



**VAAD HARABANIM**  
THE RABBINICAL COUNCIL  
of GREATER WASHINGTON

# THE BULLETIN

NISSAN 5781 • MARCH 2021 • VOLUME 9.1

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**Wishing you a Chag Kasher v'Sameach!**







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THE RABBINICAL COUNCIL  
of GREATER WASHINGTON

Rabbi Moshe Walter  
Woodside Synagogue Ahavas Torah  
Executive Director

Nisan 5781

Greetings,

The Mishnah (Pesachim 116a) teaches us how to tell the story of *yetzias mitzrayim* — the Exodus from Egypt — on Seder night: we are to be *maschil b'gnus u'm'sayim b'shevach*, to begin with the negative and end with the positive. The Mishnah further instructs that we should *darshin* — recite and analyze in depth — the five *pesukim* in *Parshas Ki Savo* (*Devarim* 26:4–8) starting with “*Arami oved avi.*” These, of course, are the verses that are recited by someone who brings his first fruits to the *Beis Hamikdash* to thank Hashem for His abundant kindnesses.

Rav Yerucham Olshin, *shlit"á*, questions why our *Chachamim* established these particular *pesukim* to comprise the body of the *Maggid* section of the Haggadah, as opposed to the more relevant *pesukim* in *Sefer Shemos* that deal directly with the events surrounding the Exodus. Moreover, the Rambam in *Hilchos Chometz u'Matzah* (7:4) restates the Mishnah, adding that anyone who is *mosif* and *ma'arich* is *meshubach* — that one who puts extra time and effort into analyzing these *pesukim* is praiseworthy. This statement is in itself problematic because, just three *halachos* earlier, in 7:1, he writes that anyone who is *ma'arich* in discussing the miracles and wonders surrounding *yetzias mitzrayim* is *meshubach*. Is the Rambam repeating himself for no apparent reason?

As we might expect, this is not the case. Rav Olshin explains that the Rambam is discussing the optimal fulfillment of two very different objectives associated with the Pesach Seder. The first objective, described in *Halacha* 7:1, is to strengthen our *emunah* in Hashem's divine providence and omnipotence. It is, therefore, highly commendable to be *ma'arich* in recounting the aforementioned miracles. The second objective of the Seder, however, is very different: namely, to enhance our sense of gratitude to Hashem for all the miracles He has performed and continues to perform for the Jewish people. This requires the recitation and a detailed analysis of “*Arami oved avi,*” — the *pesukim* of the first fruits, the *pesukim* of gratitude. As Rashi comments in *Devarim* 26:3, we recite these verses to avoid being *k'fui tovah* — displaying ingratitude. It is, perhaps, even more important in these very challenging and unsettling times that we not only work to strengthen our *emunah* but our feelings of *hakaras hatov*, gratitude, to Hashem as well.

Chazal teach that anyone who displays ingratitude to his fellow man will eventually display ingratitude to Hashem. The inverse is also likely true; anyone who displays gratitude to his fellow man will eventually display gratitude to Hashem. Perhaps this is a good Pesach for those of us who

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have recently suffered painful loss, depredation, and isolation to reawaken our feelings of gratitude and love for HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

Along those lines, I would like to express my appreciation to the many people and organizations in our community who, with great *mesiras nefesh*, have performed innumerable acts of *chesed* throughout the course of this awful pandemic:

- To the volunteers of Yad Yehuda, Bikur Cholim, the Mikvah Emunah Society, the Chevra Kadisha, and numerous other communal organizations, who continue to provide essential services to the community under the most adverse of circumstances;
- To the teachers of our Yeshivos and day schools who deal with the formidable challenges of educating children remotely — or in person while encumbered by the constraints of masks and social distancing;
- To the owners of restaurants, catering companies, and supermarkets who provide us with kosher goods and services, while providing jobs and income to their workforce — despite diminished revenues;
- To the *mispalilim* and kosher consumers who wear masks and faithfully adhere to all social distancing protocols while supporting the religious and commercial infrastructure of our community;
- To those who attend backyard weddings to gladden the hearts of *chassanim and kallos*, and backyard and Zoom *shiva* visits to comfort *aveilim*;
- To children who dutifully care for their elderly parents and to parents who have assumed the extra burden of having children at home during normal working hours;
- To the physicians and nurses who are on the front lines of administering care to those in need, who formulate responsible policy for our schools and synagogues, and who are always on call to graciously answer questions and address our concerns;
- To those who, for medical reasons, must remain isolated but who nevertheless continue to participate in *shiurim* and communal affairs remotely;
- To the *Rabanim* of our community who work tirelessly to maintain a modicum of normal Torah life during this pandemic and try to lift the spirits of their *ba'al habatim*.

There is real danger of appearing superficial and/or insensitive when trying to look for a silver

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lining amidst clouds of darkness. It is certainly true that, without the insight of an authentic *navi*, it is impossible to come to grips with the reasons for this terrible COVID pandemic or the lessons to be learned from it. But it is no less true that we have witnessed countless acts of kindness, self-sacrifice, and devotion over the course of this past year. We have seen that these trying times have brought out the best in us — and that is certainly something for which we should be grateful.

Best wishes for a Chag Kasher V'Sameach.

With love and respect,

Yosef Singer, President  
Vaad Harabanim of Greater Washington

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BULLETIN OF THE VAAD HARABANIM OF GREATER WASHINGTON: NISSAN 2021

## Introduction from the Director

We are pleased to present Issue 9.1: The Pesach Edition of the Bulletin of the Vaad HaRabanim of Greater Washington.

This issue contains informative articles for Pesach 5781 as well as essays regarding our community and its infrastructure which is constantly being enhanced by its wonderful members. It is our hope that the material contained within these pages will enhance your Pesach preparations and Yom Tov experience while providing greater familiarity with the work of the Vaad and its organizational partners in the Greater Washington Jewish community.

**In the Pesach section**, Rabbi Michoel Frank continues his review of the *minhag ashkenaz* prohibiting the consumption of *kitniyos* on Pesach. Rabbi Dovid Rosenbaum offers practical *halachos* for an Erev Pesach which occurs on Shabbos, while Rabbi Brahm Weinberg contemplates Pesach past and present. Also included in this section is the annual local guide to Chametz After Pesach.

**The Community section** of the Bulletin includes two important and relevant articles. Mr. Shlomo Katz has penned an informative piece which explores the history and contemporary status of our *eruv*, with special focus on the Silver Spring Eruv. Rabbi Ariel Sadwin's revealing article outlines the vital work of Agudath Israel of Maryland and its significance to each of us.

**In the Kashrus section**, Rabbi Mordechai Rhine provides a glimpse into the critical role of the *mashgiach*, the engine of the Capitol K kashrus team.

A very special thank you to Mrs. Mindy Tolchinsky for her tireless efforts, expertise, and precision in editing this issue. Mrs. Tolchinsky's attention to detail and careful review of the articles has been most impactful.

Thank you to Mrs. Wendy Guberman for the beautiful typesetting, layout, and graphic design which are evident on all the Bulletin's pages.

Last, but far from least, my thanks to Rabbi Yosef Singer, President of the R.C.G.W., for his direction of, commitment to, and leadership of all the Vaad's efforts and responsibilities. This is true this past year, more than ever, with the wide range of serious issues that required enormous attention and dedication.

It has not been an easy year; this generation has never faced the types of challenges through which we have lived these past twelve months. At the same time, we can be very proud of our community for overcoming many of these trials — by increasing our commitment to Torah, *tefillah*, and *chesed* under very extraordinary circumstances.

When we sit down to the Seder this year, we may be better equipped than ever to fulfill the mandate of Rabban Gamliel: “In every generation, a person is obligated to look at himself as though he personally departed from Egypt.” Let us use our personal, communal, and national struggles to experience slavery, subjugation, and bondage on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan — and use those very same feelings to truly pine for *geulah*, *mashiach*, and *Binyan Yerushalayim Bimheirah!*

We hope you enjoy and share this edition of the Bulletin. Chag Kasher V'Sameach!

Rabbi Moshe Walter  
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Erev Pesach 5781

Our Dear Community Members,

We are all aware of the enormous strain on businesses during these times. Once again, we direct your attention specifically to our caterers, restaurants and food providers such as our kosher supermarkets. Their “sit down” business has been reduced to zero with the cancellation of events and mandatory reductions in or elimination of public events.

These are the proprietors who help us keep kosher all year long and provide us with the best service possible on an ongoing basis.

It is not our intent to direct you to one provider over another. Nevertheless, we do appeal to you to direct as much business as possible locally so that our community's kosher vendors can minimize the negative financial impact on their businesses and — in some cases — literally survive this crisis. For their part, some local businesses have implemented free delivery and various other incentives to encourage you to patronize them.

With Hashem’s help, this crisis will pass and we all want these providers to be there for us — just as they have been in the past — going forward. Now, we need to be there for them. As you plan and make your Pesach purchases, please remember to support our local vendors.

With the utmost respect and gratitude for your support and with every wish for strength and faith in Hashem,

The Vaad HaRabanim of Greater Washington

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# ***Kitniyos* on Pesach: Seeds, Spices, and the Controversy Over Cottonseed Oil**

Rabbi Michoel Frank  
Ohr HaTorah

## **REVIEW OF THE PROHIBITION AGAINST KITNIYOS**

In past years, we have discussed the history of the *minhag* to prohibit *kitniyos* on Pesach, as well as the original sources among the *Rishonim*. This year, let us try to gain an understanding of the scope of the prohibition, exactly what is prohibited, and which kinds of grains or spices are included.

*Kitniyos* are typically defined as legumes such as rice, corn, peas, mustard seed and all varieties of beans. The earliest source for prohibiting these items on Pesach is Rabbi Yitzchak ben Yosef Mi'Corbeil, a mid-13<sup>th</sup> century French Tosafist known as the *SeMaK* — author of *Sefer Mitzvos HaKatan*. Combining the explanations given by the *SeMaK* with others found in the *poskim*, we find a total of four reasons for this prohibition:

1. *Kitniyos* can be made into a cooked dish resembling grain and will be confused with grain;
2. *Kitniyos* are harvested like grain and will be confused with grain products;
3. *Kitniyos* can be made into bread like grain;
4. Grain gets mixed into the *kitniyos* harvest, because they are often planted adjacently.

It is clear from the *SeMaK* that *if even one of these reasons is present*, it is sufficient to prohibit the *kitniyos* on Pesach.

## **EXTENT OF THE PROHIBITION AGAINST KITNIYOS**

Now that we have established the four reasons for the prohibition, we must determine the degree to which *Chazal* extended this prohibition. Did they treat *kitniyos* like actual *chametz*? We know that this is not true, as we can see in the *teshuvah* of Rabbi Yisrael Isserlein in the *Terumas HaDeshen*, [113]:

*Question: Grain of kitniyos which is not from the five grains and which has become wet and almost certainly has become chametz: Is it permitted to have it in the home on Pesach?*

*Teshuvah: It seems to me it is allowed. I was answered likewise by one of the Gedolim in a teshuvah...all the problems that we are concerned about with kitniyos are only regarding the prohibition to eat it, not to have it in the home (i.e., Bal Yeira'eh). Likewise, it is permitted to benefit from those grains of kitniyos on Pesach, as by lighting sesame seed oil or hemp seed oil. Although they typically are softened in water first before they are pressed for oil, and almost certainly become chametz, nevertheless it is allowed (to have benefit other than eating.)*

The *Terumas HaDeshen* makes it clear that the prohibition of *kitniyos* was limited to eating alone. It was not equated with *chametz* regarding any of the other prohibitions — even if the *kitniyos* had been soaked and had turned into some form of *chametz*. We are not prohibited from either maintaining *kitniyos* in the home or benefitting from the *kitniyos* (as in the the *issur hana'ah* of *chametz*).

## DERIVATIVES OF KITNIYOS

From the words of the *Terumas HaDeshen*, however, we can deduce a very important point: While explaining why it is permitted to light with sesame seed oil on Pesach — and providing the singular rationale that one is permitted to benefit from, but not eat, the oil — we learn that *derivatives* of *kitniyos* are also included in the prohibition, as oil is only a derivative of the grain — not the actual product. The *Terumas HaDeshen* is quoted by the *Remah* (Rabbi Moshe Isserles, in his 16<sup>th</sup> century commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 453:1).

## STATUS OF SEEDS: CUMIN, CARAWAY, AND COTTONSEED OIL

On the basis of this *Terumas HaDeshen*, we can address the question: Are seeds included in the prohibition of *kitniyos*? The *SeMaK* writes that mustard seed is *kitniyos*, because it is harvested like grain. The *Terumas HaDeshen* states that sesame seed and hemp seed are *kitniyos* as well.

The *Remah* cites the prohibition against mustard, (O.C. 464:1). However, the *Remah* (O.C. 453:1) permits the use of anis (עניס), coriander (אוליבנדרא), and caraway seeds (במון). What is the difference between these seeds and mustard?

The *Turei Zahav* (Rabbi David HaLevi Segal, known as the *TaZ*, in his 17<sup>th</sup> century commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch*, 453:1) writes that only mustard resembles grain in the manner in which it grows, but that the other seeds do not. In addition, he differentiates between two types of “caraway seeds” — prohibiting some which are similar to grain, while permitting others. It is difficult to determine the types of caraway seeds to which he is referring, or if they are what we call caraway today at all. He may be referring to fenugreek or cumin. The *Chok Yaakov* (Rabbi Yaakov ben Yosef Reischer, in his 17<sup>th</sup> century commentary on the *Orach Chaim*, 453:9) permits all forms of caraway seeds, saying that we should not be more stringent than necessary with *kitniyos*.

This apparent inconsistency between mustard, sesame, and hemp — which are prohibited — and anis, coriander, and caraway — which are permitted — makes it very difficult to create a rule for which seeds and spices are permitted and which are prohibited.

One prominent kashrus website writes, based upon the *Remah*: “Thus, as a rule, spices are not *kitniyos* but require special care to guarantee that no *chametz* grains are mixed into them.” However, there is no source to say that all spices are not *kitniyos*; on the contrary, the rulings on mustard and sesame seed indicate quite the opposite.

One contemporary issue is the spice cumin. Cumin is very similar to a grain, which should perhaps be prohibited like mustard, yet it is a cousin to caraway, which the *Remah* permits. Contemporary *poskim* are divided on the status of cumin.

One seed which was discussed historically was rapeseed, a common source of oil in Europe, and a number of responsa were written about it. The consensus was that it qualifies as *kitniyos* and is prohibited. Canola oil is made out of rapeseed, and is universally considered to be *kitniyos* today. Rapeseed is no different from coriander in appearance. Cumin, caraway, and the other seeds grow in a similar fashion and resemble rapeseed. This further demonstrates how difficult it is to say with confidence that any seed or spice is permitted, other than those that the *Remah* expressly allowed.

Botanically, rapeseed is related to mustard. On one kashrus organization's website, this is cited as a reason to differentiate rapeseed from other seeds and give it a status of *kitniyos*. But it is highly unlikely that its botanical classification makes any difference here. In addition, there is no special reason why mustard was included in the prohibition of *kitniyos* other than it resembles grain, as the *SeMaK* says!

Another modern controversy involves cottonseed oil. In addition to the question of whether this particular seed is *kitniyos*, it has the unique quality of being poisonous as a seed; only the oil can be safely consumed. One might posit that this quality may remove cottonseed oil from the prohibition of *kitniyos*. However, the rapeseed used in Europe, known as colza, was poisonous in its raw form as well. (The rapeseed used today to make canola oil has been genetically modified to reduce its poison.) Despite the inability to consume rapeseed in its raw form, it was still treated as *kitniyos* and was forbidden. Therefore, it is very hard to understand why we would permit cottonseed oil based on the concept that it is not edible in its raw form.

The *Terumas HaDeshen* prohibits eating the oil of 'kanvus' (hemp seed oil) and only permits us to benefit from it, such as by lighting. With today's focus on health food, hemp seed is considered an edible seed, but it was not historically used for food (see Rav Chanoch Henoch Eigis in *Marcheshes* [3], who writes that hemp seed is *not* an edible seed).<sup>1</sup> Yet hemp seed is considered *kitniyos*. Many *Achronim* had a version of the *Terumas HaDeshen* which stated that flaxseed oil is *kitniyos* as well: see *Cheishev Ha'Eifod* (2:18) and *Minchas Yitzchak* (3:138), who cite this as proof to prohibit cottonseed oil.

Among contemporary *poskim*, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv *zt"l* prohibited the use of cottonseed oil, as does the *Badatz Eidah Chareidis*. Rav Yosef Efrati in *Yisa Yosef* (O.C. vol. 2, 111: 4) writes that the reason that Rav Elyashiv was stringent with cottonseed oil is based upon the *Ma'aseh Rav* (184) who states that the *Gr"a* prohibited hemp seed oil and, although hemp seed is edible, it was not used for food — only for making ropes.

Many *poskim* do allow cottonseed oil, including Rav Dovid Zvi Hoffmann in *Melamed Leho'il* (1:87-88), the Tzelemer Rav *zt"l* (as cited by Rav Avraham Blumenkrantz *zt"l*), Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin in *Gevuros Eliyahu* (1:141), Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank in *Mikra'ei Kodosh* (2:60:2) in the name of Rav Chaim Soloveitchik *zt"l*, and Rav Mordechai Yaakov Breisch in *Chelkas Yaakov* (207). Many others stand on both sides of this debate. In America, it has become generally accepted to use cottonseed oil for Pesach.

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<sup>1</sup> There are historical sources that hemp seed was consumed in other parts of the world such as Asia.

## CONCLUSION

It is very difficult to classify which seeds and spices should be *kitniyos* and which should not. Likewise, *poskim* remain equally divided on the question of whether cottonseed oil should be *kitniyos*. Thus, everyone should follow whatever *minhag* they have, with the direction of their *rav*.

## Checklist: When *Erev Pesach* Falls on Shabbos

Rabbi Dovid Rosenbaum  
Young Israel Shomrai Emunah

As *Erev Pesach* falls on Shabbos this year, we do many things differently. Please see the step-by-step guidance below, beginning with Thursday morning. Details may vary based upon the shul and halachic authority. The footnotes are intended to highlight some of the areas of varied opinion. All times are for the Greater Washington area.<sup>1</sup>

**Thursday morning, March 25 – *Ta'anis Bechoros* (Fast of the First Born):** This is normally observed on *Erev Pesach*. Because that day is Shabbos this year, the fast is pushed back to the preceding Thursday. If one attends a *siyum* on this day, one is exempt from fasting the rest of the day.

**Thursday night, March 25 – *Bedikas Chametz* (Search for *Chametz*):** Although this search is normally performed the night preceding the *seder*, we do not do it on Shabbos. It is therefore done on Thursday night, at approximately 8:00 pm. As in other years, we recite the standard *brachah* before the search and the *bitul* (nullification of the *chametz*) afterwards.

**Friday morning, March 26 – *Biur Chametz* (Destruction of the *Chametz*):** While this is normally done on the morning of *Erev Pesach*, as this year it is *Shabbos*, we must burn the *chametz* on the preceding day. If it is not feasible for you to burn the *chametz*, you may break it into small pieces and flush them down the toilet.<sup>2</sup> The *chametz* should be burned before 11:58 am. THE *BITUL* IS NOT RECITED ON FRIDAY MORNING, as one may still eat and own *chametz* until Shabbos morning. Any *chametz* of which you plan to partake over Shabbos or sell to a non-Jew need not be destroyed.

**Friday morning, March 26 – *Mechiras Chametz* (Sale of the *Chametz*):** Any *chametz* which you will not be destroying on Friday morning and do not plan to use over Shabbos should be set aside in designated locations to be sold to a non-Jew. This sale should be coordinated with your Rabbi in the days leading up to Pesach. Consult your Rabbi regarding the timing of the sale this year; many local Rabbis will perform the sale by 11:55 am, so the *chametz* should be in the designated locations before that time.

**Shabbos morning, March 27 – Latest Time for Eating Chametz is 10:42 am:** Ideally one should eat all of the *chametz* remaining in the home that was not included in the sale. As one may not eat regular matzah today until the *seder*, one should make the *Hamotzi* for Shabbos lunch on *chametz* or egg matzah.<sup>3</sup> Either way, one should complete eating the *Hamotzi* food<sup>4</sup> and any

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<sup>1</sup> Even if your shul is in this area, your Rabbi may calculate the times slightly differently and list them accordingly.

<sup>2</sup> You can discuss with your Rabbi this or any other alternative to burning the *chametz*.

<sup>3</sup> Some authorities are very reluctant to allow egg matzah in this circumstance.

<sup>4</sup> Healthy Ashkenazim should refrain from eating egg matzah from 10:42 am on, just as they would for *chametz*. Sefardim may continue to eat egg matzah during the day and throughout Pesach.

other *chametz* by 10:42 am. For this reason, one should daven Shacharis early to allow sufficient time to eat the *chametz* or egg matzah in the Shabbos meal.

**Shabbos morning, March 27 – Disposal of Remaining *Chametz* by 11:58 am:** As previously mentioned, the goal should be that all *chametz* remaining in one's home after the burning midday on Friday should either have been eaten by 10:42 am Shabbos morning or have been set aside on Friday to be included in the sale of *chametz* to the non-Jew. Any remaining crumbs of *chametz* should be gathered and flushed down the toilet.<sup>5</sup> If one has a significant amount of remaining *chametz*, it should be given to a non-Jew who will take it away and do with it as he/she pleases.<sup>6</sup> Once someone has dealt with all remaining *chametz*, one should recite the *bitul* which is normally said when the *chametz* has been burned. All of this should take place before 11:58 am.

**Shabbos afternoon, March 27 – *Seudah Shlishis* (The Third Meal):** There is still a mitzvah to eat a third meal this Shabbos. As described earlier, we are prohibited from eating food for which we would make *Hamotzi* after 10:42 am.<sup>7</sup> There are different possibilities for the third meal, including completing it before 10:42 am.<sup>8</sup> A common approach is to have non-*hamotzi* foods for the third meal, such as meat, chicken, fish, or fruit. One may eat a **cooked** matzah product — such as matzah balls — but **not a baked** item — such as matzah meal cake.<sup>9</sup> If one is eating matzah balls, the meal should begin before 4:20 pm. Regardless of the foods eaten, one should make sure to not eat so much that they will not have an appetite for the matzah at the *seder*.

This is a unique Pesach, at a very unique time. May Hashem bless our diligence to perform His will, and may we observe the laws of Pesach correctly and with great happiness and meaning. May we merit the ultimate Redemption speedily in our days and, until that moment, may Hashem bless and protect each of us. *Chag Kasher V'Sameach!*

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<sup>5</sup> Other Rabbis might have different suggestions for addressing these crumbs.

<sup>6</sup> Other Rabbis might provide additional suggestions for dealing with this significant amount of *chametz*.

<sup>7</sup> As discussed earlier, Sephardim may eat egg matzah for the third meal and should make sure to begin before 4:20 pm.

<sup>8</sup> The details of implementation should be discussed with a Rabbi.

<sup>9</sup> Other Rabbis might have different opinions regarding matzah meal products on this day.

## Pesach in Egypt, Pesach During COVID, and the Lesson That Connects Them

Rabbi Brahm Weinberg  
Kemp Mill Synagogue

One of the centerpieces of Pesach, which is completely absent from *our* experience of the holiday today, is of course the Korban Pesach, the Pesach Sacrifice. The Korban Pesach was brought on the afternoon of the fourteenth of Nisan and was eaten on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan at the seder.

The original Korban Pesach was brought in Egypt on the night of the Exodus. It was truly the turning point in the story of the redemption, as it was the moment at which the Jewish people took an active role in joining Hashem in the redemptive process. It is with the blood of that Korban Pesach that they painted their doorposts and caused Hashem to pass over their homes, sparing the first-borns during the final plague that precipitated their departure from Egypt.

The Korban Pesach was more than just a meal on that night in Egypt. The Korban Pesach was more than simply a sacrifice brought in honor of or in service to Hashem on that night in Egypt. The Korban Pesach was, actually, a rite of passage that helped them transition through the liminal moment between slavery and freedom.

The *Meshech Chochma* (R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, 1843-1926), in *Parashat Beha'alotcha* (9:7), famously explains that the Korban Pesach was, in some ways, a quasi-Korban Geirut, a quasi-Sacrifice of Conversion. Just as a convert would normally bring a sacrifice as a rite of passage to complete the process of demonstrating his or her acceptance of faith in Hashem to the exclusion of all other gods, so too the Korban Pesach served in that capacity for the Jewish people as a whole. The Korban Pesach was an implicit rejection of idolatry and thus a perfect means of attesting to faith in Hashem and "conversion." The Jewish people, according to *Chazal*, were steeped in idolatry in Egypt and had to separate from it in order for the Exodus to come to fruition. By very publicly taking one of the Egyptian gods and slaughtering it, they were demonstrating in no uncertain terms that they were ready to leave their life of idolatry behind.

This idea of the Korban Pesach serving as a rejection of idolatry is reinforced by the language of the *pesukim* themselves. One of the instructions given to the Jewish people in preparation for the Korban Pesach was (Shemot 12:21):

וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְכֹל זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם:  
מִשְׁכּוֹ וּקְחוּ לָכֶם צֹאן לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתֵיכֶם וְשַׁחֲטוּ אֶת־הַפֶּסַח.

Then Moses called for all the Elders of Israel and said to them:  
Pull towards you and take a lamb according to your families and kill the Passover lamb.

On a simple level, with the words “pull towards you,” the Torah is telling the Jewish people to pull or draw or acquire a lamb to bring into their sphere in preparation for the sacrifice that would occur a few days later. On a more homiletic level, Rashi (ad loc) explains that “pull towards you” was a double entendre meant to teach the Jewish people that, in pulling this animal towards them for the sake of sacrifice, they would essentially also be pulling *themselves* away from idolatry and declaring fealty to Hashem: “Since they (the Jews) were immersed in idol worship, Hashem said to them, ‘pull and take for yourself’; pull your hands away from idol worship and take a sheep for the *mitzvah*.”

When people reject idolatry and accept monotheism, they are accepting many different tenets of faith, innumerable lifestyle changes, countless theological changes, and numerous actional changes. They are accepting a whole new identity and way of life. Throughout these changes, there is one fundamental, underlying change in philosophy that is particularly important to highlight.

The Izbitzer Rebbe in his *Mei HaShiloach* (R. Mordechai Yosef Leiner, 1801-1854) on *Parashat Yitro* (20:2) explains that one of the main features of idolatrous life is that an idol can be seen, touched, and fully known. One can feel the entire contour of the idol and even hold it in one’s hand. It is finite, complete, and entirely graspable and knowable, both physically and intellectually. By contrast, Hashem is the ultimate *unknowable* One. When it comes to idolatry, a person can (as counterintuitive as it may seem to us) fully know their god. When it comes to Hashem, we must accept that we can *never* fully know Him because He cannot be seen or heard or felt or held or even understood — because He is infinite and we are finite.

The Korban Pesach and, by extension, the entire holiday of Pesach are a celebration of our nascent faith in Hashem and our rejection of idolatry. Based upon the explanation of the *Mei HaShiloach*, we can suggest that this rejection of idolatry that we celebrate on Pesach includes the rejection of its fundamental ideology: the doctrine of knowability. By celebrating Pesach, we recall that at the dawn of our nationhood we elected to deny the idea that G-d is fully knowable and, instead, with the utmost of humility, embraced the fact that *our* G-d can never be fully known. We committed to embrace the doctrine of *unknowability*.

What a sobering and important perspective that is, not only as it pertains to our relationship with Hashem and the story of the Korban Pesach, but equally important as a general outlook on life. We are given great tools by Hashem to understand, to explore, to discover, and even to control so many aspects of our world — but, at a certain point, we must accept that we are finite beings. As difficult as it may be, we must accept that not *everything* is in our control, not *everything* is fully knowable, and not *everything* is within our reach. We must acknowledge that, as finite beings, we can never fully know Hashem or the immeasurable miracles He implanted within the world He created. We can and must strive to comprehend it all but will never fully get there; we will constantly be surprised by new things we never knew or understood before.

This year, perhaps more than ever, we can appreciate this critical lesson. The COVID-19 pandemic that hit us just over a year ago has upended our entire way of life and caused us to realize just how limited we truly are. With all our ingenuity, experience, advancement, and technology, we were left almost powerless in the face of a virus that we knew nothing about. As Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks *zt"l* said in the very first days of the pandemic: "I don't know about you, but this is, for me, a very scary time. The world is at war with an invisible enemy, and many people are feeling very, very anxious about the future."

Baruch Hashem, we harnessed all the intellectual resources we have and are slowly catching up: making new discoveries, vaccines and treatments while devising better mitigation strategies. This capacity that we have as human beings is wondrous and should not be minimized in the least, but must be counterbalanced with a sense of humility and a recognition of our finitude. Our ingenuity should be tempered by the lesson of the Korban Pesach — the unknowability of Hashem and His world — so that we are never lured into a false sense of arrogance, thinking that we know it all or control it all.

May we, who are finite, spend every day striving to come closer and closer to knowing Hashem through his Torah — even as we recognize that it is a never-ending process which can never be truly complete. May Hashem, who is infinite, bring us many miracles even if we don't fully understand them and partner with us to bring continued *refuah* (healing) and *geulah* (redemption) to our world.

## **Chametz After Pesach 2021**

It is rabbinically prohibited to purchase *chametz* after Pesach from a Jew who maintained *chametz* in his possession over the course of Pesach. This is referred to in rabbinic literature as *Chametz She'avar Alav HaPesach*.

A product is defined as *chametz* if it consists of any of the five major grains, including wheat, barley, oat, rye, or spelt in a significant concentration.

There is no prohibition to purchase *chametz* from a non-Jew who was in possession of *chametz* over Pesach.

There is no prohibition to purchase items which are not *chametz* from a Jewish-owned business that did not sell their *chametz* over Pesach.

### **Chametz may not be purchased from the following locations following Pesach:**

- One should not purchase *chametz* until Monday, April 19, 2021 (2 weeks after Pesach) from any major Jewish-owned supermarket that does not sell its *chametz*.
- One should ideally not purchase *chametz* until Monday, May 3, 2021 (4 weeks after Pesach) from supermarkets that purchase *chametz* from Jewish distributors that do not sell their *chametz*. This includes Giant, Safeway, and Target.
- One should not purchase liquor until Wednesday, May 19, 2021 (following Shavuot) from a Jewish-owned liquor store that does not sell its *chametz*.

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- ***Chametz* may be purchased from all Capitol K establishments and caterers one hour after Pesach 2021.**

- ***Chametz* may be purchased from the following national stores after Pesach 2021:**

Aldi, BJ's, Costco, CVS, Food Lion, Harris Teeter, Kmart, Lidl, Petco, PetSmart, Rite Aid, Royal Farms, Save-A-Lot, Sam's Club, Shoppers Food and Pharmacy, Trader Joe's, Walgreens, Walmart, Wegmans, Whole Foods Market

- ***Chametz* may be purchased from the following stores in our community after Pesach 2021:**

H Mart, MOM's Organic Market, Snider's, Streets Market

- **Please note this change for Pesach 2021: Snider's is now under new ownership and *chametz* may be purchased immediately after Pesach 2021.**

# Inside the Eruv

Shlomo Katz

President, Silver Spring Eruv Association

The Greater Washington Jewish community is blessed with numerous *eruvim* (plural of *eruv*), including those in Bethesda, College Park, Georgetown, Olney, Potomac, Rockville, Woodside, and the one with which I am privileged to be most involved, the “Silver Spring *Eruv*,” encompassing both White Oak and Kemp Mill. In the very near future, the Fairfax *Eruv*, the first in northern Virginia, will come online (pun intended, as explained below).

*Eruvin* in the Washington area go back at least to the early 1970s, when there was an *eruv* in the Summit Hill apartment complex at 16th Street and East-West Highway, near the present-day Silver Spring Metro station. By 1974, there was an *eruv* around the garden apartments behind the White Oak Sears (described in a July 15, 1978 article in the now-defunct *Washington Star* as the “*erub*” around the “White Hall” subdivision). And, in a letter dated August 14, 1975, Rabbi Simon Burnstein *zt”l*, Rabbi of White Oak's Southeast Hebrew Congregation, requested permission from the Montgomery County Executive to create an *eruv* that would enclose White Oak, Kemp Mill, and nearby neighborhoods — the area that later became the “Silver Spring *Eruv*,” the first large scale *eruv* in the D.C. region.

## WHAT DOES AN ERUV ACCOMPLISH?

One of the 39 *Melachos* (activities prohibited on Shabbos) is *hotza'ah* — literally, “taking out.” This prohibition includes: (1) transferring an object from a *reshus ha'rabim* (public domain) to a *reshus ha'yachid* (private domain), or vice versa; and (2) moving an object a distance of four *amos* (approximately 6–8 feet) in a *reshus ha'rabim*. Inside an *eruv*, one may carry without transgressing either of these prohibitions. (It is important to note that an *eruv* does not permit other Shabbos prohibitions — even carrying *muktzeh* items is not permitted by the *eruv*.)

One might wonder: If the Torah prohibits carrying on Shabbos, how does an *eruv* make it permitted?

The short answer is that enclosing a *reshus ha'rabim* may convert it into a *reshus ha'yachid*. “May” — because exactly how to define these domains and how to enclose them is very complicated. This complexity is one reason some people do not rely on a city *eruv* at all (see *Mishnah Berurah* 345:23). It is not because they don't trust the *eruv* committee!

Vastly oversimplifying, our city *eruvim* permit carrying only in areas where there is a rabbinic prohibition to carry without an *eruv*, but where according to Torah law one would be allowed to carry. Thousands of years ago, Shlomo Ha'melech (King Solomon) decreed that one should not carry from one courtyard (*chatzer*) into an adjoining *chatzer* without making an *eruv*, even

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though both are private domains (see *Tractate Eruvin* 21b). Thus, even when our neighborhoods do not meet the Torah's definition of a *reshus ha'rabim*, there is still a rabbinic prohibition on carrying, so we require an *eruv* — but we are not permitting something that the Torah prohibits. It certainly is not correct to call the *eruv* a “loophole” or a “legal fiction.” Rather, our Sages provided a mechanism to allow carrying in an area where *they* (not the Torah) would otherwise have prohibited doing so. (It cannot be emphasized enough that this is an oversimplification, and that this article is not meant to provide practical halachic guidance.)

## **WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF AN ERUV?**

There are three components to a public *eruv*. The most familiar component is the enclosure within which we carry (more about that below). Many people are surprised to learn, however, that the word *eruv* does not technically refer to the enclosure but, rather, to a loaf of bread or box of *matzah*. That is the second component. For the *eruv* enclosure to function, the residents within its boundaries must become one household; we do that through shared bread or, because it is more durable, *matzah*. In the case of the Silver Spring *Eruv*, that box of *matzah* is stored at Young Israel Shomrai Emunah on behalf of everyone who lives or visits within the *eruv's* boundaries. In theory, if you are at the Kemp Mill Park with your kids on a Shabbos afternoon and you forgot to bring a snack, you may help yourself to a piece of *matzah* from the shul across the street — but please don't eat too much of it; that could invalidate the *eruv* for everyone else until the *matzah* is replenished.

The third component, besides the enclosure and the food, is the *reshus* (rental) from the local government. To encourage Jews to live only among other Jews, our Sages prohibited carrying in a neighborhood that has gentiles unless the area is rented from those gentiles. At the same time, the Sages said that a token rental suffices (see *Tractate Eruvin* 62a). In America, this requirement is met by renting the *eruv* territory from the mayor or county executive for one dollar. Often, the politician involved will issue a formal, suitable-for-framing proclamation recognizing the rental, and many shuls hang that document in their lobbies. That is not, however, halachically required. If the perimeter of an *eruv* is expanded, as occurred in College Park around the most recent High Holidays, a new *reshus* recognizing the new boundaries may be required.

## **THE ERUV ENCLOSURE**

As noted, the most familiar part of an *eruv* is the enclosure or boundary itself. Ideally, an *eruv* enclosure would consist of actual walls. Indeed, in deference to the opinion of Rambam (Maimonides), many Sefardim will not carry within a city *eruv* unless it is made primarily of actual walls. Some cities in Israel have an *eruv* consisting mostly of walls — referred to as an “*eruv mehudar*” — thanks to retaining walls, security fences, and other features that count as “walls.”

The Silver Spring *Eruv*, as well as some of the other local *eruvim*, have *some* real walls—for example, the sound walls and chain link fences along the Beltway and other local highways. A hillside or slope — a “*Tel Ha’mislakket*” — may count as a wall if it is steep enough, and the Silver Spring *Eruv* uses such “walls” as well. In all, roughly a quarter of the Silver Spring *Eruv* consists of actual walls. Riverbanks of certain dimensions and slopes also qualify as walls, and the Rabbi Philip Rabinowitz Memorial *Eruv* based in Georgetown makes substantial use of the banks of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers for its enclosure.

Nevertheless, it usually is not practical in America to completely surround our neighborhoods with real walls. In the absence of a wall, the next best thing is a *tzuras ha’pesach* — literally, “the form of a doorway.” For Ashkenazim, a properly constructed *tzuras ha’pesach* has the halachic status of a wall (see, e.g., *Be’ur Halachah* 363:6, ד"ה צריך).

A *tzuras ha’pesach* is easy to construct; all it takes is two vertical elements and a horizontal element that passes directly above the verticals. Moreover, halachah permits an *eruv* to use a *tzuras ha’pesach* that was made for an unrelated purpose. Thus, *tzuros ha’pesach* (the plural form) are all around us. Wherever there are two utility poles with a wire passing directly overhead, there is a *tzuras ha’pesach*. These so-called “over-the-top” poles are an *eruv*-builder’s dream because they cost nothing to build, are reliable, and are maintenance free for the *eruv*. As part of the Silver Spring *Eruv*, you can find such an “over-the-top” arrangement on the west side of Georgia Avenue, from just north of Forest Glen Road to just south of Veirs Mill Road, a length of more than one mile.

The main difficulty with relying on utility poles and overhead power lines is the requirement that the horizontal part of the *tzuras ha’pesach* pass *directly above* the vertical pieces. Chances are that you never noticed, but many utility poles do *not* have the wires *directly* above them. If the wire runs to the side of the pole, it is called a “*tzuras ha’pesach min ha’tzad*,” and it is not a kosher “doorway.”

Most often, *eruvim* deal with this situation by placing their own vertical elements — called *lechayayim* (plural of *lechi*) — directly under a lower wire on the side of the pole, usually one of the telephone or cable TV lines. Whenever possible, we make such *lechi*s from materials one would expect to see attached to a utility pole — plastic molding or metal wire covers purchased from the same suppliers the utility companies use. Using such materials makes a *lechi* as unobtrusive as possible and therefore less susceptible to vandalism or to removal by utility workers who may think the *lechi* does not belong.

Utility poles and lines are the mainstay of most American *eruvim* — hence the pun above about a new *eruv* coming “online.” Sometimes, though, utility lines are not available and we need to construct *tzuros ha’pesach* of our own using lumber, string, and other materials. In Olney, there is more than a mile of such “homemade doorways” where the *eruv* winds its way through a forest. (One of the Olney *eruv* checkers, who I am proud to say is my son, must check that

stretch on foot week in and week out, clearing away interference from tree growth or fallen tree limbs.) The Silver Spring *Eruv* includes what we like to claim is the world's biggest *tzuras ha'pesach*: a 550-foot long string stretching between *lechis* at opposite ends of the bridge that carries the Beltway over the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River, some 250 feet below.

One of the “fun” things about *tzuras ha'pesach* is that they can be made from any material. The just-mentioned Northwest Branch *tzuras ha'pesach* was, for a time, made of dental floss. In another city, I saw a *lechi* made of Tupperware.

A final note about the *eruv* enclosure: Because most of the *eruv* is not made from “real” walls, it is easy to carry out of the *eruv* by accident. Therefore, it is important to familiarize yourself with the precise locations of the *eruv* boundaries, including such details as whether a particular sidewalk or side of the street is inside or outside the *eruv*. Many shul websites include a map of their local *eruv*.

### **IS THE ERUV ALWAYS UP?**

This is a rhetorical question, as everyone (hopefully) knows never to assume that the *eruv* is up. Most *eruvim* are checked weekly. The Silver Spring *Eruv* uses two paid checkers who check about three-quarters of the *eruv* every Friday, a process that takes approximately four to six man-hours. Those checkers also make minor repairs, while most of the more complicated fixes are done by volunteers. Some repairs require a rented bucket truck with a qualified operator, something that is not generally available on short notice on a Friday afternoon.

What can go wrong with the *eruv*? Here is a partial list:

- Utility poles or wires are replaced or moved (sometimes planned; sometimes unplanned, *e.g.*, because of accidents or storms), resulting in the destruction of a *tzuras ha'pesach*;
- Trees grow, or whole trees or limbs fall, damaging or interfering with a *tzuras ha'pesach* or a fence;
- Cars, trucks, or even bicycles, crash into *lechis* or fences and invalidate them;
- Changing temperatures cause utility poles to expand or contract, dislodging the nails that hold the *lechis*, or poles age and rot to the point that they will no longer hold nails;
- The ground under a wall or fence washes away, or a slope erodes, invalidating the previously “kosher” wall;
- Squirrels dislodge the fragile tops of *lechis* so they are no longer directly under the wire; and
- *Lechis* or strings are vandalized, especially those adjacent to bus stops located near public schools.

In short, despite the high “up” percentage that many of our local *eruvim* can boast, the status of an *eruv* should never be taken for granted. Each local *eruv* has some means of informing community members of the *eruv*'s status; users should avail themselves of that information source. Contact your shul or *eruv* for more information.

Also not to be taken for granted are the volunteers who repair and maintain our *eruvim*, as well as their families. All of them have Shabbos preparations to make at home, and some may be taking time off from work to ensure the community can carry on Shabbos. While they are not looking for a “shout-out,” they certainly deserve the community's gratitude!

On the subject of repairs, it is always interesting to see how utility and construction workers, as well as homeowners along the *eruv* boundaries, react to us. When I am making an *eruv* repair and a bystander asks what I am doing, I always begin my answer with, “This is going to sound strange . . .” Sure enough, they typically roll their eyes and lose interest by the time I have finished explaining that Orthodox Jews do not carry on the Sabbath. The foreman on the project to build the Randolph Road underpass at Georgia Avenue told me he knows what an *eruv* is because he has Jewish relatives — though how he ever came to discuss the topic with them I cannot imagine. Once, the supervisor on a Beltway bridge project who was helping us make a complicated repair asked me to explain what we were doing. When I finished explaining what an *eruv* is, he said, “That's amazing! Did you think of that yourself?” I answered, hinting to the *Gemara* cited above, “No, King Solomon did!” As a deeply religious gentile, he was extremely impressed by my connection to my Biblical namesake. Incidentally, in gratitude for his help, without which the *eruv* would have been down for several months, the Silver Spring Eruv Association treated his entire crew to a pizza lunch.

### **HOW CAN YOU HELP?**

We cannot promise our volunteers free pizza, but we can promise a rewarding experience. No particular training or experience is needed, and even a couple of hours on a Friday or another day of the week can be useful. Ask your Rabbi or local *eruv* manager for more information. Also, while the goal of this article is education, rather than fundraising, hopefully the reader will come away with an understanding of some of the expenses *eruvim* incur.

I cannot close this article without acknowledging my *Rebbe*, Moreinu Ha'Rav Gedaliah Anemer *zt"l*, from whom I was privileged to learn over three decades of involvement with the *eruv*, especially during the last ten years of his life. I am grateful to Rabbi Anemer, as well as to Rabbi Kalman Winter *zt"l* and the current rabbis of Kemp Mill and White Oak *shlita*, for entrusting me with the awesome responsibility of running the Silver Spring *Eruv*. One now-retired lay leader — my father, Dr. Irving Katz — and one still-active leader — Mr. Art Boyars — also deserve special mention. Unfortunately, a full list of builders and volunteers of all the local *eruvim* is beyond the scope of this article. May our Shabbos observance, enhanced by all the local *eruvim*, be a merit for all involved.

For more information about the Silver Spring *Eruv*, or to arrange an audio-visual presentation to your shul about city *eruv* in general, please contact the author at [SilverSpringEruv@gmail.com](mailto:SilverSpringEruv@gmail.com).

# Agudath Israel of Maryland: Protecting, Advocating, and Serving

Rabbi Ariel Sadwin  
Executive Director, Agudath Israel of Maryland

I am truly appreciative to the Vaad HaRabanim for affording me this opportunity to share a bit about the work of Agudath Israel of Maryland over the last 13 years — and especially over the last 12 months. I would like to specifically thank Rabbi Walter for approaching me with the idea.

As many of you know, the Silver Spring/Greater Washington community has been home to my family for nearly 50 years. In my youth, I was fortunate to observe community service and *chesed* on a constant basis in my home. These acts became second nature; I never imagined that one day I would have the opportunity to engage in such activities in a professional capacity.

During the summer of 2007, I was contacted by a board of community leaders in Baltimore who were working with Agudath Israel of America to establish a government affairs office to serve the Orthodox Jewish communities in Maryland. At that time, Agudath Israel was the only Orthodox organization establishing full-time offices on the state and local level to focus on issues of impact and importance to functioning Orthodox communities.

## ADVOCATING FOR OUR SCHOOLS

Upon my appointment as director that November, I immediately began to work on the issue deemed most critical to American Orthodoxy: support for Jewish day schools and their families.

Maryland state government aid to private schools began in 2000, with the allocation of \$6 million to be shared by nonpublic schools eligible under the program guidelines. By 2007, state budgets had reduced this funding to \$3 million. My first meeting on the job was a sit-down in the Annapolis offices of the Maryland Catholic Conference. After years of carrying the burden of lobbying for private schools, the Catholic Conference was thrilled to have a partner working with them during legislative sessions and throughout the year.

The alliance we forged began paying dividends shortly thereafter; B”H, it has continuously grown since. We reactivated a dormant entity, Maryland CAPE (Council for American Private Education), to serve as our coalition of private schools. Over the last twelve years, we have worked to launch additional funding programs and establish pathways to support the needs of nonpublic schools and their tuition-weary families.

Entering 2021, our day schools participate in all available state-funded initiatives: the Nonpublic Student Textbook (and Technology) Program, the School Building Construction Grant, the BOOST Scholarship (for low income families), the Nonpublic School Security Improvements Program (capital), and the Protecting Against Hate Crimes Grant (which covers security

personnel). Beginning in 2018, after passage of the federal tax reform bill, our research and guidance regarding newly-initiated incentive programs for investors in Maryland's 529 program helped hundreds of our day school families receive previously unheard-of tuition-related benefits for their children in grades K-12.

The Maryland state nonpublic school allocation —funded at the \$3 million level in 2007 — now exceeds \$25 million.

Throughout my years working to create and maintain funding programs for private schools, I have enjoyed valued partnerships with our Jewish day schools and their leadership teams. It has been a great *z'chus* to help bring them benefits to pass along to their students and parent bodies and to assist them in navigating other challenges as they arise.

### **PROTECTING RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS**

While education advocacy is certainly our main area of focus, Agudath Israel of Maryland dedicates significant effort to protecting the religious freedoms of Jewish Marylanders, while assisting the community in many areas of constituent services. Over the years, we have built relationships across numerous state and local government agencies to ensure successful communication and intervention to meet the needs of our community.

In 2008, a young infant unexpectedly passed away and law enforcement insisted that the case be investigated by the medical examiner. Without a prior relationship in place, there was little hope to avert an invasive autopsy. While careful navigation and medical intervention helped prevent that autopsy, we immediately engaged with the state's Chief Medical Examiner to share Judaism's time-tested perspectives on *kavod hameis* (respect for the deceased). We were blessed with a very willing counterpart in the medical examiner and forged a remarkable relationship resulting in unprecedented understanding and the establishment of state protocols for members of faith communities who oppose invasive autopsy. In subsequent years, Agudath Maryland has navigated countless cases in the role of liaison between the medical examiner and the community.

Community members who encounter challenges to observance of their faith in the workplace, on college campuses, in hospitals, or elsewhere receive guidance regarding necessary steps toward a solution.

### **SERVING THE COMMUNITY DURING A PANDEMIC**

When COVID-19 struck last March, a whole slate of new issues came within the purview of our office. We communicated regularly with the Governor's Office of Legal Counsel to understand how the various executive orders could accommodate some of our faith's most sacred activities. These accommodations included: securing essential-activity status for our *mikvaos*; permitting slightly more than the 10-person maximum for attendance at a religious wedding

service; and permitting a similar attendance allowance for *minyanim* when they were allowed to commence in backyards.

As funds became available to assist the many who lost jobs, we worked with the Department of Labor to assist countless frustrated community members navigate an overwhelmed unemployment benefits system. As schools began to contemplate strategies for reopening, our relationships with the departments of health and education on the state level and in several local jurisdictions were all employed — although not all entities were willing to see things the way we had hoped. Looking back now, after nearly two-thirds of the school year, we salute in amazement the heroic work of our school administrators, teachers, and nursing staff for enabling our children to have a nearly-normal school year — while their counterparts in public schools have not been as fortunate.

Through its work with state and local health departments and with many community entities, our office has been involved in COVID testing, COVID plasma donation, and the vaccine rollout. We have seen people extend themselves with extraordinary selflessness to assist their fellow community members; it has been a privilege to work with them. Similarly, it has been an honor to work with the community Rabbanim (during COVID and before), helping them deal with situations that arise with their shuls or congregants.

Despite the many among us who have been infected and affected by the pandemic, the Orthodox Jewish communities of Maryland have merited — *bli ayin hara* — to maintain a level of relative safety and of *shalom* that is the envy of communities across the country and beyond. We humbly thank Hashem for that and beseech Him to continue to shower us with His kindness and protection. May the upcoming Yom Tov of Pesach, when we commemorate *Geulas Mitzrayim* (our redemption from Egypt), further trigger Hashem's mercy to deliver our true redemption, with the coming of *Moshiach*.

*To learn more about Agudath Israel of Maryland, please visit [agudathisrael-md.org](http://agudathisrael-md.org). Rabbi Sadwin may be reached at [asadwin@agudathisrael-md.org](mailto:asadwin@agudathisrael-md.org).*

# The Role of the Mashgiach

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine

Southeast Hebrew Congregation – Knesset Yehoshua

The key to any good *hashgacha* (*kashrus* supervision) is the *mashgiach* (*kashrus* supervisor). Drawn from all walks of life, some local, some commuting, our *mashgichim* are the ones who truly ensure that the food served is reliably kosher. As a *kashrus* auditor and supervisor for the Vaad HaRabanim, I am privileged to see our very dedicated *mashgichim* in action and at their best. I would like to share the exciting behind-the-scenes world in which the *mashgichim* work—from which they help ensure the availability of a variety of kosher foods in our community.

In our *hashgacha* structure, most locations have a Primary Mashgiach, who is the mastermind of the system at that particular location. The Primary Mashgiach works closely with the owner, kitchen staff, and the Vaad administration to create a system that accommodates both “busy” and “slow” seasons at that location. An efficient system will allow a Substitute Mashgiach to smoothly transition in and out of that location as needed. Let us explore the different types of *mashgichim*, according to their level of training.

## THE SUBSTITUTE MASHGIACH

The quickest-trained is the Substitute Mashgiach, often placed in a location on short notice when the Primary Mashgiach cannot be there. The duties of the Primary Mashgiach that require the most training can often be avoided for the shift or two in which the Substitute Mashgiach works. Thus, a substitute might not be expected to check vegetables or check in chicken or meat. Instead, the commissary chef will opt to use the vegetables that have already been checked by the Primary Mashgiach. Likewise, a shipment of chicken or meat—which needs special consideration—might be secured unopened until a *mashgiach* supervisor or the Primary Mashgiach can ensure proper check-in.

The main responsibilities of the Substitute Mashgiach are lighting fires as needed (to establish *Bishul Yisroel*, the participation of a Torah-observant Jew in the preparation process) and ensuring that the basic protocols of that particular commissary are maintained. These protocols may include: maintaining vigilant separation between fish and meat; monitoring the use of only pre-checked vegetables; checking in products that are needed during that shift; and properly sealing outgoing orders. The Substitute Mashgiach fills a critical role in community *kashrus* when the Primary Mashgiach needs a shift off. Remarkably, many people in the community would be able to fill this role with minimal training—and would provide a tremendous service to the community in doing so.

## THE PRIMARY MASHGIACH

As noted, the Primary Mashgiach is the center of any reliable *hashgacha*. These *mashgichim* are generally trained in vegetable checking, are well informed regarding our unique meat and poultry list, and develop a good rapport with the staff to ensure a smooth working relationship. The typical Primary Mashgiach is a skilled problem solver who can provide workarounds during unanticipated glitches. Often, the Primary Mashgiach serves as a manager or cashier and generally keeps an eye out for the well-being of the business.

## THE EVENT MASHGIACH

Due to COVID restrictions, we are currently limited as to the types of events that can take place. However, we should discuss the Event Mashgiach, who plays a critical role in the success of kosher events. From Bar/Bat Mitzvahs to weddings to organizational banquets, it is the Event Mashgiach who ensures that a fine, kosher dining experience is had by all. May Hashem grant us good health and safety, so that we may be able to socialize at such events once again—soon.

The Event Mashgiach often serves in a situation that is new to both him and the staff. The area, such as a hotel or social venue, is typically not designated as kosher, and often the time and expense of *kashering* (rendering the facilities halachically kosher) is not included in the event plan. Instead, an area is identified that can be used for preparation and staging of platters and personal plates. This area—usually a room or two—is secured: tables are covered with a waterproof cover, upon which the chefs and staff can work. The kosher caterers will often bring their own warmers, to limit the amount of oven *kashering* that is necessary. If some *kashering* is needed, the Event Mashgiach will arrive a few hours before the event to properly prepare the secured area as needed.

A critical component in the smooth functioning of a certified event is the Event Plan, which is often drawn up at the time that a caterer accepts a job. The Event Plan assesses how many *mashgichim* will be needed to run the event efficiently and where the *mashgichim* will be assigned. Considerations include: whether non-kosher food will be served in any of the adjacent ballrooms at the same time; how many floors will be involved; and how close the caterer's sealed commissary food trucks can come to the secured staging area. Sometimes a *mashgiach* will be necessary on each floor, including the loading dock. On other occasions, the involved areas may be in close enough proximity to be secured for kosher food only. In such cases, only 1-2 *mashgichim* may be able to cover an event effectively.

## BISHUL YISROEL

Our practice is that all fires and (almost all) electric appliances are turned on by the *mashgiach*, even if the function of that fire is rewarming—a purpose for which the laws of *Bishul Yisroel* are not halachically mandated. This is fairly standard practice in the kosher food industry, as it ensures that the *mashgiach* is aware of all the warming stations. In the fast-paced environment of the food service industry, it is difficult to expect everyone to keep track of the foods/functions for which the *mashgiach* is required to light the fire. (The notable exception is the use of a microwave, which is permitted to be used without the *mashgiach* turning it on, for a variety of reasons.)

## THE INANIMATE “MASHGIACH”

One of the most interesting forms of *hashgacha* pertains to the inanimate “*mashgiach*.” I am referring to the use of *simanim* (seals), such as *hashgacha* tape, to secure an item and ensure its *kashrus* integrity when a live *mashgiach* is not present. Every commissary has a specific protocol for closing down at the end of the workday. In some locations, the doors are locked by the *mashgiach*. In other locations, accommodations are made to allow cleaning staff to work for hours after closing, while the *mashgiach* is permitted to leave at an earlier time. This is accomplished by securing meat, chicken, fish, and cheese in locked refrigerators and freezers, using conventional locks or *hashgacha* tape signed by the *mashgiach*.

Another use of the inanimate “*mashgiach*” pertains to food sent out for delivery. This has become especially common during COVID due to the prevalence of contact-free commerce. When orders are

sent using delivery services, the *mashgiach* will seal the bag, thus certifying the *kashrus* integrity of the product. It is not always easy for the *mashgiach* to know which orders are being picked up personally by the customer and which are being picked up by a delivery service. Therefore, we encourage the customer to specifically include the request for “Kosher Seals” in the special instructions of any delivery order.

#### **WHEN ISSUES ARISE**

I am sometimes asked if my skills as a mediator are needed during my weekly inspections. I am pleased to reassure our community that we have a great working relationship with our business owners, the *mashgichim*, and the staff. Most of our focus is on maintaining that smooth working relationship and on detecting and addressing any issues early on.

The one skill that I do often employ is promoting “self-determination.” When an issue is identified and needs to be resolved, I am often tempted to suggest as many as four different ways to solve it, based upon my own assessment and my knowledge of how other commissaries work. I restrain myself, however, and remember that the business owner, the *mashgiach*, and the staff have the best working knowledge of how their commissary functions, and are therefore best equipped to address whatever issue is at hand. I will therefore generally outline the problem to be addressed and offer the *mashgiach* the opportunity to propose a solution. His suggestion will often address the needs of the *kashrus* system while being the best suited for implementation in their location.

Thank you for joining me for this quick tour of the role of the *mashgiach* in our community. We all hope to see you soon!





**VAAD HARABANIM**  
THE RABBINICAL COUNCIL  
of GREATER WASHINGTON



**Vaad HaRabanim of Greater Washington**  
**The Rabbinical Council of Greater Washington**

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The Vaad HaRabanim of Greater Washington is an organization of Orthodox rabbis that provides the Greater Washington Jewish community with critical services such as *kashrus* supervision, a *beis din* for the administration of Jewish divorce, a *beis din* for arbitration of financial disputes, and a *beis din* for conversion. In addition, the Vaad, also known as the Rabbinical Council, acts as a rabbinic resource and supports vital communal service organizations, such as the *Chevre Kadisha*, *Bikur Cholim*, *Yad Yehuda* and the *Mikvah Emunah* Society. Members of the Vaad HaRabanim are dedicated to serving the broader Jewish community in whatever way possible and appreciate the opportunity to do so.