



Pesach in the Period of Coronavirus

RCA

(based of *piskei halachah* of Rav Herschel Schachter)

Important message: Any leniencies listed below are to be implemented only this year due to the exigencies and challenges posed by the Coronavirus pandemic and considerations of *pikua'ach nefesh*. God willing, we will return to a time of normalcy and we will return to our regular practices and *piskei Halachah*.

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Hechsher Kelim

1. There should not be communal *kashering* of *kelim* this year.
2. Rather than *kashering kelim*, Rav Schachter prefers that *ba'alei battim* use or purchase *kelim* for Pesach use. He feels that most *ba'alei battim* will not know how to *kasher kelim* properly.
3. Nevertheless, many *ba'alei battim* do *kasher kelim* and they should be instructed how to do this properly. The rabbi should share instructions in writing and over the internet. In addition, there are many guides and videos available.
4. Dishwashers:
 - a. If all of the material of the walls of the dishwasher are metal, even if the metal may contain a certain percentage of porcelain, since the metal is the majority we can *kasher* the dishwasher for Pesach.
 - b. It is permissible to *kasher* a dishwasher whose walls are plastic.

- c. Ashkenazim have a Minhag to not *kasher* glass utensils for Pesach; therefore, even if only part of the inside wall or door of the dishwasher consists of glass Ashkenazim should not *kasher*.
 - d. One must carefully clean the dishwasher, including the area of the drain (which may need some disassembly).
 - e. One must first wait 24 hours without using the dishwasher. Then one should run the empty dishwasher on a full cycle. The cleaning cycle should be run with the hottest water possible and no detergent.
 - i. If people in the home are using hot water at that time then the water in the dishwasher may not be hot enough
 - f. The custom for Ashkenazim is that a *kashering* should only be done in order to remove the status of something that is *Treif* or *Chametz*. However, this should not be done in order to make a vessel that is dairy into *Pareve* or a meat vessel into *Pareve*.
 - g. In general, the *kashering* of a dishwasher relies on a number of leniencies; it applies only to this year.
5. It is preferable to rely upon lenient valid halachic positions that one may not usually rely upon rather than to expose oneself to the virus by going out in public.
- a. Plastic: Since, *mei-ikkar ha-din*, one may *kasher* plastic, even those who do not rely on this opinion in general, may *kasher* plastic in case of great need.
 - b. Glass: *Minhag Ashkenaz* is to consider glass as *kli cheres* that is *bolei'a* and therefore not to *kasher* glass. *Besha'at ha-dechak* one may rely upon the *ikkar ha-din* and *kasher* glass.

Tevilat Kelim

1. If the *kelim mikvah* is open: Those who have access to a *kelim Mikvah* should:
 - a. Prepare *kelim* (remove stickers, packaging, etc.) prior to going to the *mikvah*.
 - b. The *mikvah* water must be properly chlorinated.
 - c. Wash hands prior to and after immersing *kelim*.
 - d. Wipe down areas in the *mikvah* before and after immersion.
 - e. Remove all trash from *mikvah* area after use.
 - f. Social distancing must be properly observed at the *mikvah*.
2. A person may immerse *kelim* in a natural body of water that meets the requirements of a kosher *mikvah*.
3. One must make certain, when immersing vessels, that the entire vessel is immersed at the same time without any *hatzitzah*.
4. If a *mikvah* or natural body of water is unavailable, there are three options: selling the *kelim* to a non-Jew, gifting the *kelim* to a non-Jew, *hefker kelim* (relinquishing ownership of the vessels). If actual immersion is impossible, it is preferable to sell or gift the vessels. *Hefker* should be used when no other option is possible.
 - a. Selling *Kelim*: The Beth Din of America is facilitating sale of *kelim*. See here: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc9lrSF0L328QRUIFA3D4YpAcotZgrav-u6UAFDXZXCquxDw/viewform>
 - b. Gifting to a non-Jew: While this is a valid method of transferring ownership, it may be practically complicated by restrictions of social distancing. If one does gift *kelim* to a

non-Jew the non-Jew must take possession of the *kelim* by taking physical possession of the *kelim* through *hagba'ah*. Following the sale or gifting of the *kelim*, the Jew may then borrow the *kelim* for his/her personal use. As soon it is possible to safely immerse the *kelim*, the Jew should reacquire the *kelim* from the non-Jew and immerse them, without a *bracha*, in a kosher *mikvah*.

- c. *Hefker*- When declaring the utensils as ownerless one must:
 - i. Have full intent that they are truly declaring the items as truly ownerless and that if someone were to take the item before the original owner were to reclaim them they would be willing to let the item go.
 - ii. The declaration must be to 3 people who live in your neighborhood, so that one of them has the ability to potentially acquire the item and two people could be witnesses to say that the other person did not steal the item. 2 of the people should be valid Halachic witnesses.
 - iii. This doesn't have to be done in front of 3 people. It can be declared over email or social media to 3 people. After declaring that the items are ownerless you should move the items out of your physical house or apartment and let them remain outside for a few minutes where someone could potentially come and take them.

Mechirat Chametz

1. *Shtar Harsha'ah*

- a. *Kabbalat Kinyan* is not necessary when appointing an agent to sell one's *chametz* and one may appoint the rabbi over the telephone or the internet. (Rabbi Soloveitchik, nevertheless, was stringent to fulfill the *minhag* of *kabbalat kinyan*, and suggested that one could make a *kinyan sudar* with someone who is with him/her at the time that he/she is appointing the rabbi.)
 - b. The *shtar harsha'ah* may be stored online. When selling the *chametz* to the non-Jew, it is sufficient to give the non-Jew, in writing, the names of those who are selling their *chametz*, as well as online access to all of the other information.
 - c. Examples of online *shtarei harsha'ah* can be found at:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScBtOW5PKTyvKTDRT0Eb4APht5BvxUf1anCP1Oloog_l2kenA/viewform and https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1oEA5oG_r6GO-R_I9nCGwK4bJHLNWj00eQAJTYB6Up7k/viewform?edit_requested=true.
2. Those who cannot get to their offices can still sell their *chometz* that is in their office, together with all the other *chometz* that they are selling.
 3. A rabbi can take advantage of arranging for his online appointment to sell *chametz* with Rav Mordechai Willig as the seller by going to <http://rabbanan.org/?p=29309>. There are links there to register for this service, as well as links to the CRC form as well. There is also a recording of Rav Willig's webinar which describes all of the intricacies of *mekhirat chametz*.
 4. A rabbi who performs his own *mechirat chametz* this year should be careful to observe all of the details of social distancing.

Kosher le-Pesach Food Supervision (according to *Piskei Halachah* of Rav Mordechai Willig)

1. One may be lenient regarding *kitniyot* derivatives (which is only a *chumra*) if additional shopping is required to obtain foods without such derivatives, especially for those in graver danger (i.e., over age 60).
2. One may buy milk without special *kasher le-Pesach hashgachah* before Pesach.
3. One need not buy new spices for Pesach.
4. If a non-*mehadrin* product is kosher *mei-ikkar ha-din*, it is better to use that product than to go shopping.
5. If a product without special *kasher le-Pesach* supervision is *kasher le-Pesach mei-ikkar ha-din*, it is better to use that product than to go shopping.

Ta'anit Bechorim

1. Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin wrote that in our time the custom of firstborn sons fasting no longer exists because everyone participates in a *siyum*. There is clearly no mandate to fast since we find people don't participate in an actual *Seudas Mitzvah* and instead, following the *siyum*, they simply partake of some juice and cookies. Therefore, Rabbi Henkin felt it was proper to give *tzedakah* to take the place of the custom of fasting.
2. One may participate in a *siyum* over the phone or internet.

Bi'ur Chametz

1. There should be no communal burning of *chametz* this year.
2. Rav Schachter is of the opinion that:
 - a. There is a real danger when people make fires on their property.
 - b. When people make small fires, the heat is not intense enough to burn the Chametz all the way to the center and sometimes people are left with edible Chametz that they did not realize was still there.
 - c. We must also be careful of the public perception that Jews are going about their business as usual and conducting their affairs in public while the rest of the world is confining themselves to their homes. It could appear as if the Jewish people are not sharing the burden and pain with the rest of humanity because of our religion.
3. If one does burn *chametz* (subject to the approval of local fire authorities) : Place the crumbs in a barbeque or fire pit, soak with lighter fluid, and only the 10 small pieces of chametz.
4. Flushing *chametz*: Rav Schachter is of the opinion that the best way to perform *bi'ur chametz* this year is:
 - a. Limit the amount of leftover *chametz* we have in our possession on the morning of *Erev Pesach*.
 - b. A small amount of *chametz* (no more than a *k'zayis* is needed) should be crushed into tiny particles, so as to not clog the plumbing, and flushed (without any bags or wrapping) in the toilet.
5. Disposal of other *chametz*
 - a. Other *chametz* should be disposed of in trash and left in cans at the curb. Since the trash cans are still in the Jew's *reshut*, *bittul* and *hefker* is insufficient. One should pour bleach (or some other substance) on the *chametz* to render it *nifsal mei-achilat kelev*.

Matzah Shemurah

1. Current understanding of the Coronavirus indicates that there is no danger in consuming handmade *matzot* regardless of when it was baked.

2. Both handmade and machine-made *matzah shemurah* are *kasher le-chatchilah* for *matzot mitzvah*.
3. *Be-sha'at ha-dechak*, only when *shemurah matzah* is unavailable, one may use regular *matzah* for *matzat mitvah*.
4. One does not require *hatarat nedarim* if he/she is unable to keep personal *minhagim* regarding types of *matzah* they usual eat (i.e., 18 minute, hand only, *shemurah* only).
5. If other food is not available, one who normally does not eat *gebrokhts* may eat it this year without *hatarat nedarim*.

Zoom Seder

If the government or a physician has decided that an individual must remain in isolation over the course of *Yom Tov* and this individual has a psychological condition where physicians who know this patient have determined that there is a possibility that this person being alone over the course of *Yom Tov* would be in a situation of *pikuach nefesh* (possible suicide) if the individual was not able to communicate or speak with family members, then the family members must reach out to this person over *Yom Tov* to speak on the phone or use the internet by leaving a connection open from before *Yom Tov*. Rav Moshe Feinstein has decided that, in certain circumstances, psychological danger is considered life threatening. Rabbi Soloveitchik went further and noted, in the name of his grandfather Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, that even if there is a concern that someone will lose his or her mind even if their life is not in danger, that too is considered a case of *pikuach nefashos*.

If a person is physically ill and alone and the physicians have determined that there is a possibility of the condition deteriorating further to a point of being life threatening, then the family must remain in contact using electronic devices with that person over the course of *Yom Tov* in order to check on the person's wellbeing.

If a parent who is ill lives outside of Israel and the parent has a non-Jewish aid then the children who live in Israel are allowed to call the non-Jew and speak with the non-Jew when it is *Yom Tov* outside of Israel and not *Yom Tov* in Israel in order to check in on the parent. Those family members in Israel can also ask the non-Jew to show the parent a live screen of the family so that the patient can see that his family members are safe and healthy. It is also proper to tell the non-Jewish aid in America that if the patient is upset or concerned over *Yom Tov* and the patient would like to speak to family members, then the non-Jew should remind the patient that it is Passover or the Sabbath and that after the Sabbath and holiday is over they will certainly be able to speak on the phone.

However, if someone is not as ill as described above, however they must be confined and alone because of the circumstances related to the Coronavirus then they may not use any electronic devices in order to connect to family members on Shabbos and *Yom Tov*. Although it is painful and sad to be alone and people want to be with family and friends, this is not a *sakanas nefashos*, a life threatening situation, and there is no place at all to allow the violation of *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*.

If a person were to leave the phone on before *Yom Tov* and conduct a *Pesach Seder* from their home so that others can follow along (like *Baalei Teshuvah* who may not know how to run a *Seder*) there may be reason to be lenient under great and pressing circumstances. However, to leave a computer screen on and to have people watch and connect over the internet is a greater concern of violating *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* since it creates images and pictures when the people move. Another possible suggestion for

those who are unfamiliar with the Pesach *Seder* is to create videos of how to run a Pesach *Seder* and in the weeks leading up to Pesach people can watch and learn from this video in order to know what to do when Pesach arrives. However, the video may not be played over *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*. If the individual in need of help is handicapped and these preparations from before *Yom Tov* are not sufficient then they should rely on listening to the live *Seder* over the phone.

If the government and medical professionals have said that it is not safe for parents and children to be together then children may not visit for Pesach, even at the insistence of the parents. Not listening to the parents in this situation is not a violation of *Kibbud Av V'Em*.

Some have recommended Zoom gatherings with extended family and friends on erev yom tov. This will create an opportunity for grandparents to hear their grandchildren sing Mah Nishtanah and for the family to sing familiar songs and share divrei Torah.

Hallel

When one *davens be-yechiut*, *Hallel* is not to be recited during *ma'ariv*/

1. One does not recite *Tefilat Tal* when *davening be-yechidut*.
2. One should not say *mashiv ha-ru'ach* during *Musaf* when *davening be-yechidut*. Rav Schachter feels that even one who does not normally say *morid ha-tal*, should add *morid ha-tal* at least on the first day of Pesach during *Musaf*.

Tachanun and Avinu Malkeinu

1. One should not say *Tachanun* or *Avinu Malkeinu* during the month of Nisan.

Yizkor

1. Individuals can recite *Yizkor be-yechidut* on the last day of Pesach.
2. Communities may arrange a communal *Yizkor* over the internet on *chol ha-mo'ed*.

Kah Keli

1. *Kah Keli* is not recited when *davening be-yechidut*.

Minhagim

Rav Schachter said:

Regarding the observance of *Minhagim* and stringencies during times when keeping these practices are difficult: Generally, if one wants to discontinue observing one's *Minhagim* and stringencies it would require annulling the vow, *Hataras Nedarim*. However, if a person is in a situation where they would like to continue following their customs and now circumstances have made it difficult to keep the *Minhag* for the time being, then it is understood that under difficult circumstances the practice of the stringency should not apply. Therefore, one can suspend the practice of the custom or stringency without annulling the vow with *Hataras Nedarim*. When the circumstances return to the way they were before the crisis then the individual should continue practicing their customs as before. It is important for individuals and families to ask their rabbi what is a *Din* (a real law) and what is a *Minhag*, a custom.