

ST ALBANS ASORTI SYNAGOGUE

Registered Charity number 1011446

PO Box 23
ST ALBANS, Herts AL1 4PH
☎ 01727 860642
E-mail: info@e-sams.org, www.e-sams.org

SAMS STANDARDS Policy on *Kashrut* for Pesach

This paper sets out a standard of *kashrut* that, if followed, can leave members of SAMS confident in their own *kashrut* standard over Pesach and comfortable in inviting to their homes any Jew, from any denomination. It is a wonderful *mitzvah* to fulfil the wish of the Haggadah - 'let all who are hungry come and eat' – by meeting these standards. It is a *mitzvah* I hope you will enjoy.

The standard comes in four parts: Why, Food, Cleaning and Making Kosher the Kitchen and Vessels and Pesach that Falls on Saturday Night.

Should you have any questions about anything in this standard, please do let me know on rabbi@e-sams.org. Also, I am teaching a session on the *Halachot* of Pesach on Tuesday, 12th April, at 8pm at the Freedmans; I hope you will join me then.

SECTION I: WHY

In typical Jewish style, there are many answers to the 'Why' question. None excludes the others. Here are three:

Payback time. The obligation to keep *kosher* at Pesach is just that, an obligation. It is our due in deference to the incredible miracle of our existence, our liberation from slavery and our receiving of Torah. It is the closest we, as Rabbinic Jews, can get to acknowledging the reality of the gift of our free life, a gift beyond price.

Spring cleaning. Leaven is fermented; it is part of last year's harvest. At Pesach we forgo leaven; we use only the new harvest. Pesach is a time to clear out old stock. We check the inventory not just of our cupboards, but also of ourselves and through our cleaning and observance of *kashrut* we become renewed.

The *Hametz* Inside. We are made up of a holy spark, pure and perfect. For much of the year we are involved in the mucky business of the 'real world', but for the days of Pesach we get back in touch with that simplicity, with who we really are, and what we really stand for.

For more thoughts on why we should observe these and other *mitzvot* please see:

http://www.responsafortoday.com/about/conserv_halakhah.pdf

SECTION II: FOOD

Hametz

The Bible prohibits not only eating *hametz* on Pesach, but also owning it. The prohibition is so strong that any *hametz* owned by a Jew during the days of Pesach is forbidden, even after Pesach has long gone. Furthermore it is also forbidden to eat the mixture of *hametz* with any other normal food.

Hametz is 'any food prepared from five species of grain – wheat, barley, oats, spelt and rye – which has been allowed to leaven'.

Things to note:

- If it is not food, it can't count as *hametz*. Make-up, PVA glue, washing up liquid, etc. are not *hametz*. The test of whether something is or is not food is 'whether a dog would eat it'. This may depend on your dog's personal dietary habits, but despite the best intentions of some SAMS' canines, shoes and trouser legs do not count as food.
- The prohibition of owning *hametz* over Pesach does not apply to things that are not *hametz*. You do not have to throw out tea, toothbrushes, etc. in order to meet this standard, even if you wouldn't wish to use them during Pesach.

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Getting Rid of *Hametz*

The Rabbis offer a belt, buckle and braces approach.

- First you should remove any *hametz*. A good spring clean is a lovely thing to do, but to meet the standard of the Rabbis it is necessary only to remove bits of *hametz* that are larger than the size of an olive.
- Next you should perform a *bittul* – nullification. This is done twice, once during the search for *hametz* (this year on Thursday night) and once on the morning of Seder night (this year Saturday). The formula can be recited in English as follows:

All hametz in my possession, whether I have seen it or not, whether I have removed it or not, shall be nullified and be ownerless as the dust of the earth.

This is a key part of the preparation process. Even if you have cleaned perfectly, it should be said.

- Finally, you should authorize me, or another Rabbi, to perform a *mechirah* – or sale to a non-Jew – of any *hametz* you do not wish to nullify or throw away. This is an extraordinary leniency from the Rabbis, bending over to make Pesach less onerous and less costly. It is designed to allow us to hang on to bottles of whiskey, save slices from our wedding cakes, etc. It has been mocked, but I always delight in the flexibility and sensitivity this notion allows. I would recommend it even if you think you have cleaned perfectly and you don't think you have anything physical to sell. To sell *hametz* you must contact me to let me know that you wish me to sell your *hametz*. Please do this in writing (e-mail is best). You should then put the *hametz* in a sealed container or room and leave it until Monday morning, 2nd May.

Certification

Prepared foodstuffs need certification. For a couple of years I used to eat lots of *kosher l'pesach* specially prepared foods, but came to feel that they are somehow not right. Pesach is a wonderful time to go more natural, using more fresh ingredients and fewer processed foods.

There is no need for certification for any non-food products. For things like toothpaste I would buy a new tube before Pesach and use that. There is no need for certification for fruit, vegetables, fish or meat.

Mixtures of *Hametz* and Non-*Hametz*

The Rabbis make a clear distinction between mixtures of foods that were owned before Pesach and mixtures that were purchased only during Pesach. A tiny amount of *hametz* mixed with a massive quantity of normal food ON Pesach renders the whole amount of food not kosher. But if the mixing took place BEFORE Pesach and you perform a *bittul* (see above) on the eve of Pesach then any mixed-in *hametz* is nullified and it can be used on Pesach.

Note:

This has a huge implication in terms of the foods that need certification as *kosher l'pesach*. Simple foodstuffs, subjected to an absolute minimum of processing, do not require certification IF bought before Pesach. On this list I would include foods such as unflavoured coffees, fruit juices, spices, ground nuts, etc. If you wish to make use of this leniency these foods should be bought before Pesach, left unopened until after the house has been made kosher. All these foods, however, need certification if bought during Pesach.

Kitniyot – Often translated as 'Legumes'

I can understand how *kitniyot* might have come to be prohibited. In a world where one could walk into a market and buy identical sacks containing either corn-flour or wheat-flour, it made sense to stay away from anything that could be confused for *hametz* at Pesach time. There has never, however, been a definitive

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definition or even a definitive list as to what would be covered and over time things seem to have gone a little out of control.

- Firstly, *kitniyot* are not *hametz*; owning them is no problem and using them cannot *treif* a house.
- Secondly, only Ashkenazi Jews abstain from eating them.
- Thirdly, I am inclined to keep the list narrow. I would include pulses, rice and corn, but not peanuts or garlic, and not oil products.
- Fourthly, for families who keep vegetarian or for other reasons worry about their diet over a *kitniyot*-free Pesach I would rely upon a legal ruling of my teacher Rabbi David Golinkin, who takes a very hostile approach to what he understands to be 'a mistaken or foolish custom'. More information on this ruling can be found at: http://www.responsafortoday.com/eng_index.html (English summaries Vol. 3).

SECTION III: CLEANING AND MAKING KOSHER THE KITCHEN AND VESSELS

Many people have entire sections of kitchenware that can be switched over for Pesach. If you do not it is possible to make many items of kitchenware kosher for Pesach, and even if you have entirely separate pots and pans there is still work to be done on surfaces, ovens, etc.

To kosher a vessel all three of the following procedures need to be followed:

- **The vessel must be clean of any markings of its previous use.**
All marks must be removed. In the case of well-used saucepans, etc. it may not be possible to remove deeply cooked-in stains. These pans cannot be koshered. I would consider it impossible to remove *schmutz* from joins in a vessel, or between the vessel and its handle. These vessels cannot be koshered.
- **The vessel must be left unused for 24 hours after its last use with the ingredient that is to be purged before being koshered [*ben yomo*].**
- **Ingredients that are absorbed into a vessel are secreted and can be purged from the vessel in the same way in which they were originally absorbed [*k'volvo, kach polto*].**

The key issues in understanding how an ingredient has been absorbed are the level of heat the vessel has been subjected to and the material of manufacture. Again these processes only apply once the vessel has been cleaned and left for 24 hours.

- A **pot** that has been used on a stove top, **metal kitchen utensils** and **metal cutlery** used for eating hot food can be koshered by being dunked in boiling water [*hagalah*]. **Big pots** (as opposed to pans) can be koshered if filled to overflowing with boiling water (so both inside and outside of the vessel are covered by the water); this is usually done by filling a pot with water then dropping a stone in the water causing a small amount of water to flow over the top and down the sides. Fragile vessels of this type that cannot be dunked cannot be koshered.
- It is very difficult to render **plastic ware** spotlessly clean and free of any markings of use, but this is necessary if it is to be made *kosher* by *hagalah*.
- **Metal pans** used in the oven are very difficult to clean thoroughly. I would consider it impossible to clean these pans properly; if, however, this can be done a metal pan can be rendered kosher by *libun* – heating the pan to an extreme heat for thirty minutes. **Ceramic pans** cannot be made *kosher*.
- **Ovens, stovetops** and **grills** also need *libun*. Self-cleaning ovens can be cleaned using the self-cleaning function. Other ovens and stoves should be turned on and up to the highest heat and left for 30 minutes. Grills that can be rendered spotlessly clean can be made kosher in a self-cleaning oven or cleaned with high heat for a similar length of time. Again, where it is not possible to clean a grill so it appears clean to the eye, it cannot be made kosher. In these circumstances foil should be

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used to wrap either the grill or food before it is cooked. **Gas hobs** can be made kosher by *libun* but are very difficult to get spotlessly clean and can be covered with foil for the week of Pesach.

- **Sinks, worktops and tables** that come into contact with hot foods or liquids but are not actually used for cooking can be koshered by pouring hot water over a clean surface [*irui*]. A draining rack or large bowl should be used in sinks in which dishes or pots are left to soak. A table that is used for hot foods during the year, but cannot withstand *irui*, should be cleaned and covered at Pesach.
- **Ceramics** are held by the Rabbis to be so porous that what they have previously absorbed can never be fully purged. Ceramic vessels including plates, mugs, etc. cannot be koshered.
- **Glass** is held by the Rabbis to be impervious to absorbing food and, theoretically, does not need to be koshered. I would recommend a standard dishwasher cycle. **Pyrex** can be treated as glass.
- A **microwave** oven can be made kosher if cleaned and then put on high for 10 minutes with a bowl of water inside. (Ensure the water does not run out or the oven may be damaged.)
- **Dishwashers** should be put through an entire cycle on the hottest setting before being used to clean vessels for use at Pesach.
- **Other items of kitchen machinery** present a range of challenges - please contact me with any specific queries.

One-time-use vessels can be an easy way-out of making a kitchen kosher at Pesach, but they come at an increasingly untenable cost for our planet. *Baal tashchit* is the halachic principle that prohibits wasting natural resources. Please take whatever steps you can to reduce wastage caused by one-time-use-vessels and in particular please avoid the most ecologically damaging one-time-use-vessels such as those made of polystyrene.

If you are living in a kitchen that is not yours to kosher and those you are living with are unwilling to see it made kosher, please contact me and we can discuss which of various options might work best for you and your situation.

SECTION IV: PESACH THAT FALLS ON SATURDAY NIGHT

This situation, which last occurred in 1994, presents several problems, particularly in the run up to Seder night.

- Many of the rituals that usually take place on the day before Seder night cannot be done on Shabbat. These include the lovely searching for *hametz* with a candle, burning *hametz* on the morning of Seder night and the fast of the first born. The Rabbis decreed that all these rituals should take place on Thursday night and Friday morning.
- This means the kitchen, etc. should be cleaned at the latest by Thursday night.
- This presents a problem regarding food for Shabbat. On the one hand the Rabbis mandate having two loaves on the table for Shabbat meals, on the other hand they mandate not eating *matzah* in the run up to Pesach to increase the excitement of eating what is called the *matzah* of *mitzvah*. Several options are discussed. The one I strongly recommend and will follow myself is eating *matzah ashirah* or egg *matzah* on Shabbat. Available in any Jewish food store, egg *matzah* is a little too like *matzah* for the purists, but a far easier way of dealing with a difficult circumstance than other options.
- Finally, please do not forget to include *havdalah* during the Seder night itself. You should find the prayers in any Haggadah.

Again, should you have any questions, please do let me know.
Very best wishes for a kosher and joyful Pesach,

Rabbi Jeremy Gordon
St. Albans Masorti Synagogue
March 2005, Adar II 5765