

Founded in 1740
CONGREGATION MIKVEH ISRAEL
The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue
in the City of Philadelphia

HALAKHOT
OF
PESAH

Laws and Customs of Passover

THE MONTH OF NISAN

Although in counting years we begin with Rosh Hashanah, the first of Tishri, the Torah counts months from Nisan to highlight the great events of Pesah. Parts of Nisan's days are festive occasions (the first twelve days commemorating the Mishkan's, Tabernacle's, dedication followed by Pesah), Tahanunim (supplications) are omitted from prayers the entire month. The Psalms in the latter sections of Shahrut that allude to a 'day of distress' (Ya'anukha and Tefila LeDavid) are also omitted when Tahanunim are not recited.

When one sees two blossoming fruit trees during Nisan, Bircat Hallanot (blessing of the trees) is recited. This Berakha is recited only once each year. Women also recite it. It may be recited on Shabbat or Yom Tob. Nisan is the proper time for this Berakha, but it may be recited afterwards. It is not recited after the blossoming stage, when the fruits are growing.

Eulogies are not permitted during Nisan. When necessary, a short appreciation of the departed, with moral instruction is permitted. The declaration of Siduk Hadin during the Shiva mourning period is omitted.

SEARCHING FOR HAMETS

As the Torah prohibits possession of Hamets on Pesah, it is mandatory to check one's home and remove all Hamets before Pesah. Notwithstanding the fact that the home was thoroughly cleansed of Hamets beforehand, on the night before Pesah we perform the Bedikat Hamets, (the search for Hamets), in all places where it might be found. When Pesah falls on Saturday night, the search is done the Thursday night before.

Before beginning the search, we recite the Berakha "Al Bi'ur Hamets (p. 53 in our Festival books). This Berakha covering the entire process of getting rid of Hamets, is completed the following morning; no Berakha is recited upon getting rid of Hamets in the morning. After the Berakha, one must be careful not to speak until at least beginning the search, according to the principle of not interrupting between a Berakha and the

act for which the Berakha was recited. It is proper to refrain from digressions and extraneous talk throughout the search so that it can be done correctly. In addition to homes, places of business and cars can require checking if Hamets is normally brought into them.

The search is performed by the light of a single-wick candle (a multi-wick candle is dangerous) or a flashlight. A candle is symbolic and traditional but a flashlight is safer and more effective, and therefore preferred. A widespread custom is to use a candle for the first moments of the search and then switch to a flashlight. The Berakha is recited even if one uses only a flashlight. As the home is usually thoroughly cleansed from Hamets before the Bedikah (search), it is customary but not mandatory to place pieces of Hamets where the searcher will surely find them so that he/she will have Hamets to burn.

Immediately after the search at night, the owner should recite the Bitul Hamets, an annulment/renouncement of Hamets in his possession (p. 53 in our Festival Book.) As most people will continue owning and benefitting from hamets until the morning, this first Bitul (annulment) is only directed to Hamets that the owner does not know about.

One should understand what he/she is saying. If one does not understand the traditional Aramaic words of Bitul (found on p. 53 of our Festival Book), he/she should recite it in English (p. 53).

If one embarks on a journey within 30 days before Pesah and no one will remain at home to do the Bedikah at the designated time, it should be done before leaving without reciting the Berakha. When one closes his home before the evening of Bedikat Hamets and intends to be away the entire holiday, such as when a family goes to a hotel, if he/she sells all his Hamets in his home, he/she does not have to search it. He/she searches his hotel room and renders Batel (annulled) any Hamets that may remain in his possession. The same applies to a second home that remains closed for the duration of the holiday. One who plans to leave the day of Ereb Pesah, since he/she is still at home at the time of Bedikat Hamets, is required to do it.

One who was planning to be away all Pesah and sold the Hamets in his home without making Bedikah and unexpectedly returned must search for and gather the sold Hamets that was not put away and place it in a closed-off or out-of-the-way location.

EREB PESAH (EVE OF PASSOVER)

It is forbidden to eat Hamets after the fourth hour of the day beginning from dawn. These hours are calculated according to a system under which dawn to dusk is divided into twelve hours whatever the actual length of that particular day (Sha'ot Zemaniyot/proportional hours). The time will vary slightly each year according to the solar date on which Pesah occurs, but generally it is about 9:45 A.M. E.S.T.

Benefit from Hamets, which includes selling it, is forbidden after the fifth hour, generally about 11:00 A.M. E.S.T.

It is preferable to completely get rid of all Hamets without having to sell. However, selling is allowed even if the Hamets remains in the general confines of one's home, providing the Hamets' specific location is also sold or leased to the non-Jew. As this transaction must be done legally, it is advisable for one who sells Hamets that is going to remain in the general confines of his home to do so through the rabbi. Hamets being sold should be gathered, covered, and placed where no member of the household would forget and inadvertently partake of it.

The destruction of any remaining Hamets should be done before the end of the fifth hour. It may be accomplished either by burning, shredding, dissolving, etc. It is customary and preferable to destroy Hamets through burning. When Ereb Pesah falls on Shabbat, the burning of Hamets takes place on Friday.

Hamets in a garbage receptacle placed by the street curb in front of one's home is "Hefker." It is not considered in one's possession even if the sanitation department did not remove it by the end of the fifth hour. It is preferable that the Hamets not be in one's private receptacle but in a carton that will be discarded with the Hamets.

After getting rid of all Hamets, one recites the Bitul Hamets again (p. 54 in our Festival Book). One should understand what he/she is saying. If one does not understand the traditional Aramaic words of Bitul (found on p. 53 in our Festival Book), he/she should recite it in English (p. 53). This second Bitul, unlike the one of the night before, is comprehensive, including all Hamets one owns. Selling Hamets to a non-Jew should be done before this Bitul, as Hamets being sold is not being annulled nor renounced.

Matsah should not be eaten Erebb Pesach even in the morning so that we eat the Matsah of the Seder with greater desire and appetite. Some Ashkenazi customs are stringent and prohibit the eating of Matsah, a week or even from the beginning of the month of Nisan. This applies only to Matsah with which one may fulfill his obligation in the evening. It does not apply to egg Matsah which is called 'rich' Matsah and is unsuitable for fulfilling the Mitzvah.

Cake made with matzo meal, as it is baked the way bread or Matsah is, should not be eaten Erebb Pesach. Although the matzo meal was mixed with 'enriching' items, the mixing was done after the Matsah received its identity, not at the original kneading, as with egg Matsah. On the other hand, fried or cooked Matsah products are permitted Erebb Pesach.

One should not eat a filling meal of any food in the later afternoon as it may lessen one's appetite for the evening Matsah.

There is a custom for firstborn males to fast Erebb Pesach as a sign of appreciation for the Almighty's miracle smiting the Egyptian firstborn. This Fast is overridden if the firstborn participates in a Seudat Mitzvah (festive meal attached to a Mitzvah) including the completion of a section of the Talmud although he/she himself has not learned that section.

HAMETS

The Torah forbids eating, deriving benefit from, or owning Hamets during Pesah.

Hamets results when any of the five grains (wheat, barley, rye, oats, or spelt), after harvesting, makes contact with water and fermentation takes place. Mixtures including Hamets are also prohibited as are edible extracts and alcoholic fermentation of Hamets. Bread, cereal, cake, cookies, crackers, pastas and spaghetti from the five grains are pure Hamets.

Rice, soy, corn (maize), potatoes, fruits, meat, poultry, fish and dairy products are permitted when in their pure form. If processed, one must be careful that the product does not include or did not absorb a Hamets derivative. Items containing vinegar, starch, cream or alcohol that do not have Pesah supervision or that were not specifically investigated for Pesah are not acceptable, as many companies use Hamets derivatives for these ingredients. Ashkenazi customs prohibit rice and Kitniyot (legumes).

Hamets derivatives unfit for human or animal consumption are not considered food and are permitted on Pesah. Included in this category are nearly all deodorants, soaps, cleaners and cleaning agents, polishes, toothpastes, lipsticks, most cosmetics and medicines (all ill-tasting liquids, tablets and capsules), etc. Some Ashkenazi customs are stringent and prohibit these also when they contain these Hamets derivatives.

Hamets mixed into non-Hamets substances during Pesah is not annulled in the manner that Issur is annulled all year long, such as one in sixty. Perhaps more than any other, it is this Halakha that requires an extra measure of care with food throughout Pesah.

Hamets that was mixed with non-Hamets and became annulled before Pesah remains annulled during Pesah, according to Sephardi customs only (No Hozer Veni'or). This principle applies even if inclusion of the Hamets ingredient was not known before Pesah. Thus, foods prepared

before Pesah that are known to be kosher all year long, that do not have Hamets as an ingredient, even were they to have a minor amount of Hamets mixed in and annulled before Pesah, are acceptable during Pesah. Such foods do not necessarily require special supervision. Included in this category are canned, frozen and most dried fruits and vegetables, fruit juices, sugar, salt, plain leaf tea, plain potato chips, pure coffees, pure chocolates, pure vegetable and olive oils, tomato sauce, milk, butter and plain dairy products.

Based on this Halakha of Bitul, many homemakers bake, cook and purchase as much as possible of their Pesah needs before the onset of the holiday. Ashkenazi customs do not accept the above stated Halakha.

If Hamets gets mixed into food even during Pesah, and gives a negative taste into the food, that food is permitted. Thus if Pesah food was mistakenly cooked in clean non-Pesah utensils that were not used for 24 hours, the food is permitted. This is based on the Talmudic assumption that whatever is absorbed in the walls of utensils gives a spoiled taste after 24 hours.

Ashkenazim eating at Sephardim's homes during Pesah need not be concerned that the vessels in which foods were prepared were also used for rice and legumes, which most Ashkenazim do not eat during Pesah. The Ashkenazi custom to be strict on these items is an extreme cautionary measure and does not carry over to vessels.

One who finds Hamets in his possession during Hol HaMo'ed should burn it immediately; on Yom tob, he/she should cover it until after Yom Tob, at which time he/she should burn it. There is no Berakha on these cases of burning.

Hamets that was in the possession of a Jew during Pesah is prohibited even after Pesah.

MATSAH

There is a Biblical commandment to eat Matsah (unleavened bread) on the first night of Pesah. Our ancestors did not have time to allow their dough to leaven before baking as they were chased out of Egypt. Also, Matsah is the “bread of affliction,” recalling the slavery.

Matsah is made from flour of one of the five types of grains that can become Hamets, kneaded with water and baked before it has a chance to begin leavening.

For this Mitsvah one should obtain Matsah that has been under supervision from the grain harvest (Matsah Shemurah). Each person should eat at least the Kezayit Hamotsi, but preferable all Matsah required at the Seder, from such Matsah. If not available, Matsah under supervision from the grinding is sufficient. All commercial Pesah Matsah is supervised at least from the time of grinding.

Matsah, once baked, may be dipped in water. An elderly or ill person may eat the Matsah of Mitsvah in such a manner.

Egg Matsah is permitted to be eaten during Pesah. Indeed, Matsah which was kneaded with fruit juice and not water, which is the standard procedure for making egg Matsah, does not become Hamets even if the dough was left unbaked for a lengthy period of time. (The acid does not permit activation of the leavening enzyme in the dough.) However, egg Matsah is not “poor man’s bread” and cannot be used to fulfill the obligations of the Seder.

The Berakha on regular Matsah during all of Pesah is Hamotsi even if one is eating a small amount as a cracker. During Pesah, Matsah is our bread. Even when regular Matsah is fried or cooked during Pesah, its Berakha is Hamotsi. All year we recite Mezonot on regular Matsah unless one is Kobeya’Seuda, as Matsah is normally a snack food in the category of a cracker, according to the Sephardi customs. The Berakha Al Akhilat Matsah is added to Hamotsi only at the Seder. Egg Matsah, even during Pesah, is mezonot (except if one is Kobeya’Seuda).

UTENSILS FOR USE ON PASSOVER

Pesah requires special utensils to ensure that even a little Hamets does not enter our food.

Glassware does not absorb and merely requires washing to be kosher for Pesah according to the Sephardi customs. This includes Duralex, Pyrex, and colored glass.

Absorption by utensils from food takes place in the presence of heat. Utensils primarily used for foods and liquids that are not hot (salad bowls, refrigerator trays, etc.) can be used on Pesah after thoroughly washing them clean. The same applies to tabletops and counters.

Utensils used with heat but known not to be used for Hamets all year long are acceptable for Pesah, such as teapots, hot water urns and decanters.

The requirement for kashering utensils is according to its use. As the utensil absorbed so will it emit what it absorbed. Hamets pots and pans, flatware, blenders, etc. made of metal, wood, rubber, stone, bone or plastic (which includes melmac and tupperware), can be made usable for Pesah by Hagalah.

Hagalah is total submersion of the item being kashered into a large pot of boiling water for several seconds. If the item cannot fit completely into a large pot, it may be submersed portion by portion. The utensils must be cleaned before immersion.

If one is to do Hagalah, it should be done before Pesah. However, it can be done during Hol Hamoed if the Hamets utensil being cleaned was not used for 24 hours, based on the principle that whatever is absorbed in a utensil's walls emits a spoiled taste after 24 hours.

When Hagalah is made on items that had not been used for 24 hours in a pot that also had not been used for 24 hours, it doesn't matter if the items or pot are dairy or meat, or if the pot is Hamets or kosher for Pesah.

Metals used directly on the fire with Hamets require Liboon, (placement on fire until red hot.) Utensils usually used for cold substances that on occasion were used for hot Hamets, such as metal cold-liquid drinking cups, are treated according to their usual use and merely require thorough washing (after 24 hours from Hamets use). Although the vessel on occasion absorbed Hamets, after 24 hours whatever was absorbed is spoiled; thus there is no possibility of a Torah infraction and the Rabbis did not decree a prohibition when the usage with heat was not according to the vessel's standard usage.

Hamets earthenware utensils cannot be made usable for Passover. Glazed chinaware is very different from classic earthenware and many authorities permit kashering such utensils through Hagalah or pouring boiling water on them. A Halakhic Authority should be consulted regarding the specific type of chinaware in question.

Porcelain, enamel and steel sinks are kashered by pouring boiling water all around their receptacle portion.

Ovens and their racks should be cleansed for Pesah as follows: After thoroughly cleaning with a scouring agent, leave unused for 24 hours, then heat at maximum for an hour. Self-cleaning ovens merely need to be run through a self-cleaning cycle. For microwave ovens, after cleaning, insert a microwave-safe utensil full of water and microwave at maximum for several minutes until the oven fills with steam.

Dishwashers are Kashered by their normal use—boiling water and soap. Tablecloths are Kashered by washing in soap and water.

THE SEDER

KADESH After arranging the items on the Seder Table correctly, the head of household recites the Kiddush. Everyone should be standing and attentive. Kiddush is recited after Tse'et Hakokhabim (about 35 minutes after sunset.) Each person should have his or her own cup containing at least 3 ounces (rebi'it) of wine and drink at least the majority of the cup. Red wine is preferable but grape juice may be used. This is the first of

the four Seder cups. The above regulations apply to all four cups. The Berakha of Hagefen is recited on the first and third cups only. The drinking of the four cups and the eating of the Matsot are done while reclining to the left. A left-handed person also reclines to the left.

URHATS Each person washes his or her hands for the wet vegetables going to be eaten next. A Berakha is not recited on this washing of hands.

KARPAS Less than a Kezayit of a green vegetable (celery or parsley, each according to one's custom) is eaten after dipping it in salt water or lemon juice. (Less than a Kezayit to avoid a centuries-old unresolved question: Should one who eats a measure that requires Berakha Aharona of Bore Nefashot recite that Berakha if he/she plans shortly afterwards to recite Hamotsi eventually followed by Bircat Hamazon? We try to avoid omitting a required Berakha but not to recite a Berakha that is not required.) We recite Boreh Peri Ha-Adamah on the Karpas vegetable. It is our custom to have intention that this Berakha covers the Adamah of the Maror, which will be eaten later. Although the Maror will be eaten after Hamotsi, it is necessarily eaten alone and perhaps not "covered" by Hamotsi.

YAHATS The middle Matsh is broken, by hand, into two pieces. The smaller piece is replaced between the two whole Matsot while the larger piece is set aside for Afikoman. Some have the custom that each individual takes a turn carrying this "Afikoman" Matsot, wrapped in a cloth-holder, over one's shoulder reciting Mish'arotam...as a symbolic re-enactment of the Exodus.

MAGID One raises the Matsah and recites Ha Lahma Anya. The tray is removed for children to question, the second cup of wine is poured, Ma Nishtana is recited, the tray is returned, and the Matsot are uncovered. The Haggadah is read with great joy. Questions are asked, explanations are given. The relating by fathers to sons of the Exodus from Egypt and the Almighty's miracles is the central theme of the Seder. Those who do not understand Hebrew must perform this Mitsvah in a language they understand. English translations are readily available.

ROH-TSA Wash hands and recite the Berakha Al Netilat Yadayim to prepare for Hamotsi.

MOTSI MATSAH The head of the household raises all three matsot (the two whole and one broken) and recites the Berakha of HaMotsi and, releasing the bottom whole Matsh, the Berakha of Al Akhilat Matsah. Reclining to their left, all eat at least one Kezayit (approximately one ounce). It is preferable to eat two Kezetim, one for HaMotsi and one for Matsah. At least one Kezayit should be eaten within a four minute period to be considered a single eating.

MAROR Kezayit Maror (bitter herbs) is dipped in Haroset (a date, nut and wine mixture, according to some customs), the Berakha Al Akhilat Maror is recited, and the Maror is eaten without reclining. Romaine lettuce is the preferred vegetable for Maror but great care must be taken that it first be thoroughly checked and cleaned of any tiny insects that are often found in it. Escarole or endives are acceptable and generally easier to check.

KOREKH A sandwich containing one Kezayit each of Matsah and Maror is dipped in Haroset and eaten in a reclining position after reciting the explanation of this custom, Zekher Lamikdash, etc. Those for whom it is difficult to have a Kezayit Matsah and Maror may eat smaller measures for Korekh.

SHULHAN OREKH The egg (and for some, the shank bone) is/are eaten followed by the meal. On the egg we recite Zekher LeKorban Haglga. Nothing is recited on the shank bone, if eaten. To distinguish from the Pesah sacrifice brought in the days of the Bet Hamikdash that was only broiled, the shank bone should also be cooked. It is important not to be totally satiated during the meal in order to leave room for the Afikoman which must be eaten “with appetite.”

TSAFUN After the meal, a piece of the middle Matsah that was set aside for Afikoman is distributed to each person, to which additional Matsah is added to make a Kezayit. This should be eaten reclining before midnight.

BAREKH The third sup of wine is poured and Birkat Hamazon is recited.

HALLEL Hagefen is recited on the third cup (with intention to also cover the fourth cup) and it is drunk reclining. The remainder of Hallel is recited without a Berakha beforehand, followed by Nishmat and the concluding Berakha of Hallel. The fourth cup is drunk, reclining, followed by Berakha Aharona.

NIRTSA For some, it is customary to sing songs and continue discussion of the Exodus and other miracles that the Almighty brought, until one falls asleep.

MEASUREMENTS

The acceptable measure for a Kezayit Matsah is one ounce of weight. However, the original measure of a Kezayit (an olive) is a volume one, widely interpreted as $\frac{1}{2}$ the volume of an average egg. (The “olive,” although frequently cited by the rabbis of old, was supplanted by the egg for actual measurements.) Eggs used for determining this measure must be those of the present time and locale. The weight measure we use today was derived from the volume; Rabbis calculated the volume and weighed it for the convenience of the public.

A question has arisen with the one ounce of weight measure. An average-to- large size egg of today displaces approximately two fluid ounces. The cubic volume of one fluid ounce can be completely filled with less than $\frac{2}{3}$ of an ounce (weight) of Matsah. Thus, when eating the Motsi-Matsah, where it is preferable to eat two Kezetim, one who is unable to eat two ounces may eat 1.33 ounces for two Kezetim. Of course, as stated earlier, Bediabad on Kezayit is sufficient.

The measure for a rebi'it wine is (just under) three fluid ounces. This is based on the Talmudic standard that a Rebi'it is the displacement of 1.5 eggs and on the fact that an average egg displaces approximately two fluid ounces.

A Kezayit Karpas or Maror is of slightly lesser weight than a Kezayit Matshah as vegetables have a lower density of mass and thus a lower weight for the standard volume of half an egg's displacement.

PRAYERS

Each day of Pesah before Arbit and during Shahrit, we recite Psalm 107 which deals with various situations from which the psalmist was redeemed. The Pesah redemption is closely identified with all redemptions of the Almighty.

Ya-ale Veyabo is recited in each Amida. If it was omitted during Hol Hamoed one repeats the Amida. During Yom Tob it depends if mention of our Festival Book.) As most people will continue owning and benefitting Bircat Hamazon during Pesah.

After the Amida of Arbit the first two nights, complete Hallel is recited with Berakhot. Hallel is recited after the Amida of Shahrit each day. On the first two days the complete Hallel is recited and on the latter days only partial Hallel. One explanation for the difference with Succot when we recite the complete Hallel each day with Berakhot is that the latter days of Pesah commemorate the drowning of the Egyptians at the Red Sea. The Midrash describes it as if the Almighty said to the heavenly angels: 'My creatures (the Egyptians) are drowning and you are singing?' So we tone down the Hallel recital by skipping parts

Specified Pesah selections are read from the Torah each morning. The minimum number of Aliyot on Yom Tob is five plus Maftir. The number of Aliyot on Hol Hamoed is four. Even on Hol Hamoed two Sifre Torash are taken out each day.

Musaf prayer is recited daily.

We begin reciting Morid Hatal during Musaf of the first day and Barekenu during the first weekday Arbat of Hol Hamoed.

Tefillin are not donned during all the days of Pesah.

Compiled: Rabbi Moshe Shamma

Adopted & revised: Rabbi Albert Gabbai, Philadelphia, Nisan 5754

CONGREGATION MIKVEH ISRAEL

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