

Eating Kitniyot on Pesah – Practical Considerations - 2018

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The Conservative movement has been celebrating Pesah for a few years now in light of several papers which permitted Ashkenazi Jews to eat kitniyot, legumes and other products on Pesah. Some of these products are rice, beans, corn as well as a long list of products which were added to the list of kitniyot over the centuries.

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly approved two separate legal responsa by large majorities in 2016 which argued that it is permissible for Ashkenazi Jews to eat Kitniyot on Pesah. These two papers can be found at the following links:

Rabbi David Golinkin, “Rice, beans, and kitniyot on Pesah – are they really forbidden?”

<http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/2011-2020/Golinkin-Kitniyot.pdf>

Rabbis Amy Levin and Avram Israel Reisner, “A Teshuva Permitting Ashkenazim to eat Kitniyot on Pesah”

<http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/2011-2020/Levin-Reisner-Kitniyot.pdf>

I encourage everyone to read these papers regardless of whether you are interested in eating kitniyot or not. Either way, this is an opportunity for greater understanding of the holiday of Passover and the laws and traditions surrounding it.

You will see a list of practical guidelines for those who are interested in eating kitniyot at the conclusion of “A Teshuva Permitting Ashkenazim to Eat Kitniyot on Pesah.” Nevertheless, I’d like to add a few words about the practicalities for those who are planning to incorporate kitniyot into Pesah this year.

One piece in particular that I find myself repeating quite a bit in the past few weeks is the definition of hametz. The only foods that can become hametz are products which contain wheat, barley, spelt, oats, or rye. Of course, matza is made from wheat and it isn’t hametz. Right! It is the combination of one of these five grains with liquid that cause it to rise and become hametz. But anything other than these five grains can’t become hametz and can’t ‘treif up’ your kitchen. While Ashkenazim have avoided

eating kitniyot on Pesah in the past, kitniyot have never been hametz. We know this, of course, because Sefaradi Jews have always eaten kitniyot.

One of the challenges of kitniyot is to make sure that we understand clearly what this permission means as well as its limitations. The standard caution that goes along with having a kosher kitchen generally (and on Pesah in particular) should be observed as you incorporate kitniyot.

It seems to me that for those who would like to incorporate kitniyot this Passover, the best place to look for it is in the produce aisle. In most of our supermarkets you won't find the five types of grains that can become hametz in the produce aisle. However, there are stores in our area that sell beans and other food out of bins that may have contained a variety of products. I would not purchase kitniyot out of these bins out of a concern that there could have been hametz in there in the past. The other items I would suggest are dried beans and rice in a bag even without kosher certification as long as the only ingredient is beans or rice. One other important note about rice--- Only unenriched rice should be purchased for Pesah. The enriching process can create problems for the Kosher for Passover status of enriched rice. All rice/beans purchased should be purchased in their plain state---dry/uncooked and without any seasonings. The recommendation is that people should sift or check rice and beans prior to Passover to make sure that there aren't any stray grains of wheat or other grains in it.

Here is a caution---Even if you decide that you are going to eat beans or corn this Passover, I want to make sure that people understand that they shouldn't simply get canned corn or beans unless it has a label which says kosher for Passover. While many have argued that peanuts were never kitniyot, many have avoided peanuts for many years now, assuming that they are kitniyot. With the permission to eat peanuts, some may want to have peanut butter. Theoretically this would be fine, but practically speaking, I don't think that you will be able to have peanut butter on your matza this year because it is unlikely that you will find Kosher for Passover peanut butter in the stores. As with so many packaged products on Pesah (with a few exceptions), we should be purchasing them with a Kosher for Passover symbol.

Of course, in an American Jewish community that is mostly Ashkenazi, there aren't that many packaged Passover products that contain kitniyot. Still, there are more products on the shelves of local stores now which are labeled kosher for Passover for those who eat kitniyot than in the past.

I have spoken with people who feel that there is no reason for them to change the way they have kept Passover for their entire life. In fact, they worry that by adding additional foods to the holiday, the holiday will feel less special. My personal view is

that there is little chance that adding these foods for Passover is going to change the sense that there is a holiday. In a house that is fully celebrating the holiday, there are constant reminders that it is Passover. Nevertheless, there is nothing in these papers that would suggest that people must eat kitniyot. I would imagine that to the extent that people incorporate kitniyot into Pesah, this will happen slowly.

A final word about changing Jewish tradition. You will find discussions about the implications of changing tradition in the papers mentioned above. While I regularly encourage people to feel a close connection with our ancestors and dedication not only to Jewish law but also to Jewish tradition, I don't feel comfortable insisting on this particular tradition. Rabbi Golinkin's teshuva in particular highlights the fact that the Ashkenazi custom of not eating kitniyot on Pesah is a late tradition without a clear reasoning behind it. And if the reasoning was unclear at the outset, in our day the reasons are unpersuasive. The tradition of refraining from eating kitniyot has been recognized by many important rabbis over the centuries to be an unfortunate development which detracts from, rather than adds to, the celebration of Passover.

While some may insist on tradition for tradition's sake alone, most of Jewish tradition can be explained in ways which are meaningful and important to our lives. Jewish communities have made changes (and resisted other changes) for centuries. While I have taught about kitniyot and the changes that had begun to happen in regards to Ashkenazi practice over the past few years, I had not encouraged people to begin considering incorporating kitniyot until now. I thought it would be important for the Conservative Movement as a whole to decide that this was a permissible change. I'm grateful for these new teshuvot which pave the way for this change.

If you have any questions about this issue, please contact me at ravsteven@cbahm.org or 248-851-6880.