

The Rabbi's Guide to Passover

We are once again preparing for Passover, one of the most widely observed and yet most complicated of all Jewish traditions. What follows here are general guidelines on the observance of Passover that I include in *Temple Talk* each year. I understand that there are various degrees to which Passover is kept in our various homes, and I respect all ways that Judaism is marked in our families. What follows are guidelines for keeping kosher-for-Passover according to my reading of Jewish law.

To keep kosher for Passover, the first thing that one must do is rid the household of *hametz* (i.e., food that is not kosher-for-Passover). This is because we are not only forbidden to eat hametz during Passover, we are also forbidden to own it.

Selling of Hametz. One tries to finish up foodstuffs in the house, especially perishables. What one does not finish, if unopened, may be donated for the hungry. All opened foodstuffs are considered hametz, since they may have come into contact with hametz. What one wishes to keep, one must “sell” for the week of Passover. I, and most rabbis, act as agents for their communities in the sale of hametz. Individuals will authorize me to sell their hametz. I then, as the collective agent, sell the hametz of the community to a non-Jew, in our case, Maureen, Jose or Tina. The sale will be written in such a way that Maureen, while owning all the hametz, will not actually take possession of it until after Passover. But by that time, the sale will have been cancelled and ownership will revert back to the original owners. Trust me, Maureen will not come to possess our liquor cabinets! However, since we do not actually own this food during Passover, what we do is put the non-perishable foods away, out of sight. They can be stored for the week in the garage or basement. Or they can be kept in the pantry, and if so, the pantry or specific cabinets containing such foods should be closed off with masking tape (so we don't accidentally eat Maureen's food). You can authorize me to sell your hametz by filling out the form contained in *Temple Talk* and faxing, sending or delivering it to the synagogue office, or by emailing me at rabbi@synagogue.org and asking me to sell all hametz in your possession no later than the date specified each year. I do need the authorization in writing (so please no voicemail messages), and the authorization must contain the address (or addresses) of property where you want the hametz to be sold. It is customary to make a small donation with the authorization to sell hametz. If you give me cash, or send in a check for the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund with a note that it is for Passover, I will forward the funds to Mazon, a national Jewish organization based in Los Angeles that collects food to feed the hungry. As we start to shop for our family seders, let us not forget this important mitzvah of providing for others.

Making the kitchen kosher for Passover. Making the kitchen kosher for Passover means cleaning out the fridge of all foodstuffs (or taping off the shelves of the fridge containing sold hametz) and thoroughly cleaning all the counters, tables, cabinets and other areas where food is stored, prepared, cooked and served. Some will cover their countertops and shelves with lining (or aluminum foil) to signify that those areas are kosher-for-Passover and to prevent contact with any hametz that might not have been cleaned. All flatware, dishes and cooking utensils must also be stored away or taped off. The easiest thing to do is to have separate sets of Passover dishes, utensils and pots and pans. That is preferable to “kashering.” But if one must, metal items can be “kashered”

by submersion in boiling water after cleaning. Take your largest metal pot and boil water in it so that the water boils over. That pot is now kosher for Passover. Then, drop metal utensils in the pot of boiling water, and those become kosher for Passover in turn. Make sure to keep the kashered items separate from the other items. There are some rabbinic opinions that treat hard plastics the same as metal. That is, if the plastic can withstand boiling water, then it can be kashered. I prefer not to kasher plastics. The Conservative movement also permits the kashering of glassware simply through the dishwasher. We have always done that in my family. The more traditional opinion is soaking the glassware in water for 72 hours. Finally, earthenware and wooden utensils should not be kashered. There is, of course, the tradition that fine expensive china can be kashered by not being used for a period of six months to a year. This tradition is to save us from losing our “inheritance” just because the china wasn’t kosher. While we may want our best china to be used for Passover, it is acceptable to use even paper plates, if that is done in order to observe and celebrate the traditions of Passover. However, we should also be mindful of not overproducing waste. Simple glass dishware is always a simple solution for Passover.

Finally, there are parts of the kitchen that cannot be exchanged for Passover, like the sink, stove, oven, and dishwasher. If the sink is metal, pour boiling water over it. If it is porcelain (which is unfortunate from the point of view of Jewish law) then use a plastic sink liner for Passover. The stovetop should be cleaned and that is sufficient (unless you eat off the stovetop. If you do, just don’t do that on Passover!). The self-cleaning device for a conventional oven will kasher the oven. If the oven does not have a self-cleaning mechanism, then a blowtorch is required to kasher the oven. One “hit” with the blowtorch will suffice. But only use that if you know how! The best thing to do with a barbeque is just to cover the grills with tinfoil. (While I have been informed that that may not be good for the food, I know of no other way to kasher a barbeque short of installing new racks.) The dishwasher should be run once with an empty load.

Buying Passover Foods. Fruits and vegetables and (kosher) meats are kosher for Passover. Just rinse them with water as you normally should do. Everything else is more complicated. Milk does not require a kosher-for-Passover marking if it is bought prior to Passover so buy your milk before Passover. All processed foods should have a kosher-for-Passover marking. Because so many ingredients are added to foodstuffs today, it is easier to buy only kosher-for-Passover foods. We are fortunate to live in an area where there are plenty of kosher products available. Our supermarkets and local kosher butchers carry many items that are kosher-for-Passover.

The “Nullification of Hametz”. Two nights before the start of Passover, we search, with a candle, the house for hametz a ritual that I always looked forward to growing up, and we burn the hametz (in the driveway in a paper bag, perhaps contained in a tin) the next morning. When we burn the hametz we recite a formula that nullifies all hametz in our possession that we know or don’t know of. The purpose of this is to protect us just in case we forgot to either sell or get rid of certain hametz. It is a legal “safeguard” and meaningful ritual at the same time. The text with instructions is found in most haggadot for Passover in the first few pages.

The Day Before Passover. The day before Passover, or the day of the first seder, when we mark **the Fast of the Firstborn** when firstborn are asked to fast from sun-up

until the seder to remember the first born of Egypt who died in the tenth plague. Traditionally, synagogues hold a **siyyum** after minyan on that morning when the rabbi or someone else teaches the concluding paragraph of a tractate of Talmud, following which it is a mitzvah to celebrate with a meal, taking precedence over the fast. By attending the siyyum and then having a bite to eat, one can be exempted from the fast. While this observance has been traditionally limited to first-born males, in my opinion it ought to include first-born females, as well. Temple Israel and Glen Rock Jewish Center traditionally combine for the siyyum for erev Pesach.

Hametz is not supposed to be eaten after around 11am. However, matzah is not permitted to be eaten until the Seder. So, while the siyyum exempts the first born from fasting, there is not much to eat during most of the day in any case. But we all know that there will be much food to come in the evening.

The Passover Seder. We celebrate the Seder on both the first and second nights of Passover. Some years, we make second seder together as a community, at Temple Israel. The Haggadah is the special book containing the Seder service. There are more haggadot published than any other book in the world. At a Jewish bookstore or online you will find a wonderful selection. I generally recommend the Rabbinical Assembly haggadah, *The Feast of Freedom*.

Yom Tov and Hol HaMoed. The first two and the last two days of the Passover holiday are called “yom tov” or festivals. These days are treated like Shabbat in that we are supposed to refrain from work. Temple Israel holds festival services on those days similar to our Shabbat services. The “intermediate days” between the festival days are called “Hol HaMoed” when we still eat only kosher-for-Passover foods, but we are permitted to work.

Yizkor. On the final day of Passover, we say the Yizkor prayers at synagogue, remembering those who used to celebrate with us and are here no longer. It is customary to make a donation to the synagogue where Yizkor is said in memory of our loved ones.

End of Passover. When the eight-day Passover observance ends, many enjoy a hearty meal of carbs that evening!

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions regarding these guidelines, or any other matters of concern about the holiday.

Passover has a special greeting: *hag kasher v'sameah* (a kosher and a happy holiday!). Usually we just say *hag sameah* (happy holiday!) on Jewish festivals. But on Passover we wish one another a kosher and happy holiday, because we are challenged to keep kosher-for-Passover for eight days.

Alla, Laurence, Ariel and I wish you and yours a kosher and happy Passover. Hag kasher v'sameah.