

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY

PESACH GUIDE

by Rabbi Barry Starr and the CJLS Kashrut Subcommittee¹

Pesach is the Jewish festival which requires the most preparatory effort and is the most complex. Yet Jews are committed to doing their best to observe the laws of Pesach. This Rabbinical Assembly Pesach guide is a brief outline of the policies and procedures relevant to the preparation of a kosher for Pesach home. Please contact Rabbi Osadchey if you have any questions. With significant changes in the nature and manufacture of kitchen products and food stuffs, new policies are required to maintain a kosher for Pesach kitchen. There are also many significant differences of opinion amongst rabbis regarding the laws of Pesach. We cannot present all of the various approaches. This guide is intended to help families maintain a kosher for Pesach home in accordance with the principles of Conservative Judaism and its understanding of Jewish Law.

KASHERING THE KITCHEN

It is customary (and easiest) to remove the utensils and dishes that are used during the year, replacing them with either new utensils or utensils used year to year only for Pesach. This is clearly not possible for major appliances and may not even be possible for dishes and utensils. There is a process for *kashering* many, but not all, kitchen items thus making them kosher for Pesach.

The general principle used in kashering is that the way the utensil absorbs food is the way it can be purged of that food. This principle operates on the basis of the quality or intensity of how the items absorb food. Things used for cold food can be *kashered* by rinsing since no substance has been absorbed by the dish or glass. Items used on a stove absorb the food and thus need a stronger level of action namely expelling the food into boiling water, called (*hag'alah*). The most intense form of usage is directly on a fire or in an oven and these utensils require the most intense method of *kashering*, namely (*libbun*), which burns away absorbed food.

METALS-

To *kasher* **pots, silverware, and utensils wholly of metal not used for baking**, thoroughly clean the item with soap and water, then, following a strict 24 hour waiting period during which they are not used, immerse the item in water that is at a rolling boil- *hag'alah*. For pots and pans, clean handles thoroughly. If the handle can be removed, do so for an even more thorough cleaning. To effect *hag'alah*, the item must be completely exposed to the boiling water. Pots and pans are either immersed in a larger pot of boiling water (may be done one section at a time) or filled with water brought to a rolling boil and then a heated stone is dropped into the pot such that the boiling water overflows to cover the sides of the pot. A safer alternative might be let the water boil over the sides of the pot. In the case of silverware every part of each piece

must be exposed to the water at a rolling boil. Following this *hag'alah* process, each utensil is rinsed in cold water.

Metal bakeware used in a fire or in an oven must first be thoroughly scrubbed and cleaned and then must be subjected to direct fire or an oven at its maximum setting. Thus using a blow torch or putting it in an oven during self-cleaning are two ways to accomplish this purging (*libbun*). This is a complicated and a potentially dangerous procedure and may result in discoloration or warping of the metal being purged. Exercise caution when performing *libbun*. Metal baking pans and sheets require *libbun* at very high temperatures which may warp the vessel. This may result in a reluctance to submit the vessel to the required temperature.

A **metal kitchen sink** can be *kashered* by thoroughly cleaning and scrubbing the sink (especially the garbage catch), letting 24 hours pass during which only cold water is used, and then carefully pouring boiling water over all the surfaces of the sink including the lip. A porcelain sink cannot be *kashered*, but should be thoroughly cleaned, then Pesach dish basins and dish racks must be used, one each for dairy and meat.

GLASS-

Glass dishes used for eating and serving hot foods are to be treated like any dish used for eating and serving hot food. *Kashering* is effected by cleaning and immersing in boiling water (*hag'alah*).

Glass cookware is treated like a metal pot for *kashering* (see paragraph on metal, above). The issues regarding glass bakeware are complex. Some authorities allow it to be *kashered* and others do not. Drinking glasses or glass dishes used only for cold foods may be *kashered* by a simple rinsing. Some follow the custom of soaking them for three days.

PLASTICS-

Heavy duty plastics including dishes, cutlery or serving items, providing they can withstand very hot water and do not permanently stain, may be *kashered* by *hag'alah*. If there is some doubt as to whether particular items can be *kashered*, consult your rabbi.

CERAMIC DISHES-

Ceramic dishes (earthenware, stoneware, china, pottery, etc) cannot be *kashered*. However fine china that was put away clean and that has not been used for over one Jewish calendar year may be used after thorough detergent and hot water washing. The china is then considered *pareve* (neutral) and may be designated for meat or dairy use.

COOKING APPLIANCES-

For **ovens and ranges**, every part that comes in contact with food must be thoroughly cleaned. This includes the walls and the top and bottom of the oven. Then the oven or range should be heated as hot as possible. The oven should be heated at maximum heat for an hour; the range top until the elements turn red and glow. Then parts of the range top around the elements that can be covered should be covered, (usually with aluminum foil). After a general and careful cleaning, self-cleaning ovens are put through the full cleaning cycle while empty. Following this process, the oven should be again cleaned to remove any ash. If the oven was very dirty to start, two cycles may be needed to assure a thorough cleaning.

Smooth, glass top electric ranges require *kashering* by *libbun* and *iruy* (pouring boiling water over the surface of the range top). First, clean the top thoroughly, then turn the coils on maximum heat until they are red hot. Then carefully pour boiling water on the surface area over and around the burners. The range top may now be used for cooking.

Microwave ovens that have no convection option should be thoroughly cleaned. Then an 8 ounce cup of water is placed inside and the oven is turned on until the water almost disappears (at least 6 of the 8 ounces is gone). Heating to complete dryness may damage the oven. A microwave oven that has a browning element cannot be *kashered*.

Convection ovens are *kashered* like regular ovens. Make sure that during the cleaning phase you clean thoroughly around the fan.

A **dishwasher** needs to be cleaned as thoroughly as possible including the inside area around the drainage and filters. Then a full cycle with detergent (with racks in) should be run while the dishwasher is empty. After 24 hours of not being used the dishwasher is again run empty (with racks in) and set on the highest heat for the purpose of *kashering*. If the sides of the dishwasher are made of enamel or porcelain, the dishwasher cannot be *kashered* for Pesach.

Other electrical appliances can be *kashered* if the parts that come in contact with *hametz* are metal and are removable, in which case they may be *kashered* like all other metal cooking utensils. If the parts are not removable, the appliances cannot be *kashered*. We recommend whenever possible that small appliances be used that are strictly for Pesach, thus avoiding the difficulty of *kashering* these appliances.

WORK SURFACES-

Tables, closets, and counters should be thoroughly cleaned and covered for Pesach. The coverings can be contact paper, regular paper, foil or cloth that does not contain *hametz* (e.g. been starched with *hametz* starch). Note that the covering material should be made of material that is not easily torn.

Many **counter top surfaces** can be *kashered* simply by a thorough cleaning, a 24 hour wait and *iruy* –pouring boiling water over them. To have *iruy* be effective for *kashering*, the surface must have no hairline cracks, nicks or scratches that can be seen with the naked eye. Plastic laminates, limestone, soapstone, granite, marble, glass, Corian, Staron, Ceasarstone, Swanstone, Surell and Avonite surfaces can be *kashered* by *iruy*. Wood without scratches is also *kashered* by *iruy*. Ceramic, cement or porcelain counter tops cannot be *kashered* by *iruy*. The potential effectiveness of *iruy* depends on the material of which the counter was made. A full list of counter materials that can be *kashered* may be found on the website of the Chicago Rabbinical Council (CRC).

Refrigerators and freezers should be thoroughly cleaned with detergent. If there are places where food can be stuck (e.g. cracks or difficult corners to reach), these areas should be covered.

FOODS

The Torah prohibits the ownership of *hametz* (flour, food or drink made from the prohibited species of leavened grain: wheat, oats, barley, rye or spelt) during Pesach. Ideally we burn or remove all *hametz* from our premises which may be effected by donations to a local food

pantry. In some cases, however, this would cause prohibitive financial loss. In such cases, we arrange for the sale of the *hametz* to a non-Jew and its repurchase after Pesach. See Rabbi Osadchey regarding the form for the sale of hametz or pick one up from the synagogue office.

Prohibited foods

Since the Torah prohibits the eating of *hametz* during Pesach, and since many common foods contain some *hametz*, guidance is necessary when shopping and preparing for Pesach. Prohibited foods (*hametz*) include the following: **Biscuits, cakes, coffees containing cereal derivatives, crackers, leavened bread, pasta.** These are foods that are generally made with **wheat, barley, oats, spelt or rye** (grains that can become *hametz*). Any food containing these grains or derivatives of these grains must be certified kosher for Pesach. Flavorings in foodstuffs are often derived from alcohol produced from one of these grains which would render that food *hametz*. Such products also need Pesach supervision.

Kitniyot

Ashkenazi Rabbinical authorities added the following foods (*kitniyot*) to the above list of prohibited foods:

Beans, corn, millet, peas, rice, soy

These and some other plant foods (e.g. mustard, buckwheat and sesame seeds) are not permitted for eating on Pesach. They need not be sold or disposed of before Pesach. The processed products, whether liquid or solid, from *kitniyot* are also forbidden by most Ashkenazic rabbinical authorities. These might include but not be limited to ascorbic acid (vitamin C), corn oil, corn sweetener, and soy oil. Most Sephardic authorities permit the use of all the *kitniyot* foods other than those that might have come in contact with the prohibited grains. Israeli products are often marked “contains *kitniyot*” and thus Ashkenazi Jews who do not use *kitniyot* need to be vigilant when purchasing Israeli products for Passover.

Our Movement’s Committee on Jewish Law and Standards has permitted the use of **peanuts and peanut oil** on Pesach provided said items have proper year round kosher certification and do not contain any *hametz* ingredients.

Permitted Foods

An item that is kosher all year round, that is made with no *hametz*, and is processed on machines used only for that item and nothing else (such as **ground coffee**) may be used with no special Pesach supervision. As we learn more about the processing of foods and the ingredients they contain, relying on the kashrut of a product for Pesach without a Passover *hekhsher* may be problematic. Wherever possible, processed foods ought to have a “*kasher l’Pesach hekhsher*” from a reliable source. Since that is not always possible, however, our guidelines reflect some alternatives that are acceptable.

Any food that you purchase with a “*kasher l’Pesach*” *hekhsher* must have a label that is integral to the package and it should have the name of a recognizable, living supervising Rabbi or creditable kosher supervision agency if possible. If the label is not integral to the package or if there are questions regarding the labeling, the item should not be used without consulting a Rabbi.

NO PESACH HEKHSHER REQUIRED

Products which may be purchased without a Pesach *hekhsher* before or during Pesach: **baking soda, bicarbonate of soda, eggs, fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh or frozen kosher meat, (other than chopped meat), Nestea (regular and decaffeinated), pure black, green, or white tea leaves, unflavored tea bags, unflavored regular coffee, olive oil (extra-virgin only), whole or gutted fresh fish, whole or half pecans (not pieces), whole (unground) spices and nuts**

NO PESACH HEKHSHER REQUIRED IF PURCHASED BEFORE PESACH

Products which may only be purchased without a Pesach *hekhsher* before Pesach. If bought during Pesach they require a Pesach *hekhsher*: **all pure fruit juices, filleted fish, frozen fruit (no additives), non-iodized salt, pure white sugar (no additives), quinoa (with nothing mixed in), unsalted Grade A butter, white milk**

Frozen, uncooked vegetables may be processed on shared equipment that uses *hametz*. It is preferable to purchase those with a “*kasher l’Pesach*” label. One may, however buy bags of frozen non-*hekhshered* vegetables before Pesach provided that one can either absolutely determine that no shared equipment was used or one is careful to inspect the contents before Pesach and discard any pieces of *hametz*. Even if one did not inspect the vegetables before Pesach, if one can remove pieces of *hametz* found in the package on Pesach, the vegetables themselves are permissible.

PESACH HEKHSHER ALWAYS REQUIRED

Products which require reliable *kasher l’Pesach* certification (regular kosher supervision being not sufficient) whether bought before or during Pesach: **all baked goods, farfel, matzah, any product containing matzah, matzah flour, matzah meal, Pesach cakes, all frozen processed foods, candy, canned tuna, cheeses, chocolate milk, decaf coffee, decaf tea, dried fruits, herbal tea, ice cream, liquor, non-Grade A butter, oils, soda, vinegar, wine, yogurt.**

BABY FOOD-

Baby food with a Passover *hekhsher* is sometimes available. Of course, home preparation of baby food, using *kasher l’Pesach* utensils and kitchen items is always possible. Pure vegetable prepared baby food that is *kasher* the year round is acceptable for Pesach. The use of *kitniyot* for babies is also acceptable with care taken that this baby food does not mix with food from the rest of the family. Separate dishes and utensils are recommended. Most infant formulas are made from soy and the use of *kitniyot* does not apply to infants. Thus infant formula products, *kasher* the year round, are acceptable for Pesach. Here as in baby foods, the bottles, nipples and formula should be kept away from the general kitchen area and clean up should be done out of the kitchen area (e.g. a bathroom sink).

MEDICINES-

Prescription medicines are permitted. Non-prescription pills and capsules are permitted; for liquids, check with your rabbi.

PET FOOD-

The issue of pets on Pesach is a complicated one. There are several options:

1. The pet is given, for the week of Pesach, to a gentile who can feed it whatever food is available.
2. Since no *hametz* is allowed in our possession on Pesach, one could feed the pet either *kasher l'Pesach* pet food, pet foods with no grain, or food off your own table which is already *kasher l'Pesach*. Incidentally *kitniyot* would be permissible.
3. Some authorities allow for the pet to be sold along with the *hametz* and, since the pet does not belong to the Jewish owner, regular pet food would be fed. Note that the document of sale would have to include the pet as well as *hametz*. If you have these pet foods in your home be careful to keep them away from the general kitchen area. Washing of pet utensils should be done out of the kitchen area (e.g. a bathroom sink).

NON FOOD ITEMS-

Any detergents, cleaners, etc. which are not a food stuff and which are not eaten, may be used for Pesach with no *hekhshered* supervision. This would include: **aluminum products, ammonia, baby oil, bleach, candles, contact paper, charcoal, coffee filters, fabric softener, isopropyl alcohol, laundry and dish detergent, oven cleaner, paper bags, paper plates (with no starch coating), plastic cutlery, plastic wrap, polish, powder and ointment, sanitizers, scouring pads, stain remover, water with no additives, wax paper**