleaned. They can be Kashered by pouring boiling water over them. An easier solution (and less messy) is to cover them with shelf paper or just tape them shut if you don't need them. The refrigerator should be defrosted and cleaned (no shelf paper is necessary here). To "Kasher" a stove - clean it well with commercial cleanser, do not use it for 24 hours, then heat it to maximum temperature for one hour. If you plan to use the broiling pan, cover it with heavy foil. For a self-cleaning oven, run it through one self-clean cycle.

Electric burners should be treated in a similar manner: clean, don't use for 24 hours and then heat until they are red-hot for at least five minutes.

For gas burners, either heat them to the hottest possible temperature for 15 minutes or immerse the burners in a pot of boiling water.

For a microwave oven, place a utensil with boiling water inside until thick steam fills it.

Kitchen Utensils:

Launder dishtowels and cloth tablecloths.

In general, items are "Kashered" according to how they are used: Ovens and oven racks require high heat, pots and silverware require immersion in boiling water. Items used only for cold may be "Kashered" by rinsing. Dishwashers should be run through one cycle with soap after laying idle for 24 hours.

Items which cannot be made Kosher (in any practical way):

- meat spits
- Metal baking pans
- earthen ware
- toaster ovens
- porcelain
- items that will be damaged by hot water
- items which cannot be cleaned
(e.g. graters, pots and pans with burned-on food)
- silverware and cooking utensils of more than one piece (e.g. knives with wooden handles; Hametz can be stuck in the crack).

Items which can be Kashered:

- metal pots, frying pans, (including those glazed or enameled, Teflon is questionable).
- one piece wooden utensils
- one piece silverware
- glass (no boiling necessary, for dishes and glasses, just a thorough scouring).
- Pyrex, Duralex and Corelle ware
- China: if it hasn't been used in a year, it is Kosher if scoured and cleansed with hot water.
- Hard plastic
- Nylon
- Bakelite
- Rubber that can be immersed in boiling water briefly



POINTERS:

1. Don't forget to also immerse the lids of jars and containers.
2. Use a big pot for boiling, dip items with tongs or tied to a string, while the water is actually boiling.
3. For the largest pot (too big to be dipped) boil water in it, then fill it to the brim with more water. Later, pour boiling water on the outsides and handles.
4. Remove handles of pots and pans before boiling (if possible) and boil separately.

Of course, it is, in many ways, easier to use a separate set of kitchenware and dishes for Passover. But this is not necessary.

For questions on specific items, feel free to call.

VIII. What foods can I buy?

An updated guide to Passover products is available at the Temple. Come by to pick up your copy. But please beware. Many foods are marked up for profit to take advantage of the consumer who is unaware that not all items need rabbinic supervision. If you buy the following before Passover and leave it unopened, no rabbinic supervision is needed:

- Coffee
- Tea
- Sugar
- Pepper (Pure herbs & spices e.g. not garlic salt)
- Dried fruit (with no preservatives)
- Honey
- Hard cheese (preferably sealed in the factory)
- Butter
- Fruit Juice (no additives, sweeteners or preservatives)
- Kosher meat, chicken, fresh or frozen (not breaded or in sauce)
- Detergents (may also be bought on Passover)
- Fresh milk
- Eggs
- Vegetables, fresh or frozen
- Nuts in their shells
- Pure olive oil (no additives); also safflower & peanut oils
- Tuna and other types of fish, frozen or fresh, (kosher types of fish and unbreaded, of course)
- Paper and plastic goods
- Aluminum products
- All prescribed medicines in cases of medical necessity

ITEMS WHICH MUST HAVE PASSOVER SUPERVISION:

- Matzah and Matzah products
- Cake, cake mixes
- Soups
- Pudding
- Gelatin
- Canned foods
- Mayonnaise
- Ketchup
- Mustard
- Soft drinks
- Seasoned salt
- Wine
- Margarine
- Liquors
- Ice Cream
- Pickles
- Candy & Chewing Gum
- Chocolate
- Cocoa
- Gefilte Fish
- Prepared Horseradish
- Processed meats
- Baking Powder
- Cider Vinegar

****This list does not claim to be exhaustive.**



IX. Above all, what does all this come down to?

Common sense. When you heat an oven or boil a pot, strict safety measures should be employed. Remove all soft plastics from the area.

X. Miscellaneous Issues:



The situation regarding cheese requires a fuller explanation. The Conservative Movement allows for the consumption of hard cheese that is not supervised, while Orthodox practice is to require supervision, whether on Passover or not. This has to do with the dispute over the nature of rennet, an animal by-product used in the formation of cheese. When buying food before Passover begins, don't feel compelled to buy only Miller's Kosher cheese, unless you happen to like Miller's cheese and it is your custom to eat only supervised cheese on the holiday.

Vodka may or may not be kosher for Passover; you must check the label. Usually, vodka is made from potatoes. Most Israeli wines and brandies are produced kosher-for-Passover the year around, for simplicity's sake. But some liqueurs may not be Pesach-friendly, so, again, label reading is a must.

A perennial question is whether one can use ordinary alcohol-based perfumes, aftershaves and other scents, which might contain grain alcohol. There are two distinct schools of thought on this subject. The stricter school says that only approved-for-Passover cosmetics of any type may be used. The more lenient school holds that since these products are inedible, the source of the alcohol does not matter. Anything "not fit for a dog to eat" is classed as an inedible. Both views are valid ones.

XI. Conclusion:

In the end, Passover is purely a personal experience. For some it is a game, as exemplified by the Search for Leaven, a favorite of children, which takes place the evening before the Seder. For others, it is a dreaded chore. And others have long since given up preparing for it so elaborately. What I've presented here are, for the most part, the strictest requirements of Jewish law. Many people go way beyond these requirements, others are more selective. On this festival of freedom, we are free to question tradition, but just as powerful is our freedom to enrich our lives by turning just another April evening into a night different from all other nights.

