

## Kol Ha-Rav April 2019

We Jews are living through a time which can be described-especially preparing and celebrating Passover- as "the stricter the better". Things that our parents and grandparents found acceptable to be eaten on Passover are now frowned upon. And we thought they were so religious! In recent years, rabbis have raised questions about the kashrut of the water in New York, the hair used for sheitels for wigs coming from India, and of bugs in strawberries.

And nowhere do we feel this more than on Pesach where the "stricter is better" phenomena takes place with our paying for supervision on products that require no supervision and refraining from products (e.g. legumes) that we are allowed to eat. Every year I read of more new books and rabbinic proclamations that only make Pesach more expensive and difficult to observe, that only heap prohibitions on us that needn't be there. Look at how much more you pay at a kosher market for Passover products. In recent years I've seen booklets listing medicines that do or do not have chometz. What you might not know from these books is that if someone is dangerously ill, according to Jewish law he can eat outright chometz right at the Pesach Seder. As a great Halachik authority put it: "If your choices are medicine made by Pfizer or Rokeach's ... I think you have a better chance of surviving Pfizer's quality control." By the way, toothpaste is only a problem if you intend to purposely swallow it. (It reminds me of my brother's method to solve the thirst problem on Yom Kippur: take a long cold shower with your mouth open"). Why you would, I don't know - but let's get past all these lists that tell us which deodorants and shampoos we can use. You can use them all! I have seen "Kosher for Pesach" rabbinic certification on everything from fabric softeners to paper towels and napkins, to room air fresheners and baby wipes ... and it's all a farce! When I lived in Japan, I was responsible for the kashrut supervision of an aluminum foil factory outside Tokyo. A four year old with no Talmud Torah background could have seen the factory was completely kosher.

How did all this strictness come about? It used to be that every day issues of Jewish law were decided by local rabbis in their own communities with the input of their people. That's not the way it's done anymore and we are still mostly beholden to Orthodox supervisors and mashgichim.

There are two great halachic works on everyday Jewish law that were written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One was the Mishneh Berurah, by the Chofetz Chaim. The other was the Aruch Hashulchan, by Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein. Both are considered classic. But they don't always agree. So who should one follow?

As Saturday Night Live's famous Father Guido Sarducci once put it in regard to the Pope's speaking out against birth control: "If you don't play-a da game, you no make-a da rules!" May it be for all of us a *chag kasher v'sameach* - a kosher and joyous Pesach.