

הלכה ברורה

Halacha Berurah

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The Kosher Consumer in the Modern World - Part One

Reviewed by Harav Yisroel Belsky

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The Mysterious "K"

In a previous issue we discussed some of the basic principles involved in determining when a product without a hashgacha may be used, although in principle one should generally only purchase products that have a hashgacha. In this issue we will discuss contemporary applications of these and additional kashrus principles.

Natural and Artificial Flavoring

As a general rule, any time the word 'flavors' is listed in the ingredients of a product it should not be purchased without a *hashgacha*. There is no difference if it is a food item or a medicine. Even if the label on the bottle states that all flavors are natural, it does not lessen the concern. On the contrary, *treife* ingredients come from natural sources. Wine, for example, is considered natural, as are flavorings that are animal derivatives (e.g. castoreum from beavers and civet from the cat family). Petroleum and many other chemicals which are *artificial* are kosher. If the bottle says, for example, that it is 'cherry flavored', all that means is that the beverage has a cherry taste. A flavor that is very similar to the taste of cherries was added to the beverage. If the label says 'flavored with cherries' then perhaps actual cherries were used, but otherwise, the flavorings come from other sources. Similarly, the word 'pure' is meaningless, and simply means that the product is free from bacteria and bugs. If it is one hundred percent pure, that means that it is totally free of any diseases or bacteria. Therefore, if the label on a seltzer bottle states '100% Naturally Pure Cherry Flavor', it does not necessarily mean that it is kosher. It is also noteworthy to mention that regarding many sodas, if it says on the bottle that it is 'naturally sweetened', that could mean that grape juice was added to it, and it would thus be forbidden because of *stam yeinom*. Living in such a sophisticated and scientifically advanced society where thousands of ingredients can be processed and refined from a plethora of living and non-living things, a *hashgacha* is certainly required to confirm its kosher origin.¹

Many packages contain the letter "K" which symbolically alludes to the fact that someone believes the product is kosher. The letter "K" is a letter in the alphabet and therefore cannot be a registered trademark. Its placement on a package is totally unrestricted. Any company that believes its ingredients are kosher may decide to place a "K" on the package proclaiming its kosher status. Some companies may be under the impression that anything that does not contain a significant amount of pork is inherently kosher. Others a bit more knowledgeable may believe that as long as all ingredients are kosher, then although the product is processed on the same machinery as non-kosher items, it still retains its kosher status. Some might even have a *mashgiach* who is not reliable or fully familiar with *hilchos kashrus*. The *mashgiach* may even be reform or conservative. Obviously, without the approval of a reliable *mashgiach* one may not consume the product. Some companies are known to have a reliable *mashgiach*, yet still only place a "K" on their products. It is imperative for every kosher consumer to check with someone who is well versed in the field of contemporary kashrus prior to consuming anything questionable.²

Alcohol

There are several different types of alcohol, and their kashrus status is chiefly dependent on how they are produced. Some may pose a kashrus problem year round, some only on *Pesach*, while others may always be permitted. It is important to familiarize oneself with many of the technical terms and processes used in producing alcohol, as they are very relevant in *halacha*.

I. Ethyl Alcohol

One of the most common alcohols on the market is Ethyl alcohol. Ethyl alcohol has been made since ancient times by the fermentation of sugars. All beverage ethanol and more than half of industrial ethanol is still made by this process. Starch can be used as the raw material. Starch is a complex carbohydrate (consisting of chains of sugar) that is stored in plants, grains, legumes, potatoes, etc. The yeast enzyme called zymase changes the simple sugars into ethanol and carbon dioxide.

Please Note: Due to the intricacy and brevity of the material discussed in each topic, a *Rov* should be consulted for a final *psak halacha*. In addition, this publication does not intend to be *מכריע* on issues that are a *machlokes haposkim*. Although we have usually brought the dissenting views in the footnotes, we have selected for simplicity sake to incorporate into the main text the views of the *Mishnah Berurah*, R' Moshe Feinstein, R' Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach and several other preeminent *poskim*. Please send all questions and comments to 1341 E. 23rd Street, Brooklyn, NY 11210 or email to halachaberurah@thekosher.net

As we mentioned, the alcohol found in beverages is ethyl alcohol. The earlier alcoholic beverages were products of simple fermentation that, at most, yielded about 12 percent alcohol. During the 10th century, a new scientific method was discovered which enabled beverages to contain a significantly higher alcoholic content. This method is called the distillation process. Distillation is the process of heating up a liquid and thereby dividing the different elements within the liquid by having one evaporate first. If the boiling points of the components of a mixture differ, the one with the lower boiling point will evaporate first. An important example is the separation of water, which boils at 100° C (212° F), and alcohol, which boils at 78.5° C (173° F). If a mixture of these two liquids is boiled, the vapor that rises is almost entirely pure alcohol, and the water is left behind. The vapor is then cooled and recovered in a liquid form by condensation. This process is used in producing many types of liquor, and achieves a higher alcoholic content than the starting mixture. Many of the different types of liquor are products of distillation from different beverages of lower alcoholic content. For example, brandy is distilled from wine, while some other alcoholic beverages are made from fermented mixtures originally containing large proportions of carbohydrates (e.g., rum from fermented molasses and whiskey from fermented grain mash). The higher alcoholic content can range from 80 Proof (about 40 percent) for mild whiskies to 150 Proof or more for stronger brandies and rums.³

The potential kashrus problem for *Pesach* with ethyl alcohol is quite evident. Starch can be derived from the five types of grain, and therefore, if starch was used to initiate the process, it may be *chometz*. Although ethyl alcohol is commonly made from *kitniyos* or produced synthetically from gases, products containing ethyl alcohol should be treated as *chometz*, unless one can verify otherwise.⁴

Ethyl alcohol may also pose a *kashrus* problem during the year if it is distilled from the wine of *akum*, as is common in many popular beverages (e.g. brandy).⁵

II. Isopropyl and Methyl Alcohol

Isopropyl and methyl alcohol are two types of toxic alcohol commonly found on the market. Isopropyl alcohol is usually derived from petroleum, and is used exclusively as rubbing alcohol. Methyl alcohol was formerly made by the destructive distillation of wood. Nowadays, however, almost all methanol that is produced is synthetic, and is made from hydrogen and carbon monoxide. Methanol is used as a denaturant for grain alcohol (see below), as an anti-freeze, as a solvent for gums and lacquers, and is used in the synthesis of many organic compounds. These alcohols pose no kashrus problem during the year or for *Pesach*.⁶

III. Denatured Alcohol

Most industrial ethanol is denatured to prevent its use as a beverage. Denaturing involves mixing ethanol with small amounts of poisonous or unpleasant substances to make the ethanol undrinkable, and renders it unfit even for animal consumption. The removal of *all these* substances would involve a series of treatments that would be more expensive than the federal excise tax on alcoholic beverages.⁷

However, Rav Moshe Feinstein and many other *poskim* maintain that since denatured alcohol *can be* modified and made back into drinkable alcohol by diluting it or by making some other minor improvements (even though completely restoring it by removing *all added* substances would be difficult and costly) it cannot be considered permissible in its unmodified state. Therefore, if the denatured alcohol was made with *chomitzdike* grains, it is forbidden on *Pesach* just like ordinary ethyl alcohol.⁸

Using Products On *Pesach* That Contain Alcohol

Many *poskim* maintain that the whole problem of using products that contain grain alcohol on *Pesach* is limited to those in a liquid form. Those that are in a solid form are permitted since they cannot be diluted and cannot be modified and made edible.⁹ Some examples of products in a liquid form which may be prohibited are: cologne, hair spray, shaving lotion, deodorants that are in a liquid, spray, or roll-on form, baby wipes, etc. Other liquids are permitted despite their alcohol content, since they are not fit for consumption and cannot easily be modified into an edible state. Examples of such liquids are: nail polish, nail polish remover, hand cream, lotions, shampoo, paint, air refreshers, etc. Powders are generally permissible.¹⁰

Medications

Many people are under the false impression that concerning medications everything is permitted. Although in many instances there may be *heterim* to take certain medications as will be outlined below, nevertheless, where there are no such *heterim* they may not be taken unless refraining from taking the medication can lead to a life threatening situation.¹¹ Generally, if the medication contains *tarfus* but is not pleasant tasting, one is permitted to take it according to most *poskim*. In the previous issue of *Halacha Berurah*, we mentioned the view of other *poskim* who maintain that the medication should not be taken even in such an instance.¹²

Medicine Tablets

In general, non-sweetened medicine tablets do not contain non-kosher ingredients. The issue of capsules will be discussed in a later issue. Sweetened tablets may contain non-kosher flavoring. Furthermore, many medications may contain *chomitzdike* ingredients (e.g. wheat starch that is used as a binding agent) and would not be permitted for use on *Pesach*.¹³

We mentioned in the previous issue that there is a *machlokes haposkim* regarding a medicine that contains ingredients that are non-kosher or *chomitzdik* but are not fit for consumption. Many *poskim* permit taking such medications. Many pain relief medications are not fit for consumption and are therefore permitted according to these *poskim*.¹⁴ In order to adhere to the stricter opinion and still take the medication, one can wrap the medication in a tissue and swallow it in that manner. Alternately, one can grind the medicine tablet into a powdery substance, mix it into a food such as apple sauce in a manner by which it is considered nullified according to *halacha*, and then consume that mixture.¹⁵ When dealing with medicines that contain *chometz*, the medicine should be prepared in such a manner *before Pesach*.¹⁶ This is applicable to many coated tablets. The coatings are normally fit for consumption since they are made from sugar. Some coatings are made from a type of sugar called dextrose. Dextrose is derived from *kitniyos*, but is permissible even on *Pesach* since *kitniyos* is permitted in cases of illness.¹⁷ However, often it is coated with a type of sugar called maltose which is derived from *chomitzdike* grain.¹⁸

It should be noted that with respect to certain medications, if one grinds the medicine in the manner we discussed, it may be medically disadvantageous as it could decrease the effectiveness of the medicine. Some medicines are designed to work with a slow release method, and when one crushes the medicine, there is no controlled release of the medication. (Many such medications are coated with a waxy substance.) Additionally, some tablets have an enteric coating which is designed for a delayed release. In such in-

stances, mixing it into apple sauce would defeat the design of the medication. One should consult his doctor concerning his medication. If there are no alternative medications that are kosher, one may surely rely on the view of the majority of *poskim* who permit their use in instances where they are not fit for consumption. If they are fit for consumption and there is no kosher replacement, one should consult his *Rov*.¹⁹ According to all opinions, one is permitted to keep medications that are not fit for consumption in his house over *Pesach*.²⁰

It should be noted that there are some medications that may pose a problem of *bosor becholov* which makes the issue more complex, since one is forbidden to derive any benefit from *bosor becholov*. (E.g., where the medication contains lactose - sugar derived from milk, and magnesium stearate - the result of a chemical reaction between magnesium and steric acid [derived from beef fat of a kosher animal that was not slaughtered].) In cases of necessity, a *Rov* should be consulted.²¹

It should be noted that with regard to children's tablets which are sweetened with a flavoring that is not kosher, one should obtain either a kosher replacement or a pill that is not pleasant tasting. The option of grinding it up and mixing it into applesauce would not apply in this instance since one may not nullify *tarfus* intentionally. This is unlike *chometz* before *Pesach* or a pill that is not fit for consumption which was discussed above. In the event that no replacement is available, a *Rov* should be consulted.

Liquid Medications

Liquid medications tend to be a much graver issue. Aside from ingredients that are *chometzdik* which may be in the medicine, many liquid medicines such as cough syrups, pain relievers, and antihistamines contain non-kosher ingredients. A common ingredient used is glycerin. Glycerin is one of the basic ingredients found in fats and oils. Oil may be derived from animal fats, vegetables, or petroleum (rock oil). Glycerin derived from fat of a non-kosher slaughtered animal is obviously not kosher. Glycerin is very pleasant tasting. Some liquid medications are known to contain glycerin derived from animal fat. The source of the glycerin used in some other medications is virtually impossible to find out. The companies buy it in large amounts and it can be derived from any one of the previously mentioned items or even a combination of them all.²²

There really aren't any *heterim* to rely on regarding the use of liquid medicines that contain non-kosher ingredients and are pleasant tasting, unless it can otherwise lead to a life threatening situation. The non-kosher (or *chometzdike*) ingredients are present in substantial amounts and are generally good tasting, so they are not *botul* and are fit for consumption. In such a case, one would be forbidden to take the medicine unless it can lead to a life threatening situation. The common belief that it is permitted to use such medications is based on misinformation. One must check the ingredient information prior to purchasing the medication. Fortunately, there are many comparable kosher products available on the market that have a reliable *hashgacha*. Unflavored liquid medications for children generally do not pose any problem. It is very rare for *tarfus* to be used in these products. Since they are powder blended shortly before dispensing, they have a very short shelf life and only last about a week or two beyond the date of dispensation. Consequently, they do not require the use of the various preservatives and sweeteners placed in regular liquid medications. Flavored medication for children may pose a *kashrus* problem and should be purchased only with a *hashgacha*.²³

In the event that there is no comparable kosher medication, an option may be to ruin its taste by mixing in vinegar, salt, baking soda, or the like.²⁴

Kosher Soap

There are scrupulous individuals who only use kosher soap all year round. Soap is primarily made from fats and caustic soda (sodium hydroxide). The fats may be derived from an animal source (e.g. tallow). Additionally, it may contain ingredients which are *chometz*. Some *poskim*, including the Vilna Gaon, maintain that one should only use kosher soap, even though one does not consume the soap. This is based on the concept of *סיכה כשתיה*. However, many *poskim* permit the use of non-kosher soap. Additionally, our soaps are totally inedible.²⁵ The widespread practice is to only wash dishes with liquid soap and other dish cleaning agents that have a *hasgacha*, since some of the soap may remain on the dishes and subsequently be consumed together with food.²⁶

Toothpaste and Mouthwash

Many types of toothpaste and mouthwash contain glycerin. This is a *kashrus* concern all year round. Furthermore, toothpaste and mouthwash may pose a problem for use on *Pesach* due to the fact that they contain alcohol and may contain ingredients that are derivatives of *chometz*.²⁷

The *halacha* is that one may not place *tarfus* in one's mouth even if he does not intend to swallow it. This would especially apply where one is rinsing out his mouth with it.²⁸

Toothpaste and mouthwash are generally fit for consumption. If one swallows a tremendous amount of toothpaste or mouthwash it may cause an upset stomach. A small amount, however, may actually be pleasant. Many people specifically choose different flavors of mouthwash so that they can enjoy the pleasant taste. Toothpaste is also made to be very palatable, so that if one does swallow it he should not feel disgusted. Therefore, the *heter* of not being fit for consumption is not applicable.²⁹

Although toothpaste and mouthwash may both contain the same forbidden ingredients, the *halachic* rulings for them are not necessarily the same.

A good portion of toothpaste contains a mild abrasive or polishing agent. The abrasive that is used is chalk (calcium carbonate). Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky *parkened* that although one would normally require *shishim* to nullify the forbidden item, nevertheless, in this instance, since the toothpaste consists of chalk which is not a food item, it is *botul berov*.³⁰ However, many *poskim*, including Rav Yaakov, do advise that since there are glycerin-free toothpastes on the market, one should try to use them instead. Additionally, on *Pesach* one should preferably only use toothpaste that has a *hashgacha* certifying that it does not contain any *chometzdike* ingredients.³¹ Some are only stringent in this regard on *Pesach* while others are stringent all year round, as well. When going to a dentist, one who is stringent in this regard should inquire as to whether there is any glycerin (or *chometz* on *Pesach*) in the paste that is used.³²

With regard to mouthwash, it is not simply a matter of scrupulousness to try to obtain a mouthwash that is free from any forbidden ingredients. It is a serious *shailah*. Although mouthwash is not normally swallowed, it is considered a food item, unlike toothpaste. The forbidden ingredients are not *botul* and are pleasant tasting. Thus, one should only use glycerin-free mouthwash during the year, and on *Pesach* one should only use mouthwash that has a *hashgacha* certifying that it does not contain any *chometzdike* ingredients.³³

