

The Month of Nissan: Pesach: A Meat and Potatoes Holiday? The Mystery of Healthy Eating During Pesach

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Introduction

After having slaved for weeks to prepare for Pesach, we have finally been liberated. Now is the time to free ourselves from our daily routine and enjoy the renewal of this blessed holiday. No more scrubbing cabinets, no more re-organizing kitchen drawers, just the minimum of work needed for the enjoyment of the holiday. This work is mainly cooking, cooking and cooking. Let me share with you my personal experience of Hashem's *Hashgacha Pratit* (Divine Supervision) this Pesach.

With some *Yekish* (Jewish German Jewish) blood within me, Pesach cleaning is quite an ordeal in my home, especially since the month of Nissan is also the peak season for gardening. With all of the good rain, Hashem called me outside of my kitchen, to weed and transplant every single day during the week prior to Pesach. I had *emunah* that Pesach preparation would work out somehow, and *Baruch* Hashem it did! You won't believe it, but Hashem actually sent me a professional cook *Erev* Pesach. My friend, Rivkah, called and asked if I would like an additional guest for the *Seder*, a young man from Antwerp who has no family here. I was eager to fulfill the *mitzvah* to invite someone who really had no other place to celebrate Pesach, and I gladly consented. Then to my great surprise, Rivkah told me not to worry about cooking for Pesach; the guest was an experienced chef who would whip it all up. So it 'happened' that I became a guest in my own kitchen on the eve of Pesach.

The Mitzvah to Eat

Pesach is a holiday which centers around cooking, because Pesach is the only holiday when we have a *mitzvah* from the Torah to eat, as it states.

כָּרָאשׁוּן בְּאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעֶרֶב תֹּאכְלוּ מִצַּת עַד יוֹם הָאֶחָד וְעֶשְׂרִים לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעֶרֶב: (ספר שמות פרק יב יח)
 "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, shall you eat unleavened bread, until the twenty first day of the month at evening."¹ Therefore, we must pay special attention to what and how we eat during this time. All the kitchen utensils are new and different, the countertops are covered, and we eat only special food strictly Kosher for Pesach. Not a crumb, not even a spoon that ever touched a crumb of *chametz*, without being koshered for Pesach, must come near our lips on Pesach. Some people even peel all of their vegetables in case they ever came in contact with *chametz*. With all of this fuss over food, still, I'm devastated every single Pesach. As an Ashkenazi Jew, not only can I not have my sprouted wheat bread, but I may not even eat any legumes. How can I attempt to eat healthy, in the midst of this potato and meat holiday?

¹ *Shemot* 12:18.



What Can I Eat on Pesach?

Although wheat grass juice is not actually forbidden on Pesach, since the grass and not the wheat kernels are used, I'm unable to drink it because we moved all our kitchen utensils out of the kitchen for Pesach, and use only utensils that have not been used or cleaned within a *chametz* kitchen. In addition, sometimes on the ends of the wheatgrass you may find a kernel of wheat which mustn't be found on Pesach, so we are not letting any wheat grass into our *chametz*-free home. In the past I was unable to have my daily morning drink consisting of lemon juice and cayenne pepper diluted with water, since I couldn't find any cayenne pepper with a Kosher for Pesach certification. However when I shared this a couple of years ago a very nice reader actually sent me special cayenne pepper kosher for Pesach which I now have saved with my Pesach utensil and use sparingly each year. I also really miss my special grey Celtic sea-salt, which could have been contaminated by a trace of *chametz* as the bag was open in a *chametz* kitchen. What about sprouts? Why should sprouts be legumes? All vegetables were originally sprouts before they grew and we are allowed to eat vegetables on Pesach, thank G-d! This year our rabbi (Rav Daniel Kohn), permitted those kinds of sprouts which you can easily remove the hull of the seed itself – this rules out alfalfa, radish and broccoli sprouts. *Baruch Hashem*, I was able to get sunflower sprouts and their (occasional) hull easily comes off.

Quinoa

Quinoa is one of my everyday main food staples, as it is loaded with fiber, protein, and minerals. While being gluten-free, quinoa contains more calcium, iron, and protein than wheat. Every year for almost the last ten years, since I first heard that quinoa has been deemed permissible for Pesach in USA, I have been bugging my husband to ask Rav Daniel to permit quinoa. Every year the answer was “no,” but I had *emunah* that this would change, so I kept asking my husband to ask. Last year, he somehow evaded the issue as he had already asked so many times in the past. This year, I ensured he would ask, and finally my husband came home with the good news: “You can eat quinoa this Pesach!” Speaking with my friend, the rabbi's wife, I marveled, “This year we are finally eating quinoa!” She responded, “Last year we also ate quinoa!”

Although quinoa is a sesame-seed looking kernel reminiscent of rice, it is not a grain, but a member of the beet family. Therefore, Rabbi Heinemann of the Star-K determined that quinoa is not *kitniyot* (legume). It does not grow in the vicinity of *chametz* and its growth does not resemble *kitniyot*. It, furthermore, has no religious precedent included in the prohibition against *kitniyot*. According to Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, foods which were not consumed by Jews at the time the *minhag* of *kitniyot* began are not forbidden on Pesach.² Since no Jews lived in South America, where quinoa grew, at the time when the *minhag* to avoid eating *kitniyot* on Pesach began (3-4 centuries ago), quinoa is not considered *kitniyot*. As long as we can ascertain that no *chametz* grains or *kitniyot* are mixed in, we may consume quinoa on Pesach. In the USA, the whole quinoa

² *Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim III:63.*



sold under the Ancient Harvest and Trader Joe brand names are produced in plants which do not package *chametz* grains, and some authorities permit them for Pesach use.³

However, other Rabbinic authorities hold that Quinoa requires kosher for Passover certification to ensure that it was carefully kept from contact with barley or other grains, as quinoa is often grown in close proximity to grains which can become *chametz*, such as barley. It is also often processed in the same factories as other grains, and the machines may not be adequately cleaned between runs of grain products and quinoa; both of these factors lead to a risk of *chametz* traces being found in the quinoa. Furthermore, the leading *kashrut* agencies have recently discovered that some farmers cover their quinoa with barley and/or oats to keep the birds from eating the quinoa while it dries; creating a concern that there may be grain kernels within the packaged quinoa. Finally, the sacks used to transport quinoa may have been previously used to hold barley or oats, which again raises the same concern.⁴

This year we are fortunately finally to celebrate the exodus from the ‘Pesach quinoa uncertainty.’ Rabbi Menachem Genack, CEO of OU Kosher, announced on December 20, 2013 that quinoa, the grain-like seed grown in South America, is Kosher for Pesach when processed with special OU Passover supervision and bearing the OU-P symbol.⁵ I am still wondering how to get OU-P certified quinoa here in Israel this year.

Matzah – the Bread of Healing

With quinoa available for Pesach, I had decided that I would eat *matzah* only during the *Seder* when it is obligatory, since, on the remaining days of Pesach, eating *matzah* is only an optional *mitzvah*.⁶ Although in our home, we only eat *shemura matzah*, which is made from whole wheat flour, I generally try to avoid eating food made from flour, as all the vitamins are lost when the grain is made into a powder, similarly to the process of producing juice from fruits. However, during the *Seder* night, something changed in me. I understood in the very fiber of my being how our health is a gift of Hashem. Healthy food is only a vessel for Hashem’s life-giving light, whereas keeping Hashem’s *mitzvot* connects us directly with the light of Creation. Hashem, the healer of all flesh, tells us that *matzah* is good for us. In the Zohar *matzah* is called “bread of healing.”⁷ Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach explains that the *matzah* is the greatest healing in the world. If we don’t feel it, that’s because we are not yet on the level to experience this. If Hashem commands us to eat *matzah*, this means that the *matzah* heals us both physically and spiritually.

³ http://kosherfood.about.com/od/pesach/f/kfp_quinoa.htm

⁴ http://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/498035/jewish/Is-Quinoa-Kosher-for-Passover.htm

⁵ http://www.ou.org/news/quinoa_kosher_for_passover/

⁶ *Chizkuni, Shemot 12:18, Ma'aseh Rav, 175.*

⁷ *Zohar 2:41a, 2: 183b.*



Matzah – Rectification for the Tree of Knowledge

Eating *matzah* on Pesach is a rectification for eating from the Tree of Knowledge, because when Adam and Chava ate from this forbidden Tree, their eating was like stealing. Any food which is not connected to our soul root is considered ‘stolen’ food. Since the time of eating from the Tree of Knowledge, whatever we eat has a taste of being stolen, and this makes us sad, as Hashem told Adam, “. . . in sadness you shall eat all the days of your life.”⁸ Regular food does not necessarily come from the channel that connects us directly with Hashem. However, *matzah* is prepared especially for us and therefore it comes down to us directly from Heaven. When I ate the homemade *matzah* prepared so carefully by my son for the very first time since reaching manhood, I felt how it brought down Hashem’s light directly from Above. My heartfelt prayer while chewing each bite of this *matzah* was engendered by my son’s excitement for keeping the *mitzvah* of baking *matzah*.

Pesach celebrates the birth of the Jewish people. According to Ariza”l, we were conceived on *Seder* night, and born seven days later on the last night of Pesach, at the splitting of the sea which was the breaking of the birth waters.⁹ During the seven days of Pesach, when we begin our lives anew, we may eat only *matzah*. The beginning – our root – needs to be *matzah* – the Tree of Life. According to the level of our *emunah*, is the depth of life which we receive from Hashem. *Matzah* is called “the Bread of *Emunah*.” On Pesach we renew our *emunah* that Hashem wants to give us endless life. Rabbi Shlomo explains that the last meal that we eat on the last day of Pesach is called “the meal of Mashiach” because when Mashiach comes, the earth will be healed from its curse. It will again believe in humanity and bring forth blessed produce. At this time one piece of *matzah* will be enough to give us eternal life. Let us enjoy our special Pesach food without guilt!
 “L’Chaim!”

⁸ Bereishit 3:18.

⁹ Arizal, *Sefer P’ri Etz Chaim, Sha’ar HaLulav* Chapter 8.

