

# Caring for Infants and the Infirm



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PROPER PASSOVER OBSERVANCE requires not only detailed knowledge of *halachot*, but also an appreciation and awareness of the many traditions (*minhagim*) adhered to during the holiday dictating what one may and may not eat.

While it is important that everyone follow family *minhagim*, it is also necessary to understand specific dispensations when dealing with the infirm, elderly or small children. The Rabbis throughout the generations have recognized that caring for the infirm, elderly and small children over Passover entails extra difficulties and have allowed flexibility concerning *minhagim* in cases of great need.

There are varied *minhagim* concerning what one

is permitted and not permitted to consume including *kitniyot* (corn, rice, peas, lentils, and beans), egg matzah (*matzah ashirah*), machine matzah, exclusively *shmurah* matzah, food prepared out of one's own family kitchen, dried fruits, and the list goes on.

A prominent *minhag* upheld by Ashkenazic Jewry entails refraining from eating *kitniyot* on Passover. However, there are circumstances when *kitniyot* consumption is permissible. First a review of the two basic reasons for the restriction:

- Since *kitniyot* bears many similarities to the five grains, one may come to mistakenly eat *chametz*.
- *Kitniyot* are often grown or stored with kernels of the five grains; if *chametz* kernels are mixed with the *kitniyot*, it will be difficult to separate them out.

*Kitniyot* foods are permitted to someone who is ill or a child who requires them, and is not yet cognizant of Passover concepts. Even a healthy adult may eat *kitniyot* on Passover if he would otherwise have nothing else to eat. In these cases, one should be careful to ensure that the *kitniyot* foods do not contain *chametz*, *chametz*-processing aids or additives, were not



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processed on *chametz* equipment and are stored apart from other Passover foods, as well as served on separate kitchen utensils.

The infirm, elderly or children who cannot follow the stringencies (*chumrot*) of a particular *minhag* may be lenient. If the ailment is such that the person is unlikely to be able to follow a *minhag*, even in future years, then a Rabbi should be consulted; at times *hatarat nedarim* (ritual annulment of a vow) is required.

### Who Can Eat Egg Matzah?

According to the *Shulchan Aruch*, dough made from flour mixed with fruit juices or eggs will not become *chametz* no matter how long it stands, provided no water is added. Despite this ruling, Ashkenazic practice mandates that egg matzot may only be used by the elderly and the infirm. Furthermore, all the precautions associated with ordinary Passover matzot apply to egg matzot. The egg matzah must be baked thin, in specially heated ovens for less than eighteen minutes and must be carefully guarded from becoming *chametz* during production. (Sephardic custom commonly permits different varieties of flour-juice mixtures even when not produced as matzah.) As with the permitted use of *kitniyot*, when serving an individual who needs to consume egg matzot, care should be taken to use separate or disposable utensils.

Although the allowance to eat egg matzah over Passover applies in the above-mentioned cases, one can-

not fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah on *Seder* night with egg matzah.

The Torah refers to matzah as "*lechem oni*" poor man's bread, because it is made solely from flour and water, the simplest of ingredients.

Egg matzah is called "*matzah ashirah*," rich man's bread, for it contains more complex ingredients and is unacceptable for the mitzvah of matzah. Therefore, even the elderly or infirm should (if they are able) eat a *kezayit* of *shmurah* matzah on the night of the *Seder*.

Passover is about the transmission of our rich heritage to the 'next generation'. Maintaining and teaching family *minhagim* is a vital part of that legacy—linking us to the generation of the Exodus. May this Passover lead us to our nation's long-awaited, final redemption. *Le-shanah haba'ah bi-Yerushalayim*.

Please see the next page for a listing of halachically acceptable products for infant formulas, nutritional and dietary supplements, and soy milk.

