

Kosher for Passover Teeth?!

The story is told of Hyman Rosenberg, a wealthy businessman living in Berlin in the 1930s. Sensing the danger ahead, he sold his factories and moved his family to America. To transport his wealth inconspicuously, he bought gold and had it fashioned into five sets of golden dentures. When he arrived in the United States, the customs officials questioned the need for five sets of teeth.

“You see,” Rosenberg explained, “I am a religious Jew. Jews use separate dishes and utensils for milk and meat.” The officer questioned further, “That only accounts for two sets!” Rosenberg continued, “Yes, but we also need sets for Passover.” Once again, the officer said, “Now I understand the need for four sets. But that doesn’t explain the fifth!” Quietly, Rosenberg replied, “True, but every once in a while, I also enjoy a ham sandwich.”

The story is of course apocryphal, but still begs the question: each year we *kasher* or use new or designated *kelim*, including dishes, utensils and other culinary implements for use on Pesach. Why are our teeth—used more than any other utensil throughout Pesach—considered kosher for Pesach?

The concept behind “kosher for Pesach” *kelim* is identical to the underlying principles that require one to separate milk and meat dishes (see *Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 451). Halacha assumes that *kelim* absorb the flavor of food that they came in contact with and can impact food that is later



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placed in the same *kelim*. A pot used with dairy cannot be used to cook meat, as absorbed dairy flavor may be released into the meat, and the converse is true as well (*Shulchan Aruch*, Y.D. 93:1). Likewise, chametz absorbed in *kelim* can render non-chametz food unfit for Pesach in the same fashion. In other words, absorbed flavors, or *bliyot*, have the same kashrut status as their source foods; *bliyot* of chametz are treated as chametz, and will make other foods chametz when those foods absorb them. This concept is known as “*taam k’ikar*” (see *Pesachim* Daf 44b, *Nazir* Daf 37a). The process of *kashering* a utensil for Pesach essentially purges that item of any remaining *bliyot* (*Mishna Berurah*, O.C. 452:1). Our task is to understand why one’s “un-*kasher*d teeth” do not pose any chametz concerns when we use them to eat on Pesach, and for that matter, the rest of the year, alternating between milk and meat. A number of mitigating elements will ultimately converge to provide a better understanding of the halachic background, while shedding light on some of the most practical questions of kashrut that arise in the kitchen. What follows is an outline of some of the factors discussed by the Poskim who have addressed these issues in the last two centuries. There is certainly

no intent to suggest that one’s teeth must be “kosher for Pesach,” but simply to present the relevant factors for a better understanding of principles of kashrut and Pesach.

Noten Taam Lifgam

While we have established that *bliyot* travel from the walls of a pot into the food cooking inside the pot, this will not always produce a negative halachic result. For example, if the *bliyot* contribute a flavor that is not beneficial to the ensuing mixture, prohibited *bliyot* will not prohibit the food that absorbs them (*Shulchan Aruch*, Y.D. 98:1). This is referred to as *noten taam lifgam* (offering a negative flavor). In a similar vein, if the taste of *bliyot* has deteriorated significantly, any taste the *bliyot* provide is not halachically potent and therefore insignificant. Chazal tell us that the Torah actually prescribes a timeframe for this potency: after 24 hours from absorption, the flavor absorbed in *kelim* can no longer impact food inside the *kli* (*Shulchan Aruch*, Y.D. 93:1). For example, if one cooks meat in a dairy pot that has not recently been used with dairy products, the meat will be unaffected, as the dairy flavor is labeled as *noten taam lifgam*.

Nonetheless, the pot must be *kasher*d, as the walls of the pot now



contain both dairy and meat *bliyot*. Although the “expired” dairy *bliyot* are not significant on a Torah level, Chazal deem the pot non-kosher. A Rabbinic enactment requires such *bliyot*, even after 24 hours, to be treated as viable. This helps avoid confusion and the accidental use of *kelim* with fresh *bliyot* in a prohibited manner (see *Avoda Zara* Daf 76a).

Tosafot in *Avoda Zara* (Daf 66b, s.v.

Rava) record the fact that Jews would sometimes reside in villages where the only oven fit for baking bread was in the local non-kosher bakery. Non-Jews using the bakery would smear the baking implements with lard for non-kosher baking, and so prohibiting the equipment for Jewish use. Nevertheless, halachic authorities at the time allowed Jews to clean the equipment and bake bread in the same bakery after 24 hours elapsed from

non-Jewish use. There was no other way to produce this staple and the flavor could not make the bread non-kosher at that point. Although this would ordinarily not be permitted, the rabbis did not forbid use of a *kli* with expired non-kosher *bliyot* in an extremely pressing situation (*shaat hadechak*), and so the post facto ruling was applicable.

Some Poskim posit that a similar

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logic is at work regarding one's teeth. Restricting one to only dairy or only meat would be unreasonable and impractical, and perhaps the use of one's teeth for both should also be viewed as a *shaat hadechak*. However, this would only permit eating meat after dairy (or the reverse) after 24 hours—when our practice is never to wait more than six hours.¹

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, following earlier authorities,² suggests that the physical and chemical properties of one's mouth may bring *bliyot* in the teeth to the point of *noten taam lifgam* much earlier than in a *kli* that is otherwise lying dormant (*Shut Minchat Shlomo* 2:50 s.v. *Ikar*; *Nishmat Avraham*, Y.D. 89:2:1).

Indeed, this novel approach is far-reaching. Rav Shlomo Zalman notes that when a *davar charif*, a solid

sharp food, is cut with a utensil (such as teeth), taste is imparted into the food, even after 24 hours have passed (*Shulchan Aruch*, Y.D. 96:1). He concludes that the short-term deterioration of *taam* in the mouth is so thorough, even a *davar charif* will not be affected.³

While this approach may account for the laws of milk and meat, chametz follows more stringent standards. Ashkenazim prohibit the use of food impacted by *bliyot* on Pesach, even beyond the 24-hour window (Rema, O.C. 447:10), and so *noten taam lifgam* will not independently resolve our dilemma.

Requisite Heat for Transfer of Taste

The discussion of *bliyot* requires

further qualification. We have taken for granted that *kelim* absorb flavor from foods. In reality, this is only true when the food or the *kli* reaches the temperature of *yad soledet bo*—hot enough for the unsuspecting hand to recoil after contact (*Shulchan Aruch*, Y.D. 105:2). Chazal offer guidelines to determine this temperature (*Shabbat* Daf 40b), yet there is considerable debate as to the precise definition. Opinions range from 110°F⁴ to 160°F (*Shut Minchat Shlomo* 1:91:8 and *Shut Igrot Moshe*, O.C. 4:74:3) or higher. However, it is widely accepted to consider 120°F to 140°F for these purposes.⁵ In other words, a new pot filled with dairy that is heated to 100°F remains *parve*, and can be used for meat, as long as it is cleaned out well in between.

For some, it may be unusual to eat

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foods at that temperature, and it is conceivable that one's teeth are truly *parve* and not "*chametzdik*" when clean. Indeed, some Poskim assume categorically that any food placed in one's mouth should be considered beneath the *yad soledet bo* threshold.⁶ However, others note that food is commonly maintained and consumed at these temperatures and hotter.⁷ Health regulations require many foods, such as chicken, to be held at temperatures of at least 140°F to ensure food safety.⁸ Soup (or cholent!) is generally served at temperatures considerably hotter, and consumers are often disappointed when they are served at cooler temperatures. Hot tea or coffee may be served at temperatures nearing 195°F. Of course, the addition of milk will cool the beverage somewhat, depending on how much is used. Hot chocolate is prepared and heated to similar temperatures with milk already added. Likewise, Starbucks coffeehouse standards require steamed milk, added to specialty beverages such as lattes, to reach between 150°F–170°F.⁹ Research published in the *Journal of Food Science* reports that surveyed consumers prefer drinking temperatures of hot beverages at a mean value of 140°F,¹⁰ including respondents choosing temperatures in the 170°F–190°F range, measured following the addition of condiments.

Kli Rishon, Kli Sheni

The above temperature guidelines for *bliyot* apply to foods or liquids that remain in the same pot in which

they were prepared, known as *kli rishon*. In the realm of *Hilchot Shabbat*, it is generally accepted that when transferred to another pot, a *kli sheni*, all agree that the capacity to cook most items has been diminished, even for food that maintains a temperature of *yad soledet* (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 318:5,9).¹¹ Poskim debate if this principle is translatable to *kashrut* and *chametz*. While *ikar hadin* (letter of the law) assumes the lenient approach regarding milk and meat (*Shulchan Aruch*, Y.D. 105:2) at least *post facto*, once again we assume a more stringent approach for Pesach. It is unlikely that food will enter one's mouth directly from a *kli rishon*. According to the lenient approach, it is now safe to say that one's teeth remain *parve*. However, for Pesach's unique, stricter standards, even *chametz* flavor absorbed via *kli sheni* should be considered (Rema, O.C. 447:3).

Furthermore, Acharonim quote Maharshal's position that hot, solid food in a *kli sheni* (e.g., a potato or matzah ball) does not follow the normal leniencies that exist for a *kli sheni*. Such food is known as "*davar gush*." Maharshal states his position regarding the laws of milk and meat (*Yam Shel Shlomo*, *Chulin* 7:44). While many disagree with Maharshal, as far as Pesach is concerned, we would *l'chatchila* deem a *kli* that absorbed *chametz* flavor from a *davar gush* to be a "*chametzdik*" vessel. However, it is clear that halacha would not demand the application of either of these stringencies, *kli sheni* or *davar gush*, to be observed in the unusual

situation under discussion (see *Pri Megadim*, O.C. 451 M.Z. 9, A.A. 3). Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach notes that undue stringency in these matters would compromise one's capacity to fulfill the Torah command to rejoice on Yom Tov.¹²

Transfer of Flavor

An additional consideration is relevant, as well. Halacha generally assumes that the transfer of flavor to or from a food or a *kli* is instantaneous. Nevertheless, some Poskim refer to the ruling of *Chamudei Daniel* (see *Pitchei Teshuva*, Y.D. 105:8), which states that *bliyot* only occur when there is continuous contact, albeit brief, between two items. For example, if milk splatters on a hot pan that has been used for meat, the pan will be rendered non-kosher and must be *kashered* before further use. However, according to *Chamudei Daniel*, if one would wipe away the spill immediately after it occurred, the pan is kosher and retains its original meat status. *Aruch HaShulchan* (Y.D. 105:43) and *Shut Maharsham* (1:197) accept this opinion, citing *Shut Radvaz* who concurs. *Darchei Teshuva* (105:35) indicates that most Poskim oppose this leniency, but suggests that it may be acceptable in cases of great loss. The hot liquids described above certainly do not remain in one's mouth for more than a moment, and according to *Chamudei Daniel* can be ignored from a halachic perspective. While this approach would not be accepted under normal circumstances,¹³ it is a mitigating



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factor in the unusual circumstances of our particular question.

Living Creatures and the Transfer of Flavor

A fascinating incident is reported in *Shut Chatam Sofer* (Y.D. 94) that may shed light on our issue. The responsum records a story of an individual heating butter on a stovetop. Suddenly, a chicken entered the room and jumped into the hot pot. The local rabbi ruled that the butter was prohibited to eat and could not even be sold to a non-Jew. Although one may sell or benefit from a mixture of chicken and milk (*Shulchan Aruch* O.C. 87:3),¹⁴ there is an additional consideration in this case. Because the chicken was alive when it entered the pot, the butter should be prohibited as *ever min hachai*, because it contains

flavor that came from a living animal. Therefore, it may not be sold to a non-Jew, as the injunction against ever *min hachai* is one of the seven Noachide Laws.¹⁵

However, some Acharonim would argue that the chicken jumping into the pot does not impact the food whatsoever. For example, *Shut Amudei Or* (*siman* 54) and *Shut Tuv Taam V'Daat* (1:155) argue that living creatures do not impart their flavor and so do not follow the normal rules of *bliyyot*. *Kehillot Yaakov* (*Chulin*, *siman* 5) proves that this must be the case. After all, it is not uncommon for an individual to touch very hot food with his or her finger; for example, putting a finger in hot water to test its temperature. If flavor transfer existed in this case, the hot water would be prohibited by the flavor

imparted by the finger, for human flesh (*b'sar adam*) is also prohibited (Rema, Y.D. 79:1). Alternatively, food in one's mouth at the temperature of *yad soledet bo* would be rendered prohibited. Historically, this possibility was never entertained by Jewish scholars, leading us to believe that there is indeed no for concern.

Although *Shut Pri Yitzchak* (1:21) and others refute this assertion,¹⁶ this approach serves as a compelling mitigating factor in our dilemma. Teeth, as part of the human body, would not be subject to the usual laws of kashrut, and would not impart any flavor to foods or drinks. However, this leniency would not apply to dentures, fillings and other dental apparatuses which would remain subject to the original analysis.



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Dentures on Pesach

In light of the confluence of the many factors mentioned above, it is clear that natural teeth do not pose a kashrut concern on Pesach, and one merely has to clean his or her teeth well following chametz consumption on erev Pesach. Poskim apply the above principles in responsa regarding the use of dentures for milk and meat and on Pesach. The obvious difference is that dentures are removable and may undergo a more thorough *kashering* process, and perhaps must. In fact, *Shut Tzitz Eliezer* (9:25) records that the author of *Shut Tzemach Tzedek* had several sets of dentures manufactured for him by a dentist in Vienna, to distinguish between milk, meat and Pesach.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, those of the opinion that teeth never absorb chametz because food in the mouth is never *yad soledet bo*, do not require any additional measures to prepare dentures for Pesach.¹⁷ However, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach insisted that chametz *bliyyot* should be purged. He would *kasher* his dentures each Pesach, rather than rely on the various *tzadim l'hakel* (mitigating factors) discussed above.

Principle of Predominant Use

One final argument can be lodged in favor of those who do not require more than a thorough cleaning of dentures for Pesach. Even if one does occasionally consume very hot chametz, as Rav Shlomo Zalman noted, this may not require *kashering* to rectify. Varying *kashering* methods exist for *kelim* that have differing modes of chametz exposure. A griddle, which can absorb chametz directly with dry heat, requires the

most intense heat (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 451:4). On the other hand, a pot that only absorbs *bliyyot* via a liquid medium is subject to a lower standard, and so on (*ibid.* 5). A utensil that is exposed to chametz in more than one manner need only be *kashered* according to its most frequent mode of use, even if it is occasionally subject to a more significant form of chametz absorption (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 451:6). While Ashkenazic practice is to require the most intense standard in all situations (Rema and *Mishna Berurah*, *ibid.* 48), this custom is waived in extenuating circumstances (see *Mishna Berurah*, *ibid.* 47). Because the vast majority of chametz consumed is certainly not *yad soledet bo*, a thorough cleaning of the mouth would suffice.¹⁸

Endnotes

1 See *Chulin* 105a.

2 See *Shut Zekan Aharon* (Tinyana, Siman 56) and *Chidushei Chatam Sofer* (*Chulin* Daf 105a).

3 Not all authorities agree that every sharp food is subject to this principle (see *Beit Yosef*, Y.D. 96:1). This is noteworthy as an additional mitigating factor in our discussion.

4 It is interesting to note that scientific literature dictates that this is also the temperature at which the epidermis will be burned, reminiscent of the aforementioned Talmudic guidelines. See Lee HS, O'Mahony M. "At What Temperatures do Consumers Like to Drink Coffee?: Mixing Methods." *Journal Food Science-Chicago*-67.7 (2002):2774-7.

5 See OU Document A-171. See also *The Dairy Industry Primer*, Rabbi Zushe Blech, published in *Daf HaKashrut*, Adar 5757.

6 Chazon Ish quoted in *Orchot Rabbeinu* (2:27), *Igrot Moshe* (O.C. 1:5).

7 See *Shut Minchat Shlomo* (2:50).

8 See for example, New York State Department of Health Code for Food Service Establishments, Part 14, subpart

14-1.10 (available at: https://www.health.ny.gov/regulations/nycrr/title_10/part_14/subpart_14-1.htm).

9 *Starbucks Beverage Manual*, see pp. 4, 6, 44 and 45 (available at: http://www.mwrbrandcentral.com/JSPVP/blog/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/WPS_Beverage-Manual-Complete-w-Frappuccino-Blended-7-8-14.pdf). See also *Starbucks Complete Training Manual*, available at: <http://www.imcomacademy.com/JSPVP/blog/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Starbucks-Complete-Training-Manual.pdf>).

10 See Lee and O'Mahony op.cit.. See also *National Coffee Association Guide to Brewing Essentials*, available at: <http://www.ncausa.org/About-Coffee/How-to-Brew-Coffee>.

11 Provided that the temperature is not unusually hot, see *Mishna Berura* (O.C. 318:48).

12 See *Shut Minchat Shlomo* (2:50, s.v. *V'Gam*).

13 See *Darchei Teshuva*, 105:35.

14 Unlike beef and milk where it is prohibited to sell or benefit from the mixture (*Shulchan Aruch* O.C. 87:1).

15 See *Sanhedrin* Daf 56b and *Avoda Zara* Daf 6b.

16 *Kehillot Yaakov* reconciles his aforementioned proof. While *b'sar adam* is indeed prohibited, Rambam assumes that it is not a formal *lo taaseh*. Some Poskim hold that *taam k'ikar* only applies to a *lo taaseh*. See also *Gan Shoshanim*, by RIETS Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Menachem Genack (2:10). Furthermore, the prohibition of *b'sar adam* may not apply until flesh is removed from the body. *Chavatzet Hasharon* on Esther (pg. 52) observes that if one places a finger in a hot liquid, he will remove it immediately, if it is indeed *yad soledet bo*. According to *Chamudei Daniel*, the liquid would be unaffected.

17 Chazon Ish quoted in *Orchot Rabbeinu* (2:27), *Igrot Moshe* (O.C. 1:5). See also *Tzitz Eliezer* (9:25) citing Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank. Rav Shmuel Fuerst reports that Rav Moshe Feinstein recommended refraining from consumption of hot chametz and *davar charif* within 24 hours of the start of Pesach.

18 See *Shut Minchat Shlomo* (2:50, s.v. *V'Gam*).