

# Halakhot of Pesah

by Rabbi Moshe Shamah

## I. The Month of Nissan

Although in counting years we begin from Rosh Hashanah - the first of Tishri, the seventh month - the Torah counts months from Nissan, to highlight the Exodus from Egypt, which occurred in that month.

Since most of Nissan's days are festive occasions (the first twelve days commemorate the dedication of the Mishkan followed by Pesah), the whole month assumes a festive character; accordingly, *tahanun* supplications (ana) are omitted from prayers the entire month. The two Psalms normally recited in the latter portion of *shahrit* that allude to a 'day of distress' (*Ya'anacha* and *Tefila Ledavid*) are also omitted when ana is omitted.

When one sees two blossoming fruit trees during Nissan, *Birkat Ha'ilanot* is recited. This berakha is recited only once each year by men and women. It may be recited on Shabbat or yom tob. Although Nissan is the proper time for it, it may be recited afterwards but not subsequent to the blossoming stage, when the fruit are growing.

Eulogies are not permitted during Nissan. When appropriate, a short appreciation of the departed with moral instruction is permitted.

## II. Searching for Hametz

As the Torah prohibits possession of hametz on Pesah, it is mandatory to check one's home and remove all hametz before Pesah. Despite the fact that the home was thoroughly cleansed of hametz beforehand, on the night before Pesah we perform *bediqat hametz* 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, the head of household (the leader of the search) recites the berakha *Asher qideshanu bemisvotav vesivanu `al bi'ur hametz* ("Who has sanctified us with his commandments, and commanded us on the removal of hametz"), which covers the entire process of the removal of hametz from one's property, completed the following morning; no berakha is recited upon the actual removal of the hametz in the morning. After the berakha, one must be careful not to speak until at least beginning the search, so as not interrupt between the berakha and the act for which the berakha was recited. It is proper to refrain from extraneous talk and digressions throughout the search so that it is done correctly. In addition to homes, places of business and cars require checking if hametz is normally brought into them.

Traditionally, the search has been performed by the light of a single wick candle (a multi-wick one is dangerous). Today, because of safety reasons and superior effectiveness in searching, a flashlight is preferable. A widespread custom is to use a candle for the first

moments of the search for symbolic reasons 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 hametz before the *bediqah*, it is customary but not mandatory to place pieces of hametz where the searcher will surely find them so that he will have hametz to burn.

Immediately after the search at night, the owner should recite *Bitul Hames*, an annulment/renunciation of hametz in his possession. As most people will continue owning and benefiting from hametz until the morning, this first *bitul* is directed only to hametz that the owner does not know about. One should understand what he is saying. If one does not understand the traditional Aramaic words of the *bitul* formula (found at the beginning of the Hagaddah or Mahzor), he should recite it in English. Translations are readily available.

If one embarks on a journey within 30 days before Pesah and no one remains at home to do *bediqah* at the designated time, it should be done before leaving without reciting the berakha. When one closes his home prior to the evening of *bediqat hametz* and intends to be away the entire holiday, such as when a family goes out of town, if he sells any and all hametz in his home, he does not have to search it. He searches his hotel room and makes bitul for any hametz 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 is still at home at the time of *bediqat hametz*, is required to perform it.

One who was planning to be away all Pesah and sold the hametz in his home without making *bediqah* but unexpectedly returned must search for and gather the sold hametz that was not put away and place it in a closed off or out of the way location, to prevent someone inadvertently partaking of it.

### **III. Ereb Pesah**

It is forbidden to eat hametz after the fourth hour of the day beginning from dawn. These hours are calculated according to a system whereby dawn to dusk is divided into twelve hours regardless of 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 8:45 a.m. E.S.T. Consult the specific schedule for that year for exact times.

The prohibition to benefit from hametz, which includes selling it, begins one proportional hour after the deadline for eating, generally about 10:00 a.m. E.S.T.

It is preferable to completely get rid of all hametz without having to sell. However, selling is permitted even if the hametz remains in the overall confines of one's home, providing the hametz's 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 hametz that is going to

remain in the overall confines of his property to do so through a rabbi. Hametz being sold should be gathered together, covered and placed where no member of the household would forget and mistakenly partake of it.

The destruction of any remaining hametz 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 hametz through burning. When Ereb Pesah falls on Shabbat, the burning takes place on Friday.

Hametz in a garbage receptacle placed by the street curb in front of one's home is *hefker* (ownership is relinquished) and not 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 hametz not be in one's private receptacle but in a carton or bag that will be collected with the hametz.

After getting rid of all hametz, one recites *Bitul Hames* again. This second recitation, unlike the night before, includes all hametz one owns. Selling hametz to a non-Jew should be done before this bitul, since hametz being sold is not that which is being annulled or renounced.

Matzah should not be eaten Ereb Pesah even in the morning so as to eat the matzah of the Seder with greater desire and appetite. This applies only to matzah with which one may fulfill the obligation in the evening, not egg matzah which is called 'rich' matzah and is unsuitable for fulfilling the *mitzvah*.

Cake made with matzah meal, since it is baked the way bread or matzah is, should also not be eaten Ereb Pesah. Although the matzah meal was mixed with 'enriching' items, the mixing was done after the matzah received its identity as matzah fit for the mitzvah of the Seder, not at the original kneading like egg matzah. On the other hand, if the matzah is not baked but fried or cooked, such as *i'jeh masso*, it is permitted Ereb Pesah.

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

There is a custom for first born males to fast Ereb Pesah as a sign of appreciation for the Almighty's sparing Israel's first-born when smiting the Egyptian first-born. This fast is overridden if the first-born participates in a *se'udat misvah* (festive meal attached to a mitzvah), including the completion of a tractate of the Talmud even though he himself has not learned that tractate.

#### **IV. Shabbat Ereb Pesah (following times in New York)**

1. The *Siyyum Bekhorot* is pushed back to Thursday and is treated more leniently than in other years. A non-bekhor father who might normally attend a siyyum on behalf of his first born minor son is exempt, as are women *bekhorot*.

2. *Bediqat Hames* (searching for hametz) is done Thursday night after the stars appear (approximately 25 minutes after sunset) followed by recital of the first *Kal Hamirah* (annulling unseen hames).

3. Hametz is burned Friday morning by the end of the fifth hour (usually approximately 10:10 a.m.), the same time as in other years so that there be one uniform halakha for all years, notwithstanding that this year we are permitted to eat and own hames until Shabbat morning.

4. The second *Kal Hamirah* (annulling all hames) is recited Shabbat morning by the end of the fifth hour (usually approximately 10:10 a.m.).

5. Regarding *Hamosi* and Birkat Hamazon for the meals of Friday night and Shabbat day, several options are available:

A. We may eat bread (preferably pita which produces fewer crumbs) Friday night and Shabbat morning until the end of the fourth hour (usually approximately 8:55 a.m.), taking care not to have hametz spread over the house or fall on Pesah utensils. Only a minimal amount of hametz, that which is expected to be eaten, should be left for this purpose. Any leftover hametz must be discarded by 10:10 a.m., by which time the final *Kal Hamirah* is recited. Disposal of hametz should be into a garbage bag or receptacle left outside the home within the home's erub area (halakhic enclosure for purposes of carrying on Shabbat.) As a last resort hametz leftovers may be flushed away. This option generally involves attending first minyan that Shabbat morning.

B. One who chooses to remove all hametz on Friday, reciting the final *Kal Hamira* at that time, and uses regular matzah Friday night in place of bread, would recite *Hamosi* and Birkat Hamazon as during Pesah. For the Shabbat day meal, fried or cooked whole matzah, prepared from before Shabbat, may be used. The blessings on these items would be as during Pesah: *Hamosi* and Birkat Hamazon. Although we may not eat regular matzah on Ereb Pesah Shabbat during the daytime, fried or cooked matzah is allowed.

C. Egg Matzah is Mezonot unless one eats a large amount of it (at least 6 ounces), in which case *Hamosi* and Birkat Hamazon are recited.

## **V. Hametz**

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

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

Rice, soy, corn (maize), potatoes, fruits, vegetables, 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 from a hametz derivative.

Hametz derivatives unfit for human or animal consumption are not considered food and are permitted on Pesah. This includes virtually all deodorants, soaps, cleansers and cleaning agents, polishes, toothpastes, lipsticks, most cosmetics and medicines (all ill tasting liquids, tablets and capsules), etc.

Hametz mixed into non-hametz substances during Pesah is not annulled in the manner that prohibited food items are annulled all year long, such as mixtures of one in sixty. Perhaps more than any other, it is this halakha that requires an extra measure of care with food throughout Pesah.

However, hametz that was mixed with non-hametz is annulled before Pesah in the standard manner and remains annulled during Pesah. This principle applies even if inclusion of the hametz ingredient was not known before Pesah. Thus, foods prepared before Pesah that are known to be kosher all year long, that do not have hametz as an ingredient, even were they somehow to have a minor amount of hametz 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 tea, plain potato chips, pure coffees, pure chocolates, pure vegetable oils, tomato sauce, milk, butter and plain dairy products.

Based on this halakha, many homemakers bake, cook and purchase as much as possible of their Pesah needs before the onset of the holiday.

If hametz 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 weren't used for 24 hours, the food is permitted. This is based on the principle that whatever is absorbed in the walls of utensils gives a spoiled taste after 24 hours.

Ashkenazim eating by Sephardim during Passover 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 Ashkenazic strictness on these items is an extreme cautionary measure and does not carry over to vessels.

One who finds hametz in his possession during hol hamo`ed should burn it immediately; if found on yom tob, however, it should be covered until after yom tob, at which time it should be burned. There is no berakha on these cases of burning.

*Hametz be`ayin* (roughly translated “visible,” not a mixture) which was in the possession of a Jew during Pesah is prohibited even after Pesah.

## VI. Matzah

It is a Biblical command to eat matzah (unleavened bread) on the first night of Pesah. It commemorates our ancestors not having time to allow their dough to leaven before baking, as they were chased out of Egypt. Also, matzah is the “bread of affliction,” recalling the slavery.

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

For this *mitzvah* one should obtain matzah that has been under supervision that it did not come into contact with water from the grain harvest. Each person should eat at least the *kazzayit* for *hamosi*, but preferably all matzah for the mitzvot required at the Seder, from such matzah. If not available, matzah under supervision from the grinding is sufficient. All commercial Passover matzah from the companies displaying supervision today has been “watched” at least from the time of grinding.

Matzah, once baked, may be dipped in water. An elderly or ill person may fulfill the *mitzvah* in such a manner.

Egg matzah is permitted to be eaten during Pesah. Indeed, matzah which was kneaded with fruit juice and not water, which is the standard procedure for making egg matzah, does not become hametz 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 matzah is not “poor man’s bread” and cannot be used to fulfill the obligations of the Seder.

The berakha on regular matzah during all of Pesah is *hamosi* even if one is eating a very small amount. During Pesah, matzah is our bread. Even when regular matzah is fried or cooked during Pesah, such as in *i’jeh masso* or *kibbeh masso*, its berakha is *hamosi*. All year long we recite mezonot on regular matzah except when one is *qobey’a se`uda* (there are various opinions here, essentially when one uses matzah to get full as bread) as matzah is normally a snack food in the category of a cracker. The berakha *Al Akhilat Masah* is added to *hamosi* only at the Seder. Egg matzah, even during Pesah, is mezonot (except if one is *qobey’a se`uda*).

## VII. Utensils for Passover

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

Glassware does not absorb and merely requires washing to be kosher for Pesah. This includes Duralex, Pyrex, Corningware, Corelle and colored glass.

Absorption by utensils from food takes place in the presence of heat; thus, utensils that come into contact with foods and liquids that generally are not hot (salad bowls, fruit

trays, refrigerator trays, can openers, etc.) can be used on Pesah after being washed. The same applies to tabletops and counters.

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

Koshering utensils is according to its general use. As the utensil absorbed so will it emit what it absorbed. Hametz pots and pans, flatware, blenders, etc. made of metal, wood, rubber, stone, bone or plastic (including melmac and tupperware), can be made usable for Pesah by *hag`alah*.

*Hag`alah* is total submersion of the item being koshered 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 make *hag`alah*, it is preferable to do so before Pesah. However, it can be made during hol hamo`ed providing the hametz 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 *hag`alah* 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 does not matter if the items or pot are dairy or meat, or if the pot is hametz or kosher for Passover.

Metals used directly on the fire with hametz require *liboon* (placement on fire until red hot).

Utensils usually used for cold substances that on occasion were used for hot hametz, such as metal cold liquid drinking cups, are treated according to their usual use and merely require washing (after 24 hours from hametz use). Although the vessel on occasion definitely absorbed hametz, 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.

Hametz earthenware utensils cannot be made usable for Passover. Glazed chinaware is very different from classic earthenware and many authorities permit koshering such utensils through *hag`alah* or pouring boiling water on them. An Orthodox rabbi should be consulted regarding the specific type of chinaware in question.

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

Ovens and their racks should be cleansed for Passover 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. In the case

of microwave ovens, after cleaning, insert a microwave safe utensil with water and microwave at maximum for several minutes, until the oven fills with steam.

Dishwashers are koshered by their normal use of boiling water and soap.

Tablecloths are koshered by washing in soap and water.

## VIII. The Seder

**Qadesh** After arranging the items on the Seder table correctly, the head of household recites *qiddush*. Everyone should be standing and attentive and there should be no talking during the recital of the berakhot. *Qiddush* is recited after *set hakokhabim* (the appearance of stars, which in New York is 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. These 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 matzot are done while reclining to the left. A left-handed person also reclines to the left.

**Urhas** 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** We eat less than a *kazzayit* of a green vegetable (celery is our custom) after dipping it in salt water. [The reason for having less than a *kazzayit* is to avoid a centuries old unresolved question: should one who eats a measure that requires berakha aharonah of *Bore Nefashot* recite that berakha if he plans to shortly afterwards recite *hamosi* that will eventually be followed by Birkat Hamazon? We try to avoid omitting a required berakha but not to recite an unrequired berakha.]

We recite *Boreh Peri Ha'adamah* on the karpas vegetable. It is our custom to have intention that this berakha "cover" the adamah of the maror, which will be eaten later. Although the maror will be eaten after *hamosi*, it is necessarily eaten alone and perhaps not covered by *hamosi*. So again, to avoid a question we cover it with the berakha on the karpas.

**Yahas** The middle matzah is broken, by hand, into two pieces. The smaller piece is replaced between the two whole matzot while the larger piece is set aside for Afiqoman. Each individual takes a turn carrying the afiqoman matzah, wrapped in a cloth holder, over one's shoulder reciting *Mish'arotam...* as a symbolic reenactment of the Exodus.

**Magid** One raises the matzah and recites *Ha Lahma `Anyah*. The tray is removed for children to question, the second cup of wine is poured, *Ma Nishtana* is recited, the tray returned, and the matzot 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 *mitzvah* in a language they understand. English translations are readily available.

**Rohsa** One should wash his or her hands and recite the berakha *Al Netilat Yadayim* to prepare for *hamosi*.

**Mosi Masah** The head of the household raises all 3 matzot (the two whole and one broken) and recites the berakha of *hamosi*. Next, he releases the bottom whole matzah and recites the berakha of *Al Akhilat Masah*. Reclining to their left, all eat at least one *kazzayit* (approximately one ounce). It is preferable to eat two *kazzaytim*, one for *Mosi* and one for *Masah*. At least one *kazzayit* should be eaten within a four minute period to be considered a single eating.

**Maror** *Kazzayit* maror (bitter herbs) is dipped in haroset (a date, nut and wine mixture), the berakha *Al Akhilat Maror* is recited, and the maror is eaten without reclining. Romaine Lettuce is a preferred vegetable for maror but great care must be taken that it first be thoroughly checked and cleansed 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 *kazzayit* each of matzah and maror is dipped in haroset and eaten in a reclining position after reciting the explanation of this custom, *Zekher Lamiqdash* etc. Those for whom it is difficult to have *kazzayit* matzah and maror may eat smaller measures for korekh.

**Shulhan Orekh** The egg and shankbone are eaten followed by the meal. On the egg we recite *Zekher LeQorban Hagiga*. Nothing is recited on the shankbone. To distinguish from the Pesah sacrifice brought in the days of the Bet Hamiqdash which was only broiled, the shankbone should also be cooked. It is important not to be totally satiated during the meal in order to leave room for the afiqoman, which must be eaten "with appetite."

**Safon** After the meal a piece of the middle matzah is distributed to each person, to which additional matzah is added to make a *kazzayit*. This should be eaten reclining before midnight.

**Barekh** The third cup of wine is poured and Birkat Hamazon is recited.

**Hallel** Hagefen is recited before drinking the third cup, reclining. One should have intention to also cover the fourth cup with this berakha. 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 aharonah.

**Nirsa** It is customary to sing and continue discussion of the Exodus and other miracles that the Almighty wrought until one falls asleep.

## IX. Measurements

The measure for a *kazzayit* matzah is thought by many in our community to be one ounce of weight. However, the original measure of a *kazzayit* (meaning an olive) is basically a volume one, widely interpreted as 1/2 the volume of an average egg. (Although the olive was widely cited by the rabbis of old, it was supplanted by the egg for actual measurements.) The egg used for determining this measure must be an average one of the present time and locale. The weight measure we use today was derived from the volume; rabbis of the past calculated the volume and then 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 2/3 of an ounce (weight) of matzah. Thus, when eating the *mosi masah*, where it is preferable to eat two *kazzaytim*, one who is unable to eat two ounces may eat 1.33 ounces for two *kazzaytim*. Of course, as stated earlier, *bedi`abad* one *kazzayit* 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 today displaces approximately two fluid ounces.

A *kazzayit* karpas or maror is of lesser weight than a *kazzayit* matzah as vegetables have a lower density of mass and thus a lower weight for the standard volume of half an egg's displacement.

## X. 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 hamo`ed one repeats the amida. During yom tob it depends if mention of Pesah was made independently of it or not. *Ya`ale veyabo* is also recited in Birkat 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 berakhot before and after are recited; on the latter days not. One explanation for the difference with Sukkot when we recite 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 (thus not saying the berakhot).

Specified Pesah selections are read from the Torah each morning. The minimum number of aliyot on yom tov is five plus maftir. The number of aliyot on hol hamo`ed is four. Even on hol hamo`ed two *Sifre Torah* are taken out each day.

Musaf prayer is recited daily.

We begin reciting *Morid Hatal* during Musaf of the first day and *Barekhenu* during the first weekday arbut of hol hamo`ed.

Tefillin are not donned during the days of Pesah.