



Rabbi Yaakov Hopfer
President

28 Adar 5780/March 24, 2020

To our Baltimore Jewish Community,

Tomorrow night, we will IY”H welcome the month of Nissan - a month of celebration and spiritual elation. However, we know that, for our greater community, there are many questions regarding Pre-Pesach and Pesach related issues. We hope that the following guidelines provide clarity and direction. As always, if you have any questions, please reach out to your Rav.

1. **Mechiras Chometz/Selling of Chometz Before Pesach** – Given the need for social distancing, there will be no in-person interaction between the Rabbonim and their congregants for Mechiras Chametz. Each Rav will email/mail out a Shtar Harshaah (power of attorney document). Do not go to the home of a Rav for a shtar. The “shtar” (which will have space for your name, address, etc. and which authorizes your Rav to sell your chometz and rent the place of the chometz to a non-Jew) should be forwarded to your Rav via regular mail, email or per the instructions of your shul. Alternatively, this authorization can be done by calling and speaking to your Rav. If you call your Rav, speak directly with him or with someone designated to take the information on his behalf. Do not leave a message on his answering machine with your information. Please note that each shul will have its own system – please discuss with your Rav or shul president.
2. **Hagolas Kelim** (Kashering of Utensils) - There will be no public *hagolas kelim* this year. Information on how to Kasher your utensils in your home is available from your Rav and at www.star-k.org.
3. **Tevilas Kelim/Immersion of Food Utensils in a Mikva** – As is well known, food utensils (e.g. pots, pans, cutlery, drinking glasses, etc.) require *Tevilas Kelim*. However, to avoid overcrowding at the Kelim Mikva, which would create a serious public health concern, **effective immediately the Kelim Mikvaos have been closed**. Because of these extenuating circumstances one may rely on the leniency that utensils that are “hefker” (ownerless) or not belonging to a Jew, do not require tevila. This can be accomplished in the following manner:
 - a. **If Purchasing Utensils from a Non-Jew** - Before purchasing such utensils from a non-Jew, declare or have the following specifically in mind: “I am not acquiring these utensils. Even when I pay for them and take them home, they will not belong to me.”
 - b. **If You Already Acquired Utensils or You are Purchasing them from a Jewish-Owned Store** - If you already own utensils that were not toveled (e.g. you already purchased them but did not yet immerse them in the mikva) or you purchased or received utensils as a gift from someone Jewish, you must make the utensils “hefker” (ownerless) before using them.
 - **Follow these instructions:** Arrange a conference call via phone or online with three men over Bar Mitzva who know you and recognize your voice. At least one of them should be at least 18 years old. At least two of them should not be your relative or relatives of each other. Tell the three men on the phone, “*I hereby declare that all of the utensils that are mine that have not been toveled yet, are now hefker (ownerless).*”



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The three men should acknowledge your statement by responding, "Okay." If you purchase additional such utensils afterwards, this procedure must be repeated. Contact your Rav if you need further instructions or help in setting up such a conference call.

This is a special leniency that one can rely upon only during the current situation of pikuach nefesh (risk to life). When things return to normal, bez"H, one may not rely on the above method.

NOTE: Once the Kelim Mikva reopens you will be required to reacquire the utensils by picking them up and then toveling them (with a bracha, if required). Therefore, it is important that you carefully mark or keep track of which utensils were not toveled, so that you will know which items need tevila in the future.

4. **Biur Chometz/Burning the Chometz** – Due to the current situation, this year, there will be no public chometz burning as in previous years. Please note the following procedures:
 - Before searching for chometz on the night before Erev Pesach (Tuesday night), put out 10 very small pieces of bread (which add up to the size of a kzayis) and search for chometz as you normally do.
 - If you own a barbeque grill, on Wednesday morning - Erev Pesach, burn these 10 small pieces on the grill and recite Kol Chamira (the statement nullifying ownership of any chometz). If you do not have a grill, do the following: In a bag, carefully break up the small pieces of bread into tiny crumbs. Flush the crumbs, without the bag, down the toilet. Dispose of the bag in the outside garbage can and then recite Kol Chamira. All of this should be completed before 11:38 a.m. (sof zman biur chometz). There is another process for disposal known as zoreh la'ruach, please consult your Rav for further details.
 - Before burning or flushing the crumbs, place all remaining chometz (that was not sold to a non-Jew) in your outside trash cans and recite the following in front of anyone (even a relative and even on the phone): "I hereby declare that my garbage cans and all of my chometz garbage are hefker (ownerless) and I relinquish all ownership thereof." If possible, before making the above statement, bring your garbage cans to the curb for pickup. If you cannot bring the cans to the curb on Erev Pesach (e.g. your pickup day is Tuesday) you may bring them to the curb during Pesach at the regularly scheduled time (e.g. Monday night). Either way, you may take the cans back from the curb and fill the hefker (ownerless) cans during Pesach. When doing so, do NOT have intent to acquire them. Re-acquire the garbage cans after Pesach has ended.
 - Other than the above burning of the 10 small pieces of bread in your barbeque grill, **under no circumstances should anyone make a private or public fire to burn chometz. Furthermore, other than the above, do not flush other bread or chometz down the toilet.**

We are asking our entire community to rely on these leniencies as it is a matter of public health and safety.



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5. **Siyum Bechorim** – As is well known, it is customary for first born males (or their father) to fast on Erev Pesach, or attend a siyum, which allows them to break their fast. Since shuls are closed, each shul will schedule a siyum (or more than one siyum) that will be available online and/or via telephone. Due to the current situation, if a b'chor listens to the siyum – although he is not present - he is considered a participant and should then break his fast by eating something special in honor of the siyum. For those unable to hear their shul siyum, a communal siyum will take place at 9:45 a.m. on Wednesday, Erev Pesach. Specific online and phone details will be sent out before Erev Pesach.

We ask you to pay close attention to the following important points made in the joint statement of Agudas Yisroel, the Orthodox Union (OU), and the Vaad of Lakewood:

6. We are accustomed to honoring Pesach to the utmost degree, including taking haircuts, purchasing new clothing and tableware, and preparing the fullest menus. This year's public health crisis mandates us to significantly limit all of the above. Our responsibility is to refrain from any NON-ESSENTIAL outside interactions, especially in-store shopping, but also including home-based businesses, barber shops, etc. If there is a need for truly ESSENTIAL purchases, send one family member only – who is neither ill, vulnerable, nor of known exposure to COVID-19 – as rarely and as briefly as possible. Stores serving the community should shift to home delivery or drive-by parking lot pick-up of pre-orders, and – to the extent this is not possible – must take substantive steps to minimize crowding, maintain hygiene, and maximize social distancing.

We will truly honor Pesach by limiting our purchases to the truly ESSENTIAL, ensuring that all of us – especially the vulnerable – are able to celebrate Pesach in good health. STAY HOME; SAVE LIVES.

7. The Pesach plans of many have been completely upended. This creates severe difficulty for so many. Nevertheless, public health requires strict adherence to these guidelines. **Travel to other cities must be cancelled, whether to vacation venues or to family.** Everyone must plan to celebrate Pesach in their current locations.

Individuals living alone or those absolutely unable to prepare for Pesach may choose to self-quarantine for 14 days, and then – if asymptomatic – may join with a welcoming local family, without additional company, that is similarly asymptomatic and that has been disciplined in staying home and limiting their interactions outside the home to the absolute minimum described above. These guests may join one family only for the duration of Pesach and must carefully observe the highest standards of hygiene and social distancing. The elderly and high risk must seek medical advice before considering this.

These are difficult times for Am Yisroel and for all of humanity. If we continue with our enhanced Teffilos, Talmud Torah, dedication to Chessed and take all of the necessary physical precautions to stem the spread of this disease, we will IY"H be zocheh to see geulah, yeshuah and much simcha.