



# MATZA GUIDE



*This GUIDE is an attempt to clarify several issues which people are not always aware of. As clear and thorough as I have tried to be, there will probably be confusion in some reader's mind. When in doubt about any of the points concerned, please consult a Rav for further clarification. I pray to HaShem, that I should only help educate and inspire my 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", it should not be used to fulfill the mitzva on the first night. (Whether 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. 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. 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 mins.**

Periodically (once a day, usually at night) matza-making equipment receives a very thorough cleaning. This is above and beyond the cleaning done every (less than) 18 minutes. There are people who insist on using only matza that is baked during the first 18 minutes following intensive cleaning. They consider it a HIDUR (enhancement) of the mitzva and/or they are more confident that the matza has fewer questions about the meticulousness of its production. 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 handmade 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-made. 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.

And there are also machine matzot that have individuals (usually members of a CHABURA - a matza-baking group) who do some of the steps by hand, or at least more hands-on control of the machinery, with the actual baking being done by machine.

There are definitely two ways (at least) of looking at the issue of hand vs. machine. One interpersonal factor is not to look down at those who choose one or the other, albeit different from you.

## **Matzot Rakot a.k.a. Soft Matza**

**sometimes referred to by  
Ashkenazim as S’faradi Matza**

Hard, thin, crusty Hand Sh’mura matza results from rolling the dough as thin as possible and baking the matza in an extremely hot oven. In one hand-matza bakery, I clocked the length of time the rolled out sheet of dough was in the oven - 35 seconds, completely baked top and bottom without need to flip, since the heat of the oven came from all sides, not just the ‘floor’ of the oven. The total time from the moment that the water touched the flour through the kneading to make a workable dough, through the breaking up of the dough into matza-size balls, rolling them out into thin rounds, perforating each round future matza, draping the rounds carefully on a long wooden pole, placing them carefully into the oven, baking time, removing the well-baked matzot from the oven and transferring them to a cooling rack - the total time was 4½ minutes. (Enough to allow three full batches well within the 18 minute period.

This is how Ashkenazim have traditionally baked their matza. Thin and very hot and fast. The

result: the aforementioned hard, thin, crusty matzot that many of us have grown fond of... and some of us continue to compare it with cardboard (sometimes to tasty cardboard).

There is another way to make Kosher L'Pesach matzot - regular and sh'mura. Start with the same recipe: flour and water. Roll the dough out, but not so thin. Don't worry, there's plenty of time to make the matza. Bake it in an oven that is hot, but not extremely so. Don't worry, it will take a bit longer to bake, but well within the time limit. The result is a soft matza, similar to ESH-TANUR, a.k.a. LAFA.

Eidot Mizrach use these soft matzot. Ashkenazim should ask their poskim about their use. Not because there is anything less Kosher L'Pesach with the soft matza; it's just that long-standing practices are hard to adjust.

(One advantage in the soft matza is the ability to make a real Koreich, a Hillel sandwich, without breaking your matza to bits.)

I am not recommending the use of Soft Matza, neither am I recommending against it. Your Rav should be consulted to clarify the issue and help with the decisions. Remember that some practices have the binding force of MINHAG,

but other practices might not. Sounds obtuse? Sorry.

## **Matza Ashira a.k.a. Egg Matza**

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 might result in 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 know 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. (Some say that halachic noon is the deadline for egg matza.)

**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) 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 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 MATZA FLOUR. In Hebrew, KEMACH L'MATZOT as opposed to KEMACH MATZOT. 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 custom 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 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 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.

So too, a Rav should be consulted by those no-gebruchts people who are considering their first Pesach

kneidlach. It is possible to undo the binding nature of some minhagim, but one should not treat the issue lightly. Consulting a Rav is important.

## 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 or 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 (**when Erev Pesach is NOT 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 way before Erev Pesach in the afternoon. And that is perfectly fine.

## Chocolate covered Matza & chocolate Matza

There are a number of different chocolate matza snacks on the market. Chocolate covered matzot use real wheat & water only matza.

There's no problem with this product (for people who eat regular matza on Pesach), but 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 shape of matza. This, of course, is not really matza, and does not really belong in this Guide to Matza, 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 is still on supermarket shelves when the Pesach matzot and other products come out. Be careful. Always read labels.

*Exhausted from reading so much about matza? Relax a bit and then, when allowed - enjoy your matza and your Chag HaMatzotz.*