



## ***Kashrut for Pesach***<sup>1</sup>

This paper sets out a guide to *kashrut* that can leave members of BHA confident in their own *kashrut* standard over Pesach and comfortable inviting any Jew, from any denomination to their homes. It is a wonderful *mitzvah* to fulfil the wish of the Haggadah - 'let all who are hungry come and eat' – by meeting these standards. It is a *mitzvah* I hope you will enjoy.

The guide comes in three parts: [Why](#), [Food](#), [Cleaning and Making Kosher the Kitchen and Vessels](#)

Should you have any questions about anything regarding Pesach, please let me know at [brent@beaconhebrewalliance.org](mailto:brent@beaconhebrewalliance.org) or 845.831.2012.

### **SECTION I: WHY**

In typical Jewish style, there are many answers to 'Why keep kosher for Pesach? None excludes the others. Here are three:

- **Payback time.** The obligation to keep *kosher* at Pesach is just that, an obligation. It is part of what we owe in gratitude for the incredible miracle of our existence, our liberation from slavery and our receiving of Torah. It is a way for us 21<sup>st</sup> Century Jews to acknowledge the gift of our life as free people, a gift beyond price.
- **Spring cleaning.** Leaven is fermented; it is part of last year's harvest. At Pesach we forgo leaven; we use only the new harvest. Pesach is a time to clear out old stock, not only of our cabinets, but our souls. The cleaning of our homes, purging them of *hametz* so that they are kosher – which is to say, fit – is a way of renewing our souls.
- **Liberation and solidarity:** There are millions of people around the world who cannot meet their basic needs because of political or economic oppression. Diminishing our food, even in this limited way, is a way of tapping our collective memory of Egyptian oppression and building solidarity with them.

Of course, beyond these rationales, there is also the simple reality that this is a central part of Jewish civilization and collective memory. Why do we Americans light fireworks on the fourth of July? Sure, there is a story about the rocket's red glare, and there is the simple reality that that is just part of American culture. So too with regards to kashering for Pesach, some of us remember kashering the house with our families of origin, others want to enter into the collective memory of the Jewish people around this ritual, and others of us want our children to be able to do so. Regardless of **why** you might do it, here are some thoughts on **what** you might actually do to kasher.

### **SECTION II: FOOD**

#### ***Hametz***

*Hametz* is 'any food prepared from five species of grain – barley, rye, oats, wheat, and spelt – which has been allowed to leaven'. The Torah prohibits not only eating *hametz* on Pesach, but also owning it. The prohibition is so strong that any *hametz* owned by a Jew during the days of Pesach is forbidden, even after Pesach has long gone. Furthermore it is also forbidden to eat the mixture of *hametz* with any other normal food.

Things to note:

- **If it is not food, it can't be *hametz*.** Make-up, glue, soap, etc. cannot *hametz*. The test of whether something is or is not food is 'whether a dog would eat it'. If you do not have a dog of your own with whom you can consult on this point of Jewish practice, please be in touch with Cantor Ellen Gersh.

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<sup>1</sup> This guide is based on guides prepared by Rabbis Jeremy Gordon and Joel Roth. We are grateful for their assistance.

She has two dogs, Spring and Ginji, and she will be glad to tell you if they would eat the item in question. If they would eat it, then it can't have *hametz*. If even they wouldn't eat it, then you have no worries.

- The prohibition of owning *hametz* over Pesach does not apply to things that are not *hametz*. You do not have to throw out tea, toothbrushes, etc. in order to meet this standard, even if you wouldn't use them during Pesach.

### Getting Rid of *Hametz*

The Rabbis offer a belt, buckle and suspenders approach to getting rid of *hametz*.

- First you should remove any *hametz* you can identify. A good spring clean is a lovely thing to do, but to meet the standard of the Rabbis it is necessary only to remove bits of *hametz* that are larger than the size of an olive.
- Next you should perform a *bittul* – nullification. This is done twice, once during the search for *hametz* on the day *before* the day of the Seder and once on the morning of the first Seder before around 10 a.m. The formula can be recited in English as follows:

*All hametz in my possession, whether I have seen it or not, whether I have removed it or not, shall be nullified and be ownerless as the dust of the earth.*

This is a key part of the preparation process. Even if you have cleaned perfectly, it should be said.

- Finally, you should authorize me or another Rabbi, to perform a *mehirah* – or sale to a non-Jew – of any *hametz* you do not wish to nullify or throw away. This is a traditional leniency to make Pesach less onerous and less costly. It is designed to allow us to hang on to bottles of whiskey, save slices from our wedding cakes, etc. I would recommend it even if you think you have cleaned perfectly and you don't think you have anything physical to sell. To sell *hametz*, please [fill out this form](#) and send it to me *before* the week of Pesach. You should then put the *hametz* in a sealed container or room and leave it until after 10pm the night that Passover goes out.

### Certification

Prepared foodstuffs need certification. There are plenty of foods that are prepared specifically *kasher l'pesach*, but Pesach is a wonderful time to go more natural, using more fresh ingredients and fewer processed foods. Fresh fruits and vegetables do not need certification on Pesach (or any other time of the year).

There is no need for certification for any non-food products. For things like toothpaste I would buy a new tube before Pesach and use that. There is no need for certification for fruit, vegetables, fish or meat.

### Mixtures of *Hametz* and Non-*Hametz*

The Rabbis of the Talmud make a clear distinction between mixtures of foods that were owned *before* Pesach and mixtures that were purchased *during* Pesach. A tiny amount of *hametz* mixed with a massive quantity of normal food bought *during* Pesach renders the whole amount of food not-kosher. But if the mixing took place *before* Pesach and you perform a *bittul* (see above) on the eve of Pesach then a tiny amount of mixed-in *hametz* (less than 1/60<sup>th</sup>) is nullified and the food can be used on Pesach.

#### Note:

This has a huge implication in terms of the foods that need certification as *kasher l'pesach*. Simple foodstuffs, subjected to an absolute minimum of processing, do not require certification *if* bought before Pesach. On this list I would include foods such as unflavored coffees, fruit juices, spices, ground nuts, etc. If you wish to make

use of this leniency these foods should be bought before Pesach, left unopened until after the house has been made kosher. All these foods, however, need certification if bought *during* Pesach.

### **Kitniyot – Often translated as ‘Legumes’**

I can understand how *kitniyot* might have come to be prohibited. In a world where one could walk into a market and buy identical sacks containing either corn-flour or wheat-flour, it made sense to stay away from anything that could be confused for *hametz* at Pesach time. That is not the world we live in now. Additionally, there has never been a definitive definition or even a definitive list as to what exactly counts as *kitniyot* and over time things seem to have gone a little out of control. So, a few observations:

1. *Kitniyot* are not *hametz*; owning them is no problem and using them cannot *treif* a house.
2. Only Ashkenazi Jews have the tradition to abstain from eating them.
3. I am inclined to limit the list of *kitniyot* to the following: beans, corn, millet, peas, rice and soy.
4. For families who are vegetarian or for any other reason worry about their diet over a *kitniyot*-free Pesach I would rely upon a legal ruling of my teacher Rabbi David Golinkin, who takes a very hostile approach to *kitniyot*, which he understands to be ‘a mistaken or foolish custom’. More information on this ruling can be found at: [http://www.responsafortoday.com/eng\\_index.html](http://www.responsafortoday.com/eng_index.html) (look on the left hand side, under English summaries, Vol. 3).

In line with the long-standing custom of Ashkenazi Jews, including many in this community, Beacon Hebrew Alliance will be *kitniyot*-free this year. In my own home however, we will be eating *kitniyot* that are not otherwise suspect of not being kosher for Passover.

### **SECTION III: CLEANING AND MAKING KOSHER THE KITCHEN AND VESSELS**

Many people have entire sections of kitchenware that can be switched over for Pesach. That makes some Pesach preparations easier. However, even if you don't, it is possible to make many items of kitchenware kosher for Pesach, and even if you have entirely separate pots and pans there is still work to be done on surfaces, ovens, etc.

To kosher a vessel all three of the following procedures need to be followed:

- **The vessel must be clean of any markings of its previous use.** All marks must be removed. In the case of well-used saucepans, etc. it may not be possible to remove deeply cooked-in stains. These pans cannot be koshered. I would consider it impossible to remove *schmutz* from joins in a vessel, or between the vessel and its handle. These vessels cannot be kashered.
- **The vessel must be left unused for 24 hours after its last use with the ingredient that is to be purged before being koshered.**
- **Ingredients that are absorbed into a vessel are secreted and can be purged from the vessel in the same way in which they were originally absorbed.**

The key issues in understanding how an ingredient has been absorbed are the level of heat the vessel has been subjected to and the material of manufacture. Again these processes only apply once the vessel has been cleaned and left for 24 hours.

- A **pot** that has been used on a stove top, **metal kitchen utensils** and **metal cutlery** used for eating hot food can be koshered by being dunked in boiling water. **Big pots** (as opposed to pans) can be koshered if filled to overflowing with boiling water (so both inside and outside of the vessel are covered by the water); this is usually done by filling a pot with water then dropping a stone in the water causing a small amount of water to flow over the top and down the sides. Fragile vessels of this type that cannot be dunked cannot be koshered.

- It is very difficult to render **plastic ware** spotlessly clean and free of any markings of use, but this is necessary if it is to be made *kosher* by use of boiling water.
- **Metal pans** used in the oven are very difficult to clean thoroughly. However, once they are thoroughly cleaned, they can be kashered by heating the pan to an extreme heat for thirty minutes. **Ceramic pans** cannot be made *kosher*.
- **Ovens, stovetops and grills** also need exposure to extreme heat for thirty minutes. Self-cleaning ovens can be cleaned using the self-cleaning function. Other ovens and stoves should be turned on and up to the highest heat and left for 30 minutes. Grills that can be rendered spotlessly clean can be made kosher in a self-cleaning oven or cleaned with high heat for a similar length of time. Again, where it is not possible to clean a grill so it appears clean to the eye, it cannot be made kosher. In these circumstances foil should be used to wrap either the grill or food before it is cooked.
- **Sinks, worktops and tables** that come into contact with hot foods or liquids but are not actually used for cooking can be koshered by pouring hot water over a clean surface. A draining rack or large bowl should be used in sinks in which dishes or pots are left to soak. A table that is used for hot foods during the year, but cannot withstand boiling water, should be cleaned and covered at Pesach.
- **Ceramics** are held by the Rabbis to be so porous that what they have previously absorbed can never be fully purged. Ceramic vessels including plates, mugs, etc. cannot be koshered.
- **Glass** is held by the Rabbis to be impervious to absorbing food and, theoretically, does not need to be koshered. In practice it is traditional to soak glassware in water for 24 hours (usually a bath is the best way to do this). **Pyrex** is a modern material, most authorities consider that it cannot be treated like glass, but I am inclined to treat it as glass when there is no evidence of baked-in coloration on, for example, a baking dish.
- A **microwave** oven can be made kosher if cleaned and then put on high for 2 minutes with a bowl of water inside. (Ensure the water does not run out or the oven may be damaged.)
- **Dishwashers** should be put through an entire cycle on the hottest setting before being used to clean vessels for use at Pesach.
- **Other items of kitchen machinery** present a range of challenges - please contact me with any specific queries.

**One-time-use vessels** can be an easy way-out of making a kitchen kosher at Pesach, but they come at an increasingly untenable cost for our planet. *Baal tashchit* is the halachic principle that prohibits wasting natural resources. Please take whatever steps you can to reduce wastage caused by one-time-use-vessels and in particular please avoid the most ecologically damaging one-time-use-vessels such as those made of polystyrene.

Again, should you have any questions, please do let me know.

Very best wishes for a kosher and joyful Pesach,



**Rabbi Brent Chaim Spodek**

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