



RABBI YISSACHAR DOV KRAKOWSKI

DIRECTOR OF OU KOSHER ISRAEL



# Understanding the Not-So-Simple Matzah

The Pesach holiday is also known by its biblical name, Chag HaMatzos”, demonstrating the centrality of this food to the festival. Many associate matzah exclusively with the thin and brittle cracker-like flat bread consumed on Pesach. Many understand that matzah is unleavened bread. None of this, however, explains all the varieties of matzah available on the market. From *shmura* to 18-minute matzah, and *round* to square machine-made matzah, what really is the difference? Add in Yeminite soft matza and egg matza to the mix, and the options become even more complex. We will attempt to clarify the distinctions of each.

## THE BASIC MATZAH

The Torah states that on Pesach we may not eat leavened bread, rather only

matzah. The basic definition of matzah is bread that has not risen. Most bread is comprised of multiple ingredients. The two ingredients that all breads have in common are flour and water. Normally, one adds a leavening agent like yeast or sourdough to the flour-water mixture, to hasten rising. However, even flour and water without any added ingredients will rise after some time, via naturally occurring yeast (bacteria). Chazal determined that 18 minutes constitutes the amount of time for water and flour to rise on their own. Consequently, the timing between the mixing of the flour and water until matzah is fully baked cannot exceed 18 minutes.

This timelimit does not require matzah to emerge thin and brittle. Thus, from a very basic perspective, one could theoretically prepare a very plain pita, baked within that time span, and it wouldn't constitute chametz. In fact, the only size restriction mentioned by the Gemara is the maximum height for matzah -- less than one *tefach* (approximately four inches). Nevertheless, the pita could still become chametz, if it is not fully dry and contains unbaked flour within. Folds in matzah dough can also potentially create

## NACHI REALTY 054-461-3943

**In a finished brand new building on Mekor Chaim Street** - Spacious 2, 3 & 4 rooms apartments, Sukka mirpesets, storage, parking and Shabbat Elevator, 2 room - 2.09m NIS; large 86m 3 room - 3.17m NIS and 4 rooms - 3.79m NIS

**Great opportunity to buy in a new building under construction in Arnona/ Talpilot**  
2-5 rooms, great payment terms and prices start at just 2.39m NIS

raw pockets. It is for this reason that matzah has customarily been made cracker thin, to ensure that it is entirely baked through. Ashkenazi Jews universally use very thin, dry and brittle matzot. (Some Jewish communities sanction the use of soft flat bread.)

The concern of unbaked flour parts in matzah is also what has led to the custom (particularly in Hasidic communities) to not consume *gebrochts*, or wet matzot. This practice ensures that if somehow, some flour remained unbaked and was inadvertently mixed with water, it would not become chametz. Those who eat *gebrochts* presume all the flour was baked, thus alleviating any worry.

There is one more basic criterion: As mentioned earlier, Chazal determined the maximum time before simple flour and water becomes chametz is 18 minutes. This time allowance is given if the dough mixture strictly contains these two ingredients. Other added ingredients may hasten the dough to rise, which could even happen immediately. As such, matzot must be made from flour and water alone.

The 18-minute clock starts the moment flour and water meet. The flour used for matzah must be sourced from a dry grinding. Wheat is often tempered with water prior to being ground, to help separate the different parts of the kernel. It is therefore essential to use flour that has not been tempered.

All bread, not just matzo, is only considered bread, according to halacha, if it is made from the following five grains: wheat, barley, spelt, rye and oats. It should be noted that in order for a mixture to be



rendered chametz, it must contain one of these five types of grain.

The 18-minute period also assumes that the mixture isn't exposed to heat prior to being baked, which could hasten its leavening. Accordingly, flour needs to be stored in a cool, dark space. Likewise, the water should be poured and stored overnight to ensure that it is cooled down; this is referred to as *Mayim Shelanu*.

**Why Shmura?** For the matzot eaten on Seder night, the Torah specifically states, “ושמרתם את המצות,” you should guard the matzot.” Chazal understand the Torah's extra emphasis as an obligation to guard not just the processing of the matzot, but also supervision of the flour; hence *shmura* matzah. There are two approaches amongst *Rishonim* (early commentaries) as to when this extra guarding of the flour begins. The Rambam and Rif maintain that one should safeguard the flour

from the harvesting of the grain, while Rashi and Rosh argue that it is sufficient to safeguard the flour from the time that it is milled.

Currently, when we refer to matzot as *shmura*, we generally mean from harvest (which is the higher level of supervision). All OU-Pesach certified matzot are supervised, at least from the time the flour was ground.

One is only obligated to use *shmura* matzah for the Seder. Non-*shmura* matzot are 100 percent halachically kosher for the remainder of Pesach. With regard to Pesach particularly, many *minhagim* (traditions) involve taking on extra *chumros* (stringencies). Using only *shmura* matzot for the entire Pesach is one of those. If one's family *minhag* is to only use *shmura* matzah on Pesach, one should act accordingly. If, however, one doesn't have such a *minhag*, one need not start to be *machmir* (strict) to only use *shmura*, especially because all matzot nowadays are minimally *shmura* from the time of grinding.

There is an additional reason why one might wish to strictly eat *shmura* matzah: the Gra explains that there is a *Mitzva Kiyumis* (a voluntary/conditional mitzvah)

in eating matzah all seven days of Pesach, according to the verse, "Seven days you shall eat matzot." It may therefore be that all matzot we eat on Pesach (as matzah – i.e. not as matzah/cake meal) have the status of the *Matzot Mitzva* and therefore should also require an excessive *shmira* (safeguard). If one chooses to exclusively eat *shmura* for this reason, there is no need to use only *shmura* matzah when one is using matzah byproducts such as cakes and rolls made from matzah meal.

### EIGHTEEN-MINUTE MATZOT

"Eighteen-minute matzot" is a term used to describe machine-made matzah for which the equipment is stopped, partially disassembled, and cleaned every 18 minutes, instead of after an eight-hour shift (or some other time variant).

To understand the idea of 18-minute matzot, we must first understand why this isn't a basic requirement of all matzot. We have already established that Chazal dictated an 18-minute limit from the time of the mixing of the flour and water until it is baked. It would therefore seem necessary to clean the machine from all remnants of dough, and dough build-up, every 18 minutes. However, the Gemara also tells us that one can leave flour mixed with water all day before baking, as long as it is being constantly toiled, (Chazal refer to this as *Issuk*). This means that as long as the dough is being worked on, it doesn't need to be baked. The moment the dough sits untouched, the clock starts ticking.

The 18-minute requirement is deemed unnecessary for machine-made matzot because the machine is always moving and all the dough is always mixed. There

**Dollars in America.  
Life in Israel.**

**Is your wealth safe?**

**Aaron Frolich**  
Certified Financial Planner &  
Licensed Investment Advisor  
+972.54.320.8077

GREEN PEAK  
ADVISORS

Book a **FREE** 30-minute consultation!

aaron@greenpeakadvisors.com www.greenpeakadvisors.com

is consequently no risk of any chametz coming into existence.

There is one more detail required for this Talmudic leniency of *Issuk*, and that is that the dough doesn't become warm from the *Issuk*. To this end, the machine-made matzah lines that OU certifies are especially designed to operate under completely cool conditions. In fact, despite being industrial, heavy-duty equipment, they stay completely cool to the touch. Additionally, OU requires that the area around the matzah production line be properly ventilated and cooled to the extent that extra air vents cool the conveyer belt both above and below, as it returns from where it meets the oven.

While there is much room to be lenient and to allow the matzah production lines to work for hours straight, those wishing to be more scrupulous consume matzot from lines which were stopped and fully cleaned every 18 minutes – hence the term 18-minute matzot.

It should be noted that OU kosher requires multiple *mashgichim* (supervisors) on matzah production lines who constantly clean them with vacuums and air guns, ensuring that even non-18-minute-matzot are free of dough build-up.

**Hand-Made Matzah** According to many opinions, it is important that matzot being used for the mitzva of eating matzot be made with that specific intention, known as *Li'Shma*. When workers make matzah by hand, everyone explicitly declares ahead of their shift that all the work they will be doing is "*l'shem matzot mitzva*" – for the sake of the mitzva of matzot. While the same declaration could

be made by the workers who control the production line of machine-made matzah, it is a matter of historical contention as to whether one can convey *Li'Shma* in reference to a machine. Consequently, some refrain from using machine-made matzot for the Seder. Some also prefer hand-made matzot because the many parts of machine lines allow dough to get stuck in various nooks and crannies.

Hand-made matzot have an element of *hiddur* (enhancement or beautification) because of their "*Lishma*" status and individual attention and care.

Rabbi Yisroel Belsky, zt"l, pointed out yet another *hiddur* in hand-made matzot: machine-made matzot are generally baked in tunnel ovens. The matzot bake as they travel through the tunnel on a steel conveyer belt. While these ovens are constructed so that the matzot fully bake early on in their travel journey, hand-made matzot are generally baked in stone ovens that are heated for prolonged periods of time. As such, the matzot bake practically the instant they hit the oven.

As Pesach is a time when many people follow very particular *minhagim* regarding what they eat, there are those who will

**Fresh squeezed Pomegranate Juice** helps many people who are undergoing chemotherapy to tolerate chemotherapy much better and to feel much better!



Please contact for more info.  
**David Goldstein**  
058-632 0415  
[tizku613@yahoo.com](mailto:tizku613@yahoo.com)

not use machine-made matzot no matter how *mehudar* (enhanced or beautified) they are, as their ancestors did not use them.

There are still many *hidurim* that can be done with both machine and hand-made matzot. As a result, there definitely are differences among brands and *hashgachos* (kosher certifications).

### EGG MATZOT

Egg matzot, or, in more halachic terms, matzot ashira, are matzot made from a mixture of fruit juice or eggs, and flour. Earlier we noted that only flour from one of the five grains mixed with water can become chametz. The Gemara discusses whether liquids other than water, when mixed with flour, can become chametz. While it does not rule out the possibility that they can become chametz, it states that they are not *memaher lehachmitz*, meaning they do not cause the dough to rise quickly. Since “not rising quickly” isn’t a precise time limit, we refer back to the 18-minute limit for regular water and flour-based matzot when approaching egg matzah. Additionally, we assume that if more ingredients are added, they can cause the mixture to rise more quickly. Thus, egg matzot must be made from flour and juice or egg alone, and be free of additional ingredients.

Egg matzot must be totally free of water, otherwise the mixture becomes flour and water with an added ingredient of juice or eggs, rendering it chametz very quickly. This is especially challenging as most fruit is washed with water before being juiced, and most industrial production lines are cleaned using water. Therefore, juice or

eggs being used for egg matzot need special kosher supervision and certification to guarantee that they are totally water-free. According to the Rama’s ruling, Ashkenazi Jews do not use matzah ashira on Pesach, with the exception of minors and the ill.

Like most areas in industry, new technologies in the realm of matzah manufacturing emerge with time. These technologies present new halachic challenges that require new and innovative solutions. The goal is to harness these technologies to improve matzot’ halachic quality.

With a plethora of matzah options, how does one choose? Pesach is about the transmission of our heritage from generation to generation. Each generation should attempt to maintain the halachically mandated traditions of their family and community. ■

בס"ד

# הבוטח כליות ולב



**OUR DEAR  
IMMA  
NEEDS A  
KIDNEY  
TRANSPLANT**

**CAN YOU HELP  
SAVE HER LIFE?**

Kidney donations are through Matnat Chaim organization. Eligibility for men above 27 years of age, and women who have completed giving birth. Link to the form: [https://kilya.org.il/he/p-form/?patient=ATARA\\_RAICH](https://kilya.org.il/he/p-form/?patient=ATARA_RAICH)

Please contact:  
Sarit: 054-6954500  
Einat: 054-9479567

