PESACH 2013: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Question: When it comes to non-edible items such as toiletries, cosmetics and medications, which items must be chametz free and which items do not?

Discussion: Some families have the tradition not to use on Pesach any item which may contain any chametz or chametz derivative. Those families should continue following their hallowed and praiseworthy tradition. The answer below is directed towards those families who do not have such a custom and are looking to follow the basic halachah:

Medications: Coated tablets, flavored medications, pleasant tasting cough syrups and all chewable medications need to be researched to see if they contain any chametz or chametz derivative. All other medications are permitted to be used regardless of the content. [Oral medications containing kitniyos should only be used for some who is ill, not someone who is merely suffering from a minor discomfort. If you are unsure of your status, clarify it with a Rav.] Vitamins are generally not considered medications, and should not be used unless they are chametz-free. It goes without saying that no medications should be discontinued without prior consultation with a Rav and a doctor.

Toiletries and Cosmetics: Deodorants, hair sprays, colognes, perfumes, shaving lotions and all items which contain denatured alcohol should be avoided. Toothpaste and mouthwash should not be used unless it is verified that they contain no chametz. All other products, such as soaps, shampoos, creams, powders, stick and gel deodorants, lotions, blush, eye shadow, eye liner, mascara and nail polish, may be used regardless of their content.

Question: May I kosher my microwave for Pesach use?

Discussion: It is not recommended that you do so. If you absolutely must use a microwave on Pesach, we suggest you buy a new one for Pesach and keep it for Pesach use for future years.
Question: How do I kosher my countertops for Pesach?

Discussion: There are many different types of countertops available today, and how to kosher them would depend on which type of countertop you have: Group 1): Stone countertops (marble, limestone, granite, soapstone, slate, onyx) may be koshered by thoroughly cleaning them, waiting 24 hours and then pouring boiling water over them. Group 2) Glass, cement (Buddy Rhodes, Cheng Design), porcelain or ceramic countertops may not be koshered; they must be covered with a non-porous material which will not easily rip or tear. Group 3) Butcher block or wood surfaces

countertops (John Boos, Spekva, Omega) may be koshered by the hot water method, but only if they contain no cracks that may have trapped chametz; otherwise they must be covered. Group 4) Countertops made out of synthetic materials or plastics (Formica, acrylic, Corian, Avonite) are debatable; some poskim permit them to be koshered via the hot water method provided they are not scratched or stained and cleaned real well, while others maintain that these material may not be koshered and cannot be used unless they are covered.

Question: Is it permitted to get a haircut or do laundry on erev Pesach after midday (chatzos)?

Discussion: It is forbidden to do melachah, "work," even if it is needed for Yom Tov, on erev Pesach after chatzos. Two basic reasons are given for this rabbinic prohibition: 1) When the Beis ha-Mikdash stood, erev Pesach was considered a Yom Tov, since the Korban Pesach was brought on that day. It retains the status of Yom Tov today even though the Korban Pesach is no longer offered. 2) To give everyone a chance to properly prepare for the Seder.

Certain forms of personal grooming and certain households chores that are halachically classified as "work" are forbidden to be done on erev Pesach after chatzos. Thus it is forbidden to get a haircut or a shave, to sew new clothing or to do laundry on erev Pesach after chatzos. One must arrange his schedule so that these tasks are completed before midday. L'chatchilah, one should even cut his nails before chatzos. If, b'diavad, one could not or did not take care of these matters before midday, some of them may still be done while others may not: sewing or completing the sewing of new clothes may not be done at all; a haircut and shave may be taken only at a non-Jewish barber; laundry may be done only by a non-Jewish maid or dry cleaner. Other chores, such as ironing clothes, polishing shoes, cutting nails, sewing buttons and other minor mending, may be done with no restrictions.

Question: What type of chicken or meat may I serve on Seder night?

Discussion: When the Beis ha-Mikdash was standing, the only roasted meat permitted to be eaten on the Seder night was the meat of the Korban Pesach. Nowadays, although the Beis ha-Mikdash is no longer standing and we no longer eat the Korban Pesach, we still do not eat any roasted meat on the two Seder nights. "Meat" includes meat from any animal which requires shechitah (ritual slaughter), including chicken and turkey. Roasted fish, however, is permitted. "Roasted" includes any type of roasting, including pot roast. (Pot roast refers to meat or chicken which is roasted in a pot or pan in its own juice, without adding any water or other liquids.) Even if the item was cooked first and then roasted it is forbidden. But if it was roasted and then cooked it is permitted according to most poskim. A minority opinion forbids that as well. Fried, barbecued, broiled over an open fire or smoked meat is considered like roasted meat and is forbidden. Liver, which is broiled, is not eaten on the Seder night. Deep fried, however, is considered like cooked and is permitted. Based on the above, it is important to remember that at the Seder, it is forbidden to eat the roasted zeroa which is placed on the Seder Plate. But it is permitted to eat the zeroa during the daytime meal. In any case,

the zeroa should not be discarded, as it is considered a bizyaon mitzvah to do so, and one should make sure that it is eaten at an appropriate time.

Question: At many Seders the recital of the Hagadah takes a long time. Is it permitted to drink during that time?

Discussion: When necessary, it is permitted to drink water or soda between the first and second cups. A shehakol is recited over the water, unless the water was on the table during Kiddush, or if one intended during Kiddush to drink water or soda during the recital of the Hagadah.

Coffee, tea, milk, or pure fruit juices may also, when necessary, be drunk between the first and second cups, but only if they will not require their own berachah. In order for them to be covered by the ha-gafen recited over the first cup, they would have to have been on the table during Kiddush or one would have had to intend to drink them while reciting Kiddush. Since these beverages are considered chamar medinah, reciting a separate berachah and drinking them would make it appear as if one is adding an additional cup to the four prescribed ones. Wine and other intoxicating beverages should be completely avoided between the drinking of the first two cups. It is permitted, however to drink wine and all other beverages after the second cup is drunk and throughout Shulchan Orech when the meal is served.

Question In the first day of Yom Tov, is it permitted to take food out of the freezer so that it will be defrosted come night time?

Discussion: It is forbidden to prepare food (or any other need) on the first day of Yom Tov for the second day of Yom Tov - hachanah. Thus one may not cook or warm any food on the first day of Yom Tov if it is being prepared to be eaten on the second day. Some poskim maintain that removing food from the freezer is considered a significant act which would be classified as "preparation" and is therefore forbidden. Other poskim, however, argue that merely removing food out of the freezer is not a significant enough act to be considered hachanah, and is therefore permitted. L'chatchilah, therefore, one should plan her meals in a way where she would not need to defrost food on the first day to the next. Under extenuating circumstances, or if one failed to plan and now finds herself unable to serve the Yom Tov properly, she may rely on the lenient opinions. The defrosting should take place as early in the day as possible, thus giving the impression that the food may be eaten on the first day of Yom Tov.

The Vaad Harabbonim wishes the entire community a happy and inspiring Yom Tov!

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