

Pesach: The Pursuit of a Chometz-Free Home

By Rabbi Shlomi Wise, Rabbinic Coordinator KLBD

Rabbi Gavriel Zinner¹ shares a story from Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Halberstam of Rudnick. A righteous man, meticulous about Pesach, personally cleaned the kitchen, slaughtered animals, *koshered* the meat, and cooked with utmost care. On *Seder* night, he was distressed to find a wheat kernel in his soup, rendering his food and vessels *chometz*. Praying for an explanation, he learned that a bird had dropped wheat into his pot, placed under the chimney for extra caution. This occurred because he forgot to seek *siyata dishmaya* (Heavenly assistance) with his preparation. The lesson: without *Hashem's* protection, even the most careful efforts can fail.

Since *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, *Yidden* have meticulously removed all chometz before Pesach, applying this to all food brought into the home. The *Chida*² writes that strict chometz avoidance ensures a good year.³

Alongside *chometz* and *kitniyos*, customs arose to exclude other foods on Pesach due to contamination concerns, some still observed today.

In the 18th century, the *Pri Megodim*⁴ noted that some avoided garlic on Pesach, although no reason was found. The *Chayei Odor*⁵ dismissed this as baseless. Rabbi Meir Bransdorfer⁶ suggested the custom likely arose from concerns about garlic dried in distant places using unknown methods, while fresh garlic remains widely consumed in many *ehrlische* (upright) homes.

Some *Chassidishe* communities only consume fish that were purchased live before Pesach. Rabbi Akiva Osher Padwa explained that the custom stemmed from unscrupulous sellers rubbing fish with ethanol around the gills to prevent undesirable odours. If the ethanol was derived from *chometz*, it would contaminate the fish.

In Europe, mead was popular; therefore, the *Rema*⁷ recorded a custom to avoid honey unless sourced directly from beehives in large barrels, as flour was often added to aid fermentation. The *Baer Hetev*⁸ noted flour was rarely added to barrelled honey and if present would be nullified (*botel b'shishim*) before Pesach when heated. But honey in small containers, especially for mead, often contained flour. The *Magen Avrohom*⁹ and *Taz*¹⁰ debated the permissibility of honey when not used for mead. The *Shulchan Oruch HaRav*¹¹ explained the ban was a precaution in places where flour was added, but where it wasn't customarily added, honey was permitted.

In *Ashkenazi* communities, sugar was not only prohibited for consumption on Pesach but was also forbidden to be stored throughout the *Yom Tov*. The *Maharil*¹² recorded in the 15th century that his own rabbi ate sugar from Crete on Pesach as it contained no *chometz*. (This may be linked to the Venetian Senate granting Jews in Crete sugar export privileges in gratitude for David Maurogonato's role in suppressing two revolts.)

The *Noda B'Yehuda*¹³ wrote that in regions where sugar was grown, adulteration was not a concern since flour was unavailable. However, barrels may previously have contained flour, or flour could have been

¹ *Nitei Gavriel, Pesach*, vol.1, p.15.

² Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai, 1724-1806. *Moreh B'Etzba*, 196.

³ See also *Baer Hetev, Orach Chaim*, 447:1 paraphrasing the *Arizal*.

⁴ Rabbi Yosef ben Meir Teomim, 1727-1792. *Orach Chaim* 467, *Eishel Avrohom*, 1.

⁵ Rabbi Avrohom Danzig of Vilna, 1748-1820. *Klal* 127, 7.

⁶ *Yerushalayim*, 1934-2009.

⁷ Rabbi Moshe Isserles, c.1520-1572. *Orach Chaim*, 467:8.

⁸ Rabbi Yehuda Ashkenazi, Poland, c.1700-1745. *Orach Chaim* 467:13.

⁹ Rabbi Avrohom Abele Gombiner, Poland, c.1635-1682. *Orach Chaim* 467:7.

¹⁰ Rabbi Dovid HaLevi Segal of Poland c.1586-1667. *Orach Chaim* 467:6.

¹¹ Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady, Belarus, 1745-1812. *Orach Chaim* 467:14.

¹² Rabbi Yaakov HaLevi Moelin of Mainz. c.1365-1427. *Minhagim, Ma'acholos Asuros B'Pesach*, note 13.

¹³ *Nitei Gavriel, Pesach*, vol.1, p.15.

¹³ Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai, 1724-1806. *Moreh B'Etzba*, 196.

added later to powdered sugar. Some were *meikel* (lenient) when a major merchant sold the sugar, provided a *Yid* oversaw the barrel's opening in Rotterdam and took sugar only from the centre to avoid contamination. The *Teshuvos Tiferes Tzvi*¹⁴ wrote that in his time, rough-cut brown sugar was usually not problematic, as any white flour contamination would be clearly visible.

Cloves were not eaten on *Pesach*. The *Biur HaGra*¹⁵ explains the chometz concern was that old cloves might be soaked in brewing water or beer to impart a clove-like smell, which would mask staleness.

The *Rema* notes that many abstain from dried fruits on *Pesach* since they may be dried in ovens used for baking bread, and flour may be added during the drying process. Today, rice or oat flour is often applied to dried fruits such as figs, apricots, dates, and prunes to prevent clumping or extend shelf life, though this is usually declared on the packaging. In *Darkei Moshe*, he notes that small raisins, typically sun-dried, were consumed, while the *Magen Avrohom* observed that larger raisins were also allowed to make raisin wine. Despite chometz concerns, any flour potentially present would be nullified (*botel b'shishim*) in the water added during the wine making process before *Pesach*.

The issue of finding a kernel of wheat in cooked chicken on *Pesach* has arisen many times over the past thousand years. The *Maharil* noted that women would remove the gizzard before *Pesach* and tie its opening to prevent wheat or barley from falling out. In some *Ashkenazi* communities, such as Amsterdam, people refrained from eating chicken altogether on *Pesach*.

Today, this issue is rare, as the London Board for Shechita removes intestines, crop, and gizzard from chickens, which are then powerfully vacuumed, washed and checked by dedicated *mashgichim* (supervisors) for any feed residue—all before *melichah* (salting). They also prohibit selling *pupicks* (gizzards) unless rigorously inspected before salting, which is why *pupicks* rarely carry a kosher for *Pesach* label.

We respect these long-standing customs, in deference to the diligence with which they have been preserved for generations. At KLBD, we are committed to ensuring that all products are thoroughly checked before certifying or approving them for *Pesach*. This careful attention to detail helps to maintain the sanctity and integrity of the holiday for all those who observe it.

Whatever your family customs, may our commitment to these *minhogim* be a source of *brocho*, and may we all be *zocheh* to a *Chag Kosher v'Sameach*, filled with *gezunt*, *simcha*, and true *cheirus*.

¹³ See also *Baer Hetev, Orach Chaim*, 447:1 paraphrasing the *Arizal*.

¹³ Rabbi Yosef ben Meir Teomim, 1727-1792. *Orach Chaim* 467, *Eishel Avrohom*, 1.

¹³ Rabbi Avrohom Danzig of Vilna, 1748-1820. *Klal* 127, 7.

¹³ *Yerusholayim*, 1934-2009.

¹³ Rabbi Moshe Isserles, c.1520-1572. *Orach Chaim*, 467:8.

¹³ Rabbi Yehuda Ashkenazi, Poland, c.1700-1745. *Orach Chaim* 467:13.

¹³ Rabbi Avrohom Abele Gombiner, Poland, c.1635-1682. *Orach Chaim* 467:7.

¹³ Rabbi Dovid HaLevi Segal of Poland c.1586-1667. *Orach Chaim* 467:6.

¹³ Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady, Belarus, 1745-1812. *Orach Chaim* 467:14.

¹³ Rabbi Yaakov HaLevi Moelin of Mainz. c.1365-1427. *Minhagim, Ma'acholos Asuros B'Pesach*, note 13.

¹³ Rabbi Yechezkel HaLevi Landau of Prague, 1713-1793. *Mahadura Tinyana, Orach Chaim*, 72 (end).

¹⁴ Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Bushka of Poland, 1740-1806. *Orach Chaim*, 18 and 19.

¹⁵ Rabbi Eliyohu ben Shlomo Zalman of Vilna, 1720-1797. *Orach Chaim*, 467:8.