

PHILOTORAH

MATZA GUIDE

This is an attempt to clarify several issues about MATZA which people are not always aware of. As clear and thorough as we have tried to be, there will probably be confusion in some readers' minds on some points in this guide. When in doubt about any of the points concerned, please consult a Rav for clarification. We pray to HaShem, that we should only help educate and inspire our fellow Jews to better observance and appreciation of Torah and mitzvot, and not G-d forbid, inadvertently trip anyone into transgression. Read carefully and ask questions when you are not sure.

Matza P'shuta a.k.a. Regular Matza

The recipe for matza is simple - flour and water. The flour requires special preparation and supervision to be Pesach flour. The chametz process accelerates with the addition of any other ingredient. Therefore, our Sages insist on flour and water only. They calculated that flour mixed with water (at room temperature and other controlled conditions) can become chametz if not baked within 18 minutes. Therefore, the baking process is geared towards this timing. Each 18 minutes (a little less), equipment and surfaces that come into contact with

dough are cleaned. Matza that is baked from flour and water without specific intention "for the sake of the mitzva" and without the extra-special supervision (see below) is certified chametz-free and usable on Pesach, but because it is not SH'MURA (see below), it should not be used to fulfill the mitzva on the first night. (If it can qualify in extenuating circumstances should be the subject of a Rabbinic query.)

Matza Sh'mura a.k.a. Shmura Matza

The Torah prohibits eating and possessing chametz on Pesach. Because of this, flour is milled and stored with exacting standards to assure a chametz-free product. But this is not the whole story. The Torah requires that we "guard the matzot". This is explained as an additional requirement above and beyond the procedures for non-chametz matza. There are two aspects of the preparation of matza that give it this higher status of Shmura.

(1) Regular matza is baked from flour that is supervised from the time that the wheat is ground into flour - MI-SH'AT T'CHINA. This is the minimum requirement of matza to guarantee that it is not chametz. Shmura requires supervision from the time the wheat was cut from the ground - MI-SH'AT K'TZIRA. Think of "from grinding" as police protection, and "from reaping" as an honor guard and/or a high alert situation. This is part of what matza shmura is.

(2) Matza for the mitzva must be baked specifically for that purpose.

Thus, SHMURA MATZA is MORE than minimum in these two significant ways. This is the matza which we should use for the mitzva at the Seder. Some use Shmura matza exclusively throughout Pesach; some for the first day; some only for the Seder. Some use shmura only for the fulfillment of the mitzva. As a minimum, each person should have shmura matza for the mitzvot of Matza, Koreich, and Afikoman.

One more variation: For all of Pesach, shmura for making HaMotzi, even though regular matzot are also eaten during the meal and/or in recipes. Although the obligation to eat matza exists only on Seder night, there is a fulfillable mitzva to eat matza all seven days of Pesach.

First Oven a.k.a. First 18 minutes

Periodically (once a day, usually at night) matza-making equipment receives a very thorough cleaning. This is above and beyond the cleaning done every 18 minutes. There are people who insist on using only matza that is baked during the first 18 minutes following intensive cleaning. First 18 minute matza is more expensive than regular. First Oven Matzot can be 'regular' or sh'mura.

Hand vs. Machine

Shmura matza is available in two forms:

square machine-made matzot and large round hand-made matzot. Many people prefer hand matzot especially for the mitzvot at the Seder. Some people feel that "baking for the sake of the mitzva" intention is more direct and "real" when the matza is prepared and baked by hand, rather than the impersonal flicking of switches and operation of levers, etc. that constitute the human actions in the machine-baking process.

Others feel that the machine matzot can also have the full KAVANA for the mitzva and will choose their shmura based on taste and price, considering the "religious standards" of hand and machine to be comparable.

And then there are those people who feel that there is a greater likelihood of human error when matzot are hand-produced. They consider today's machines to be capable of kneading dough, rolling to a uniform thinness, etc. far more efficiently than humans. These people insist on machine matzot and will not use hand matzot at all.

There are definitely two ways (at least) of looking at the issue of hand vs. machine.

Matza Ashira a.k.a. Egg Matza

Read all the way through to avoid misconceptions about permissibility for Ashkenazim.

The Shulchan Aruch says that flour kneaded with liquids other than water -

e.g. wine, apple cider, honey, egg - cannot become chametz... ever. Water is a necessary ingredient in chametz, just as it is a necessary ingredient of matza. No water, no chametz. (The wine and other liquids mentioned above have to be pure and undiluted - not reconstituted with water.) Based upon this statement in the Shulchan Aruch, we would be allowed to bake water-free matzot and cookies for Pesach. Care would have to be taken not to allow any water into the mixture, since this will likely produce chametz - and at an accelerated, uncontrollable rate. This warning is stated in the Shulchan Aruch. Based on the above, there is a Kosher for Pesach product known as EGG MATZA or MATZA ASHIRA, which is completely non-chametz.

Egg matza cannot be used for the mitzva of matza for at least two reasons.

(1) The mitzva is performed with that which would have become chametz if given enough time. This is not the case with egg matza, as mentioned earlier.

(2) Egg matza is also called MATZA ASHIRA, rich matza. Because of the tastier ingredients and softer consistency, egg matza does not qualify as LECHEM ONI - bread of affliction, poor person's bread.

All of what has been said so far about MATZA ASHIRA is based on the author of the Shulchan Aruch, R' Yosef Karo, and is accepted as halachic by S'fardim (Eidot Mizrach).

However, the RAMA, Rabbi Moshe Isserles, the foremost "addender" of the Shulchan Aruch and authority for the Ashkenazi community, states that "we" have the practice not to eat matza ashira during Pesach. Built into the Ashkenazi ban on egg matza, is an exemption for infants and the elderly (and/or infirm, who would have digestion problems with regular matza). This clearly means that egg matza is definitely not chametz. One may possess egg matza during Pesach, and provide it for those who are allowed to eat it. But, we (meaning "healthy" Ashkenazim) don't eat egg matza (nor any product that is halachically equivalent to egg matza) on Pesach. Most consider the ban on egg matza to begin at the same time actual Chametz is forbidden on Erev Pesach.

This is especially important years when Erev Pesach is Shabbat. When using egg matza for Lechem Mishna, most hold that meals should be early enough to finish the egg matza before the no-eating-chametz time. The meal, of course, can continue, with all food kosher for Pesach.

BUYER BEWARE: In Israel, there are many, many Pesach cookies on the market, both packaged and sold in bulk, that are made with Pesach flour (not matza meal or cake meal, but raw flour) and other ingredients, but no water. These cookies don't look like the egg matza we might be familiar with, but they are exactly the same. They are cookies that are Kosher for Pesach; S'fardim can

eat them; Ashkenazim cannot (except as mentioned above). These cookies are often labeled MATZA ASHIRA and/or UGIYOT YAYIN (wine cookies), but sometimes not. Read labels carefully to avoid the pitfall of eating something labeled (and correctly so, for S'faradim) KOSHER L'PESACH but that may not be eaten by Ashkenazim. When in doubt - ASK.

ALSO NOTE the difference between KEMACH L'MATZOT - PESACH FLOUR, a.k.a. FLOUR FOR MATZA, i.e. Kosher for Pesach wheat flour that is used in the baking of matzot (and the various Matza Ashira products on the market), as opposed to KEMACH MATZOT - MATZA FLOUR. The latter is what we call matza meal or cake meal. It is made from matza that has been ground into a flour-substitute used by many (but not all - see below) for Pesach cooking and baking. When flour is used in a food product, the result is either real matza, real chametz, or egg matza (which, to repeat and stress, is not chametz, but... - see above).

BTW, the “egg-matza” cookies are a great idea for pre-Pesach snacks, especially for toddlers who might be in the habit of stashing their food between the couch cushions and in the ribs of radiators. These cookies are not chametz, and neither are their crumbs. And you can have them around for right after Pesach - again, with no problems.

The Ashkenazi practice is based on a fear that some water might get into the

mixtures at the wrong time, combined with paying token heed to the opinion - that is not accepted as halacha, but nevertheless exists - that it IS possible to produce chametz, even without water. We don't accept that opinion as halacha, but it does influence our practice of not eating matza ashira on Pesach.

Matza Sh'ruya a.k.a. Gebruchts

Mix flour with water, knead it into a dough, roll it thin, perforate it to prevent rising, and bake it, and if you've done things carefully and quickly, you have matza. Take this matza and crush it up, grind it, and mix it with water without worry because once the matza has been baked it can never become chametz. This is the reasoning behind matza meal and cake meal, and the kneidlach, cakes, etc. made from them. They are flour substitutes in a host of recipes. No risk of chametz.

However, what if in the haste of kneading the dough for matza, some flour remains dry and unmixed with water. Then it doesn't become matza upon baking. It remains flour. And flour is potential chametz. Not chametz, but potential chametz. This hypothetical, minute amount of raw, dry flour is trapped inside a sheet of matza. Eat the matza and you are actually eating matza plus a bit of flour. No problem. But, take the matza and crush it up into a bowl of hot chicken soup, cold egg & water, or room-

temperature borscht, and the flour now mixes with water (and other ingredients) and can produce chametz, even in much less than 18 minutes.) Does this actually happen? Do we have to worry about this possibility? Halachically, we do not have to worry about it. Machines and people who knead the dough for matza do a thorough job and we may assume that there is no raw flour trapped inside our matza. That is the halacha.

But there are many communities and families that have taken upon themselves - somewhere along their family trees, back some generations - the minhag of NOT 'soaking matza'. The extent to which this minhag of NO GEBRUCHTS goes, varies from family to family. Today, it is mostly a matter of continuing the practices of one's family tradition. This is so, even if one is sure that the matza dough was kneaded very well. Not eating Gebruchts does not mean that a person is more religious than those who do. It is a matter of custom. Those with the custom though, are duty-bound to keep it. A mixed marriage between a kneidel person and a potato starch only person create interesting situations with in-laws, etc. A Rav should be consulted for guidance in these (and other) matters.

Oat Matza

What about people with allergies or intolerance towards wheat? There is a shmura matza available made from oat flour. (This will help SOME, but not all

people with the gluten-intolerance.) There is a debate among botanists as to whether oats as we identify it today is the same as the SHIBOLET SHU'AL mentioned in the Mishna and halachic literature. If they are the same, then oat matza is an important substitute for wheat matza for people with these medical conditions. A rav should be consulted in case of need. Wheat is the preferred grain for matza, because it is first-mentioned on the list of the five grains. But the health factor definitely must be considered. There is also matza from spelt and rye, usable as a substitute for wheat matza.

Note: Anyone with a gluten intolerance should consult his/her doctor and then a rav to sort out their matza issue.

Matza Baked on Erev Pesach after Noon

There are some individuals who are particular about baking their mitzva matzot on the afternoon of Erev Pesach (unless it is Shabbat), a mere few hours before the Seder. Since the baking is done at the same time that the Korban Pesach was brought in the Beit HaMikdash, those who bake then, sing Hallel while they work, to commemorate the Hallel that accompanied the K.P. Some sources indicate that this is the ONLY matza that one can really fulfill the mitzva with. Others maintain that earlier matza is acceptable, but that this is better. Still others hold that one should

NOT bake matzot on the afternoon of Erev Pesach, because any chametz that is accidentally produced means a violation of possession. Needless to say (almost), most people use matza that was baked before Erev Pesach in the afternoon.

Chocolate covered Matza & chocolate Matza

There are (at least) 3 different chocolate-matza snacks on the market.

Chocolate covered matzot use real wheat & water only matzot. There's no problem with this product (for people who eat regular matza on Pesach), except that the bracha for it remains HaMotzi. Coating matza with chocolate does not remove the obligation to wash, say HAMOTZI and bench afterwards.

Chocolate covered egg matza has the same rules as egg matza. The bracha is M'ZONOT and Ashkenazim cannot eat this product on Pesach (except as mentioned in the Matza Ashira section).

Then there is chocolate matzot, which are pure chocolate in the form of matza. This, of course, is not really matza, and does not really belong in this Matza Guide, but is included anyway. It gets a SHEHAKOL.

Chametzdik Matza

Be careful of matza which is chametz, from the rest of the year. It looks like matza, tastes similar, etc. but is as

chametz as any bread. Some of this "round the year" matza might still be on supermarket shelves when the Pesach matzot and other products come out. Be careful.

And now you know...