

PESACH 5780

Preparing for Passover During a Pandemic

Rabbi Jesse Olitzky and Rabbi Rachel Marder

**Wednesday evening, April 8, 2020 —
Thursday evening, April 16, 2020**

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A Message from the Rabbis

As we approach Passover this year, it is clear it will look and feel very different from previous celebrations. We read at our Seder tables about the ten plagues in Egypt. With each plague recited, we drip a pinky of wine, acknowledging the pain and suffering that others experienced. When reading the ten plagues narrative in the Torah, we acknowledge that prior to the tenth plague, the Israelites were charged to act. The nine previous plagues did not impact the Israelites at all. Yet, in order to be spared from the tenth plague, they were tasked with spreading blood of the pascal sacrifice on their lintel and doorposts. They were told to act to save lives. They could no longer take their own health and well-being for granted.

It was with a heavy heart that we had to temporarily close the doors of our synagogue building, and halt all in-person gatherings, classes, and worship services. Like the Israelites, we had to act in order to protect ourselves – and others – from harm. We pray that the Malach HaMavet, the angel of death, passes over us all and this pandemic ends.

Collectively, we have an important role to play in mitigating the plague of this virus. This is a time to avoid gatherings in order to protect ourselves and especially the most vulnerable among us. We know this will be especially difficult during Passover. While Passover is a holiday that encourages festive meals, often with extended family and friends joining together, we urge you to limit your seders this year to those living in your home. We do not make this suggestion lightly. We do so with the understanding and belief that Pekuach Nefesh doche et HaShabbat, that saving and protecting life supersedes our traditional observance of Shabbat and Festivals. We make this recommendation believing that this is a Sha'at HaDachak, a pressing time, which may lead us to adjust our observance of the holiday. Despite our physical separation, together we will find ways to observe and celebrate Passover.

In this year's Passover guide, you will find opportunities for learning prior to Passover, a link to join our virtual second night Passover seder via Zoom, guidance for observance of kashrut during the Passover holiday and more. This year we are experiencing a collective Egypt. Our day-to-day lives have become narrower and more restricted. We do not want the laws of kashrut and cleaning to overwhelm or create greater anxiety. We will do what we can under the current circumstances. Please lean into the freedom of this holiday, as we look for ways to feel free and joyful.

We pray for everyone's good health and we wish you a chag kasher v'sameach, a joyous Passover, even in this difficult and often scary time.

Rabbi Olitzky and Rabbi Marder

Learning as a Way to Prepare for Passover

This year, we will be offering many classes and conversations prior to Passover to help us prepare and find new meaning in the holiday. Join us for any or all of the following:

Kashrut in the Time of Coronavirus

Sunday, March 29 at 7:00pm

Rabbi Olitzky will lead a pre-Passover learning session about what foods are acceptable to eat and purchase due to unprecedented disruptions in the food supply. You can participate [virtually via Zoom](#).

Leading a Seder Right Now

Sunday, April 5 at 11:00am

Rabbi Marder is hosting a discussion on tips and insights for leading a seder this year and what new meaning we can experience in particular this year. [Join via Zoom](#).

Beth El Virtual Seder

Thursday, April 9 at 5:30pm

We understand the importance of celebrating with community so we invite you to join Rabbi Marder as she leads a Virtual Second Night Passover Seder. This will be an abbreviated seder that includes singing and conversation for all ages. [Join via Zoom](#).

Finding a Haggadah

The Passover seder is all about telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt. We can't do that, or participate in the different aspects of the seder without a Haggadah. There are many haggadot available online. You can create your own at haggadot.com. We also recommend the digital haggadah of *Valley Beth Shalom* in Los Angeles. You can [download the PDF here](#), or for a haggadah that is more appropriate for a seder with young children, check out the [PJ Library Haggadah](#).

On all other nights we eat *hametz*. This year, what will we eat?

We understand that there may be limited access to Kosher for Passover food this year in comparison to previous years. We also encourage individuals to limit their trips to supermarkets to essential items. This year, we need to avoid doing exorbitant Passover shopping.

Congregation Beth El member, Shannon Sarna Goldberg, editor of *The Nosh*, [offers easy recipe suggestions](#) and places from which you can order food. Shannon recommends going back to the basics, focusing on fresh foods this year, rather than processed and packaged Kosher for Passover foods. **Most importantly, do the best you can and go easy on yourselves. No decision regarding which foods that you buy should lead you to unnecessarily put your health in jeopardy.**

[CLICK HERE](#) TO FIND LISTS OF FOODS THAT MAY BE PURCHASED EITHER BEFORE OR DURING PASSOVER THAT DO NOT REQUIRE A SPECIFIC KOSHER FOR PASSOVER CERTIFICATION.

Questions about kitniyot (legumes, rice, corn, soy beans, peas and lentils)

In December of 2015, the Conservative Movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards offered a halakhic responsum, a teshuvah, that permits Ashkenazic Jews to eat kitniyot (legumes, rice, corn, soy beans, peas and lentils). This teshuvah cites numerous halakhic works as support allowing the eating of kitniyot on Passover. The responsum uses many halakhic proof texts to clarify that refraining from eating kitniyot is an error and an unnecessary stringent act, even if it was a custom that these rabbis continued to follow. Taking into account these texts, as well as eating habits, diets, and food restrictions, and the inapplicability to the original

concern that led to the prohibition of eating kitniyot, the responsum permits the eating of kitniyot on Passover.

As mara d'atra of Congregation Beth El, taking into account this teshuva, the eating of kitniyot on Passover is permitted. For those who are interested, [you can read the full teshuvah here](#). We respect each individual's personal practice. This year in particular, when there is limited food supply, the Conservative Movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards recommends that everyone consider adding kitniyot to their Passover menus.

It is important to note that Conservative movement authorities have long held that peanuts and green beans are not and were never kitniyot. Therefore, even folks who wish to maintain the traditional Ashkenazi stringency against kitniyot may eat green beans, as well as peanuts and any peanut derivatives (like peanut butter and peanut oil) on Pesach. In fact, peanuts, natural peanut butter, and peanut oil, may be purchased by anyone before Pesach without Kosher for Pesach certification, provided said items have proper year-round kosher certification and do not contain hametz ingredients.

For those who refrain from eating kitniyot on Passover, it is important to note that Kitniyot are NOT hametz and serving kitniyot will NOT make your house or your dishes non-kosher for Passover.

What Goes on the Seder Plate?

Here are a few tips for filling your seder plate this year if you have trouble finding the necessary ingredients. For *Karpas*, we usually use parsley, but it can be any vegetable. In fact, in Israel, a boiled potato is regularly used. For *Maror*, we usually use horseradish. If horseradish is not available, find other vegetables or fruits that can bring a tear to the eye if consumed raw (such as hot peppers, fresh ginger, mustard greens, or a raw lemon. For an egg and a shankbone, the Talmud (*Pesachim 114b*) offers substitutes. If one is unable to have a shankbone for their seder plate, a roasted beet is acceptable. Additionally, the Talmud says that rice (for those who eat *kitniyot*) is an acceptable replacement for a roasted egg.

How do we eliminate *Hametz* from our homes?

Eliminating the *hametz* from our homes may seem like a daunting task. However, there are a few basic steps which performed together will make your house clean and ready for *Pesach*.

1. We start by removing all leavened foods from our homes. We also understand that, especially at a time when access to all foods may be challenging, removing food from your home is both wasteful and worrisome. For that reason, you can seal off your *hametz* products in a closed off cabinet and temporarily sell your *hametz* to someone of another faith who doesn't observe Passover. Information on how to do so, and having Rabbi Olitzky serve as your agent and sell your *hametz* on your behalf is listed below.
2. The second step is cleaning and kashering your home for *Pesach*. While some see this as a burden, it can also be a spiritual practice. We rid the *hametz* from our homes. These leavened products represent our own "puffiness." The act of cleaning for Passover allows us to rid ourselves of haughtiness as well. This experience of social distancing and quarantining humbles us also.

Parts of the [Rabbinical Assembly's Passover Guide](#) are below. The general principles are: nothing that is absorbent, such as wood, can be kashered. Other materials are kashered in a way that is equivalent to the way they are used. If something is used on the stovetop, it must be immersed in boiling water. If something is used in the oven, it must have more intense heat such as by placing in a heated oven or using a blowtorch. I recommend purchasing baking pans to use only for Passover rather than risking damage or injuries! Anything that has "cold contact" like refrigerators and kitchen cupboards, needs to be wiped down and cleaned with cleanser.

Please contact [Rabbi Olitzky](#) or [Rabbi Marder](#) with specific questions you may have.

What do I do with hametz that is too valuable for me to throw out or donate?

Rabbinic tradition understood that there is a financial loss in throwing out *hametz*. Additionally, there is a concern over wasting so much food.

Especially now, we urge you to not waste food and unnecessarily throw food away. For that reason, there is also the *halakhic* concept of *Mechirat hametz*, or “selling one’s *hametz*” that is too valuable to remove from your home. This is a legal device that permits us to transfer ownership of any *hametz* that is too valuable to destroy (such as fine liquors, unopened supplies of pasta) or which has been overlooked. *Hametz* that is to be sold should be stored out of sight and sealed away for the duration of the holiday. Rabbi Olitzky will “sell” your *hametz* to someone of another faith for the duration of Passover.

Since this is a legal transaction, Rabbi Olitzky needs to be explicitly appointed to perform such a sale on your behalf. If you would like Rabbi Olitzky to serve as your agent and sell your hametz on your behalf, you can [fill out this form online](#).

It is customary to make a contribution to tzedakah at this time as well. We especially take this *mitzvah* to heart this year in our current economic reality.

Ma’ot Chittin -- It is an ancient custom to make a special solicitation for the poor in the weeks before Passover so that no one will be hungry for Passover and families have the capacity to make Seder. We encourage you to donate money to those who are currently food insecure. There are many organizations doing incredible work. Some include [Masbia Soup Kitchen](#), which is providing kosher meals to those who are food insecure and currently quarantined, and [MEND – Meeting Essential Needs with Dignity](#). While many food pantries and soup kitchens have been forced to temporarily close, including the Interfaith Food Pantry of the Oranges which we staff, MEND is still providing emergency food assistance to many clients of our local food pantries.

Shopping for Passover Food

Which foods require a Kosher for Passover certification? Which foods can be purchased without a Kosher for Passover certification during Passover and which must be bought before Passover?

NO KOSHER FOR PASSOVER HEKHSHER REQUIRED BEFORE OR DURING PASSOVER: These products may be purchased without a Pesach hekhsher before or during Pesach: baking soda, bicarbonate of soda, eggs, fresh fruits and vegetables (including pre-washed bagged_, 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 (and other pure oils), whole or gutted fresh fish, whole or half pecans, whole (unground) spices and nuts

NO KOSHER FOR PASSOVER HEKHSHER REQUIRED ONLY IF PURCHASED BEFORE PASSOVER: These are products which may only be purchased without a Pesach hekhsher before Pesach. If bought during Pesach they DO require a Pesach hekhsher: all pure fruit juices, filleted fish, frozen fruit (no additives), plain cheeses (without any flavor morsels), non-iodized salt, pure white sugar (no additives), quinoa (pure with nothing mixed in), white milk, some fair-trade chocolates should be by Equal-Exchange (check out shop.equalexchange.coop/pesach for more information), chopped meat, plain, non-flavored almond milk, rice milk, soy milk, cashew milk, non-flavored cream cheeses (with ingredients of milk and cream, salt, stabilizers (xanthan and/or carob bean and/or guar gums)), non-flavored yogurt with milk and bacteria only (which are *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus*), canned tuna (with just tuna, water or oil, salt and pyrophosphates); 100% maple syrup, 100% Agave, ground salt and peppers, plain (non-flavored) decaf coffee, plain margarine, pure honey, dried fruit

Frozen, uncooked vegetables may be processed on shared equipment that uses hametz. Therefore, it is preferable to purchase those with a kosher 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.

FOR THOSE WHO EAT KITNIYOT:

Fresh corn on the cob and fresh beans (like lima beans in their pods) may be purchased before and during *Pesach*, that is, treated like any other fresh vegetable. Dried *kitniyot* (legumes, rice and corn) can be purchased bagged or in boxes and then sifted or sorted before *Pesach*. These should ideally not be purchased in bulk from bins because of the concern that the bin might previously have been used for *hametz*, and a few grains of *hametz* might be mixed in. In any case, one should inspect these before *Pesach* and discard any pieces of *hametz*. If one did not inspect the rice or dried beans before *Pesach*, one should remove pieces of *hametz* found in the package on *Pesach*, discarding those, and the *kitniyot* themselves remain permissible. *Kitniyot* in cans may only be purchased with *Pesach* certification since the canning process has certain related *hametz* concerns, and may be purchased on *Pesach*. With regards to frozen raw *kitniyot* (corn, edamame [soy beans], etc.), one may purchase bags of frozen non-hekhsheredn *kitniyot* 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. Processed foods, including tofu, although containing no listed *hametz*, continue to require *Pesach* certification due to the possibility of admixtures of *hametz* during production. Even those who continue to observe the Ashkenazic custom of eschewing *kitniyot* during *Pesach* may eat from *Pesach* dishes, utensils and cooking vessels that have come into contact with *kitniyot* and may consume *kitniyot* derivatives like oil.

Bedikat Hametz -- Searching for Leaven

On Tuesday evening, April 7th, as soon as night has fallen, at approximately 7:57 PM, we continue the process of removal of hametz by doing Bedikat Hametz (the search for leaven) and Bitul Hametz (the nullification of leaven).

First, we light a single candle and say the blessing:

Baruch ata adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav vetzivanu al biyur hametz.

Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, ruler of the universe, that sanctified us with God's commandments and commanded us to remove hametz.

Then by candlelight we search the house for little pieces of hametz. It is customary to search for this hametz with a wooden spoon and a feather. In many cases, you may actually find crumbs. If you did a thorough job cleaning though, it may be more challenging to find hametz. For this reason, some follow the custom of actually hiding pieces of hametz to ensure that some is found when searching. This is a great ritual for all ages, but especially a hands-on opportunity for young children. After the search for the hametz is done, and all the pieces are found, we collect the pieces and the remaining leaven.

We proceed with the recitation of the formula for Bitul Hametz:

Kol Chamira v'chami'ah, d'ika virshuti d'la chami'tei ud'la vi'artei ud'la y'da'na lei li'batel v'lehavei hefker k'afra v'ar'a.

All hametz, leaven and leavened bread, in my possession which I have neither seen nor removed nor know about, should be annulled and considered ownerless, like the dust of the earth.

Bedikat Hametz kits--which include a wooden spoon and feather to pick up hametz, a candle whose light is used to search for hametz, and the blessing for searching and nullifying hametz—are available on Amazon. Feel free to make your own kit!

The next day, **Wednesday morning, April 8th**, we burn the collected leaven, *Bi'ur Hametz*, with any tools that were used to collect it. This should be done before 11:53 AM. Again, you should recite the nullification formula above as you burn the hametz. Additionally, you should not eat any leavened foods after 10:47 AM so that you will be hungry for the Matzah of the seder!!

Please note that there will not be a communal, in-person burning of hametz this year.

With the cleaning, sale, nullification and burning of hametz, your house is "Kosher for Passover"

If I am the first-born in my family, do I have special responsibilities?

Yes. In commemoration of the final plague that killed the first-born Egyptians and the saving of the Israelite first-borns who were “passed over” because their families had the first Pesach meal, we have the tradition of the Fast of the First Born. The first-borns are obligated to fast the day before Passover.

Some follow the custom of having a siyyum, completing a text of study, and thus, celebrating with a feast so that they do not have to fast the day before a holiday.

A Final Message

Each and every year, during the four questions, we ask “why is this night different from all other nights?” This year, we understand that this Passover is different from all other Passover celebrations. This year, we are practicing social distancing. This year, we are staying at home. This year, we may be quarantining ourselves. Next year, may we return to large seders, full sanctuaries, and community gatherings.
Chag Kasher v'Sameach!

PLEASE LOOK AT OUR [WEBSITE](#), WEEKLY EMAIL, AND [FACEBOOK PAGE](#) FOR WAYS TO VIRTUALLY JOIN US FOR HOLIDAY SERVICES.

A Review of the Steps to *Pesach* Preparation

1. Removal of leavened products from your home--beginning today! If you are getting rid of food, please consider donating it.
2. Cleaning and kashering your home, office, and cars.
3. Selling your Hametz through Rabbi Olitzky, *Mehirat Hametz*, by Monday, April 6th
4. Searching for your Hametz, *Bedikat Hametz*, on Tuesday, April 7th, after 7:57 PM.
5. Fast of the Firstborn on Wednesday, April 8th.
6. *Bi'ur Hametz*, on Wednesday, April 8th by 11:53 AM. (Please note that we will not be having a communal burning of the *hametz* this year.

From the Rabbinical Assembly of America's Passover Guide:

KASHERING OF KITCHEN APPLIANCES AND UTENSILS:

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 reserved for exclusive use on Pesach. This is clearly not feasible for major kitchen appliances and may not even be possible for dishes and utensils. There is a process for kashering a variety of utensils and appliances.

The general principle used in kashering is that the way the utensil absorbs food is the way it can be purged of that food כּוּלוֹ כִּי פוּלְטוֹ (ke-volo kach pol-to). This principle operates on the basis of the quality or intensity of how the particular item absorbs food. Kitchen items 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 through a process called הַגְעָלָה (hag'alah). The most intense form of kashering applies to items used directly on a fire or in an oven and these utensils require a process of kashering called לִיבּוּן (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 (הַגְעָלָה – 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 הַגְעָלָה (hag'alah, a method for kashering for Pesach), 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 הַגְעָלָה (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 (לִיבּוּן– 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 לִיבּוּן (libbun). Metal baking pans and sheets require לִיבּוּן (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. F 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 (הגעלה hag'alah).

CERAMIC DISHES

Ceramic dishes (earthenware, stoneware, china, pottery, etc) cannot be kashered. However, rabbinic tradition also takes into account the financial challenges of not being able to kasher such expensive and fine dishes. 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 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 should be heated 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 cleaned again 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 ליבון (libbun) and ערוי (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 microwave oven is turned on until the water boils over and 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.

ADDITIONAL KITCHEN APPLIANCES

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 חמץ (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

Most counter top surfaces can be kashered simply by a thorough cleaning, a 24 hour wait and ערוי (iruy – pouring boiling water over them). To have ערוי (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 ערוי (iruy).
- Wood without scratches is also kashered by ערוי (iruy).
- Ceramic, cement or porcelain counter tops cannot be kashered by ערוי (iruy).

The potential effectiveness of ערוי (iruy) depends on the material of which the counter was made. [Many have the custom of covering their countertops. If you do this, make sure that the material does not contain hametz. Covering is not necessary if the surface has been scrubbed with cleanser and covered with boiling water.]

Refrigerators and freezers should be thoroughly cleaned with detergent. If you are concerned how thoroughly the shelves must be cleaned, then you can also cover the refrigerator shelves.