

A Guide to Pesach Preparation for the JCCP/CBT community

1. DEFINITION OF CHAMETZ ... In Exodus 12:15 the Bible tells us: *Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread: on the very first day you shall remove leaven from your houses ...* The Rabbis specified five grains which can become *chametz*: wheat, barley, spelt, rye and oats. Additionally, Ashkenazic authorities prohibited rice and *kitniot* (legumes including beans, peas, lentils, corn, maize, millet and mustard). While rice and *kitniot* are not strictly speaking *chametz*, they cannot be eaten, but can be “used” as in cornstarch powder or medicines. It is easiest if they, and products containing them, are treated like *chametz*. Sephardic authorities prohibit only the five specified grains, and thus Sephardic Jews are allowed to eat legumes and rice during Passover. According to Jewish law, *matzah* may be baked using any one, *but only one*, of the five acceptable grains. Traditionally it is made from wheat.

2. GENERAL LAWS CONCERNING CHAMETZ ... During Passover it is prohibited to derive any benefit whatsoever from *chametz*. One may not eat *chametz*, or run a business involved in the buying or selling of *chametz*. Even ownership of *chametz* is forbidden. We are also obliged to remove *chametz* from our possession. This is done by a *bitul*, renouncing the possession of all *chametz* in one’s household, using the *kol chamira* formula found in the beginning of most *haggadot*. Any *chametz* left over should be burned. Another way of renouncing ownership is by selling the *chametz* in one’s possession. (See *mechirat chametz*).

A. PREPARATION OF THE HOME FOR PASSOVER ... Special care must be taken with Passover foods. If a mistake is made while preparing foods during the rest of the year, the law provides several remedies. These remedies do not apply, however, to the laws of *chametz*. The laws of annulment (one part in sixty) do not apply regarding *chametz*. Chemicals permitted during the year might be prohibited on Passover. All utensils, pots, dishes, counters and anything used for the preparation of food must be *kashered*. If it is not possible to *kasher* them, they should be replaced with utensils used exclusively on Passover. All areas of the house should be thoroughly cleaned

and examined for *chametz*. A person renting a room from a non-Jew (e.g., a student in a dormitory) is responsible only for the space he or she occupies. Traditionally a formal search (*bedikat chametz*) is held the evening before the first day of Passover, using a candle for light and a feather with which to sweep up crumbs.

B. SALE OF CHAMETZ ... It is sometimes impossible to destroy or remove all of the chametz in one's possession, especially when great financial sacrifice is involved (*hefsed merubah*). Therefore, rabbinic authorities used a legal device embodying a special sale called *mechirat chametz* which is arranged through a Rabbi. Since the *chametz* is sold to a non-Jew, it does not belong to a Jew during Passover. All *chametz* to be sold is isolated from the food and utensils used on Passover. Pets and other animal food should also be sold (although they remain in the house as usual) since most animal food contains *chametz*. The Rabbi arranges for all materials thus sold, to be sold back immediately after Passover.

3. PROHIBITED FOODS ... Prohibited foods include the following: leavened bread, cakes, biscuits, crackers, cereal, coffees containing cereal derivatives, wheat, barley, oats, spelt, rye and all liquids containing ingredients or flavors made from grain alcohol. Most Ashkenazic authorities have added the following foods (*kitniot*) to the above list: rice, corn, millet, legumes, beans and peas. String beans, however, are permitted. The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly has ruled unanimously that peanuts and peanut oil are permissible. Some Ashkenazic authorities permit, while others forbid, the use of legumes in a form other than their natural state, for example, corn sweeteners, corn oil, soy oil. Sephardic authorities permit the use of all of the above. Rabbi Weiner does not recommend *kitniot* for use on Passover

4. PERMITTED FOODS

A. Products which may be purchased without a *Kosher Le-Pesach* label before or during Passover:

Baking soda
Bicarbonate of soda
Coffee, regular, unflavored
Eggs

Fish, fresh (whole or gutted)
Fruits and vegetables, fresh
Meat, Kosher (fresh or frozen)
Nestea (regular and decaffeinated)
Nuts, whole (unground)
Olive oil (extra-virgin only)
Pecans, whole or half pecans (not pieces)
Tea bags - unflavored
Tea leaves (Pure black, green or white leaves)
Spices, whole (unground)

B. The following products may be purchased without a *Kosher Le-Pesach* label before Passover. If bought during Passover, however, they require a *Kosher Le-Pesach* label:

Fish, filleted
Fruit, frozen (no additives)
Fruit juices, pure (no additives)
Quinoa, pure (no additives)
Salt, non-iodized
Sugar, white, pure (no additives)

C. The following products require a *Kosher Le-Pesach* label whether bought before or during Passover:

Any product containing matzah, matzah flour or matzah meal
Baked goods, all
Butter
Cakes, Passover
Candy
Cheeses
Chocolate milk
Coffee, decaf
Farfel
Ice cream
Liquor
Matzah
Oils
Processed foods, all frozen
Tea, decaf
Tea, herbal
Tuna, canned

Wine
Yogurt

5. OTHER “NON-FOOD” CONSIDERATIONS ...

A. MEDICINES ... Because the principle of *pikuach nefesh* (the preservation of life) takes precedence over all other laws, all medicines prescribed by a doctor in connection with life-sustaining therapy are permitted on Passover. Be aware that all medications, e.g., aspirin, vitamins and tranquilizers, while not made from *chametz*, may contain *chametz* as a binder. That is why, as a general rule, capsules are preferable to tablets. As in all cases, when a question arises, the Rabbi should be consulted. Generally, we are very lenient with regard to medicine.

B. COSMETICS ... Lotions, ointments and creams need no special Passover formulation. Many other cosmetics however, have an alcohol base. Those made from grain alcohol are regarded as *chametz*.

C. BABY FOOD ... Baby food for Passover use is readily available. If Passover baby food cannot be obtained, however, the baby’s food should be prepared in a separate part of the house so that this food is not mixed with food for other members of the family.

D. PET FOOD ... Most pet foods contain *chametz*. Both the pet and the pet food should be sold (see *mechirat chametz*) during Passover. This arrangement can be discussed with the Rabbi.

6. KASHERING UTENSILS AND APPLIANCES FOR PASSOVER ... Purging and open flame are the two basic methods of *kashering*,

A. PURGING (*Hag’alah*) ... Most cooking utensils can be made kosher by immersion in boiling water. This includes metal pots, most baking pans, flatware and most other kitchenware. The procedure is as follows:

1. The article to be *kashered* is thoroughly scoured (cleaned).
2. The article is set aside and not used for 24 hours.
3. The article is completely immersed in a pot of actively boiling water.

4. The articles are then rinsed immediately under cold water.
5. If a pot is too large to fit into another pot, the pot to be kashered is filled to the brim with water, and that water is brought to a boil. While the water is boiling, a hot stone or piece of metal is dropped into the pot in order that the water is kept at its peak heat and also to ensure that the water boils over the side of the pot.
6. The pot in which the articles were kashered is itself kashered as per step 5 above.

B. OPEN FLAME (*Libun*) ... Any utensils which come into direct contact with fire, such as a barbecue spit, a barbecue grill, a broiling pan or rack, is kashered by open flame. The procedure is as follows:

1. The article to be *kashered* is thoroughly scoured (cleaned).
2. The article is set aside and not used for 24 hours.
3. The article is then put under an open flame and thoroughly heated until the metal glows red hot or is so hot that a piece of paper is singed when it is touched to the metal.

C. SPECIAL CASES ... Utensils with wooden handles cannot be kashered, because particles of food which could lodge between the handle and the blade cannot be effectively removed by purging. The proper method to *kasher* glassware is to soak it in clear water for 72 hours, changing the water every 24 hours. Fine (glazed) china that has not been used for twelve months can be considered as new. Earthenware and other pottery cannot be *kashered*, since whatever they absorb cannot be purged. Most glazes are porous, and thus cannot be *kashered*. Utensils covered with a non-stick surface such as Teflon can be *kashered* like other utensils. Countertops and tables made of Formica or other laminates should be thoroughly scoured. Those made of wood are scraped with a steel brush. The surface is then left bare for 24 hours, after which the surface is thoroughly rinsed with boiling water poured directly from the pot in which it was boiled.

D. APPLIANCES ... An oven is thoroughly scoured. The burners are then turned on full until the metal glows red hot or a piece of paper is singed when touched to the metal. Remove all plastic knobs from around the oven to prevent melting. If the oven

is of the continuous cleaning type (not self-cleaning), the Rabbi should be consulted. The shelves and bins of refrigerators and freezers are removed in order to facilitate cleaning. The shelves, bins and walls are then thoroughly washed. A metal sink is *kashered* as is a large pot; a porcelain sink cannot be *kashered* and should be thoroughly scrubbed with heavy duty aluminum foil. Plastic tubs should be used to wash dishes. The interior of a dishwasher is thoroughly scoured, paying careful attention to the strainer over the drain. The dishwasher is left unused for 24 hours and then run through a wash cycle without soap. Any metal surface of a small appliance that comes in contact with food should be *kashered* by purging. Plastic parts are treated as mentioned above. An electric frying pan which can be immersed, should be purged. Many electrical appliances cannot be immersed and therefore cannot be *kashered*. An electric mixer should have its beaters purged and its bowls either purged (metal) or washed (glass). An electric can opener should have its blade and magnets removed and purged. The rest of the appliance should be cleaned so that no food remains in any crevice.

E. MICROWAVE OVENS ... Microwave ovens present a special case since the inside surface does not become hot. One recommended procedure is to thoroughly clean the inside and then place a dish of water into the oven and allow it to boil for a few minutes. If the oven is a combination microwave and standard oven, consult the Rabbi.