

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's question:

What is the status of quartz stone counter-tops in terms of *kashering* them for *Pesach*?

The issues:

A) Methods of kashering; Materials that can or cannot be kashered

B) Kashering a table-top

C) Quartz stone

A) Methods of kashering; Materials that can or cannot be kashered

If a food is forbidden, its separated flavor, *taam*, is also forbidden. Therefore, if this flavor flavors permissible food, the food is now forbidden. *Ta'am* can be transferred in two ways: it is imparted directly to the permissible food when they are cooked together; it could be cooked in a utensil that absorbs the forbidden flavor and then imparts it to a kosher food cooked in it later. This absorbed flavor is called *balua*, swallowed.

Ta'am can only forbid a neutral food if it is beneficial. Whereas spoiled food is forbidden until it is considered totally inedible, flavor that contributes negative taste no longer forbids kosher food. This is called *nosain ta'am lifegam*, or *ta'am pagum*. Twenty-four hours after being absorbed in the walls of the utensil, it is considered *pagum*.

One part of forbidden food cannot impart a trace of its flavor to sixty parts of other food. Some flavor will be transferred, but it is too little to be detected. The amount and proportion of the flavor is measured by the amount of original forbidden food. It is assumed that a pot can absorb the volume of all the flavor of actual food cooked inside it, provided that the volume of the pot is equal or more than the volume of the food. Any time more food is cooked in the pot, all the previously absorbed flavor can come out of the walls of the pot and be imparted to the new food. Thus, each time fresh food is cooked in there it must be enough to neutralize the forbidden *balua*.

Accordingly, the pot may not be used until it has been *kashered*, cleansed of the unkosher flavor. Even if the maximum unkosher taste is so little that when the pot is full or half full it will be neutralized, or it is *pagum*, one may not use it. The exception to this is *kli shefa*, a large pot never used for a small amount, that happened to absorb a small amount of unkosher *balua*. Some maintain that this dispensation only works if the non-kosher *ta'am* is already *pagum*. This exception may be relied on only occasionally. The ruling itself is contested, and using the utensil involves intentionally neutralizing the *ta'am*. This is normally forbidden. Therefore, eventually, the utensil must be *kashered*.

Kashering purges the forbidden *ta'am balua* in the walls of the utensil. As long as actual food is present, it will continue to impart its flavor. Therefore, the first step in *kashering* is to remove any residue of the forbidden food. Each time food is cooked in there, it becomes forbidden and, in turn, freshens the forbidden *balua*. Fresh food cooked

in there after twenty-four hours does not become forbidden by it, and does not refresh the *balua*. However, the utensil must still be *kashered*. The standard *kashering* process involves boiling water. If this water is insufficient to neutralize it, it reabsorbs the *balua*, and then imparts it back. Therefore, before *kashering*, one should wait twenty-four hours, assuring the absence of forbidding *ta'am*.

Ta'am can be removed in two ways. It can be taken out of where it has become lodged, by boiling, or it can be destroyed by burning. The first method is called *hag'alah*, and the second, *libun*. These are Scriptural concepts, referred to when the Jews captured utensils as spoils of the war with Midian. This is one Talmudic source for *ta'am ke'ikar*.

Earthen utensils absorb easily, but do not impart all of the *balua*. They can not be *kashered* by *hag'alah*. *Libun* would work for practically anything. Once the *ta'am* is burned, it no longer exists. However, there is concern that one might be wary of using a high enough heat due to the fragility of the utensil. Therefore, the only valid method is *hachzaras kivshonos*, returning the utensils to the kilns in which they were fired originally. One doing this is clearly not concerned whether they crack. Many maintain that materials like plastics that were used hot can not be *kashered*. They have properties similar to earthenware, but can not be baked at high temperatures. However, if they were not used with direct heat, they can sometimes be *kashered* in the same way that they were used. Some utensils absorb without a heat medium, but by soaking cold. This can be *kashered* by soaking cold for twenty-four hours, then emptying and re-soaking three times.

Glass is debated. Some say it is impervious to any *balua*, and should never require *kashering*. Others treat it like metal, that can be *kashered* in the same ways. A third view maintains that it is like earthenware, and cannot be *kashered*. The consensus is to follow the three views for different applications. When it comes to using the same utensils for meat and dairy, we assume that it is impervious. Both of these food types are permissible. The prohibition begins when they are mixed, including in *balua* form. From non-kosher food, we require *kashering*, and recognize its validity. *Chametz* is stringent. On *Pesach* any mixture is forbidden, regardless of the overwhelming amount of permissible food, and *taam pagum* is forbidden. Therefore, we apply the most stringent view on glassware.

Libun itself has two levels, *libun chamur* and *libun kal*. *Libun chamur* means that the utensil is heated to the point that it could actually begin to shed some of its surface material. *Libun kal* is heated to the point that straw would singe when touching it. Each of these is used, depending on how strongly the flavor was absorbed. Sometimes *libun kal* is used as a substitute for *hag'alah*, and in cases where it is more convenient.

There is a discussion on *kashering* from meat to dairy. *Hetaira bala*, the *balua* was not forbidden, but one wishes to remove it to permit the counterpart flavor. The Talmud discusses this idea with regard to the flavor of *korban* meat. After a time limit the meat becomes *nosar*, overdue, and is forbidden. For many *korbanos*, this is two days after the slaughtering. If the meat was cooked, the flavor in the pot could become *nosar*. Since every day new *korban* meat is cooked, one could say that each day *kashers* the previous day's flavor before it becomes *nosar*. This idea is used to lighten the severity of the *balua* and to allow for a weaker form of *kashering* than the way it was absorbed. There is a major debate on whether *chameitz* absorbed before *Pesach* can be called *hetaira bala*. It is

not forbidden before *Pesach*. In this way it resembles meat or dairy. However, meat or dairy need to be mixed, or they remain permissible forever. *Chameitz* becomes forbidden automatically. *Nosar* takes on a new *halachic* status. *Chameitz* is the same all through.

A utensil is *kashered* consistent with its normal use. *Kebol'o kach polto* means that one extracts the flavor in the same way that it was absorbed. In some cases, extracting is not possible. The only way to remove it is to destroy it. This is where *libun* comes into play. Most *hag'alah* involves a *kli rishon*, a pot used in the cooking stage of the food preparation process. Foods cooked in a pot are absorbed through the medium of a boiling liquid. They are thus extracted through this method of *kashering*. The utensil is suspended in boiling water for the time it takes to loosen and remove the flavor. If it can not be suspended inside a big pot, other methods are used. These include filling it and causing it to overflow, especially using a heated rock or metal, or *libun kal*.

If a utensil was used with hot food but not on the flame, the same *hag'alah* is done. If a utensil is used with food roasted dry, *hag'alah* will not be effective. When a utensil was used with direct fire, *libun chamur* is required. In some other instances, such as indirect heat, *libun kal* is enough. If the food was poured from a *kli rishon* into a *kli sheini*, second utensil, it absorbed the *ta'am* this way. It can be extracted by pouring boiling water on it. Utensils used with no heat or very low warmth do not require *kashering*. Flavor can only be imparted through heat, or by soaking for twenty-four hours. The method for those utensils has been discussed. [See Psachim 30a-b 76a-b, Avoda Zara 66b 75b-76b, Zevachim 96b 97a, Chulin 8a 97-99 108a, Poskim. Tur, Sh Ar OC 451-452, YD 98 99 121 122, commentaries. Hilchos Pesach (R Eider) XIII:3-6, etc. Hakashrus 3:22-24.]

B) Kashering a table top

A table or counter is never used as a *kli rishon*. Usually, it is used to place a hot pot on, with the metal separating the food from the surface. Hot food is sometimes placed on the surface, or it can overflow. The poskim debate the status of hot solid food. Some say that since it is not surrounded on all sides by a *kli shaini*, it has the status of a *kli rishon*. Nonetheless, the counter surface itself is cold. The Talmud debates the status of a cold surface under a hot item. We follow the opinion that considers it a cold interaction. However, at the point of contact, the cold surface gets hot while cooling the hot item. Therefore, *balua* enters a very thin layer, known as *kedai klipah*, enough to be peeled. Since this is a normal use for counters, they could be *kashered* in the same way, by *iruy kli rishon*. However, this is not really required if the main usage does not involve this.

Some poskim maintain that for *Pesach* one must take into account the possibility that hot bread was placed on the counter, and that it constitutes usage with a *kli rishon*. This view requires an *even meluban*, hot stone (or an electric iron on the highest setting), that is dragged across the surface while the hot water is poured onto it. Others say that while this has become the *minhag*, it is unnecessary. If the counter is not made of one piece, there is always some concern for minor particles trapped in the joints. In this case, the surface must be covered. [See Tur sh Ar OC 451:21 Ar Hash 41, commentaries.]

C) Quartz stone

The poskim say that stone can be *kashered*. Its *balua* is extracted, as opposed to earthenware. As mentioned, plastics and other synthetic materials are debated. Many

poskim consider them the same as earthenware. *Askenazim* also include glass in the same category, for *chametz*. Quartz-stone is a synthetic material that can be shaped to form a single piece counter. The material is made up of 93% natural stone, and 7% synthetic binding material. It is hardened through heat, which would be called baking it. Its advantages include the resistance to staining and other types of absorption. Some brands require periodic application of a sealant. It also resists heat very well, while some stone surfaces have a risk of explosion when very hot materials are placed on them. Supposedly, it does not break scratch or crack as easily. Manufacturers claim that the material is impervious to germs and prevents growth of bacteria on its surface.

If synthetic material is considered earthenware, *hachzaras kivshonos* might not help. A kiln reaches the temperature of *libun*. The ovens used to harden these materials are not so hot. Once hardened, the material cannot necessarily tolerate the same levels of heat.

The debates about glass and plastics center on the lack of a clear Talmudic recognition of impervious material. The Talmud describes the surface of the heart as impervious to absorbing blood. Based on this, the poskim debate whether glass could be considered the same. Apparently, without a Talmudic guideline, the matter is open to debate. All matter is assumed by some to have enough space at the molecular level to absorb some *taam*. Metal certainly seems to be waterproof. Through heat, metal surfaces can clearly absorb, as the Torah requires *kashering* the vessels from *Midian*.

Libun kal would work for earthen vessels not used with direct flames. It burns the absorbed *taam*. We do not rely on it because the owner might not heat it enough, out of concern for it cracking. Therefore, thick heavy utensils that will not crack, and bricks that are not so valuable, may be *kashered* through *libun kal*. Accordingly, if one can get a guarantee from the manufacturer that the quartz stone will not crack when heated with *libun kal*, he may use this method. Since it is guaranteed, he will not be concerned about cracking. Since the *balua* in this case is *kedai klipah*, placing a hot electric iron over the surface for a few minutes should suffice. It should reach the point where straw would singe when touching it. [See refs to sections A and B. Psachim 30b, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 451:1-2 8, commentaries. R Eider XIII:note 10.]

In conclusion, some *rabonim* might rely on *kashering* quartz stone. A *rav* should be consulted. If the manufacturer guarantees it, *libun kal* may be used to *kasher* it.

On the Parsha ... [Moshe] took the *egel* that they made, burned it in fire and ground it fine .. and made the *Benei Yisroel* drink it. [32:20] He did not melt it, but burned it together with another material, so that it became a black powder. [Ibn Ezra, Ramban] Why did Moshe not grind the gold directly? Why did he not melt the *egel* and then grind it? Perhaps Moshe wanted to alter the material such that it would be burned, rather than cleansed.

Sponsored by Joshua Sindler in memory of Merv Berkman, Moshe Yudel ben Elazar z"l, whose

***yahrzeit* is on the 20th of Adar. ם**

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