

NO

Matzah On Pesach?



The Liska Rebbe keeps a unique minhag alive

By Nesanel Gantz

CThere are some people who do not eat matzah on Pesach. Yes, you read that right! I learned of this fascinating minhag from Ami's editor in chief, Rabbi Yitzchok Frankfurter, and was privileged to interview the current Liska Rebbe, Rav Tzvi Hersh Friedlander, to research it. The Liska Rebbe's family and Chassidim are the primary people through whom this sacred and extremely rare tradition is transmitted throughout the generations.

It must be noted that for the purpose of brevity and clarity, throughout the article where the words "no matzah on Pesach" are used, it does not refer to the minimum matzah that is eaten by all Jews on the seder night, but to the rest of the days of yom tov.

At first when I learned of this minhag, I must admit I was flabbergasted. No matzah on Pesach? Why not? I began asking many people if they had heard of the minhag, or perhaps knew someone who kept it. While no one I spoke to actually practiced this minhag, a few said they knew of someone, usually in Eretz Yisrael, who kept it.

The general consensus was that those who practiced it were of an older generation who rarely request of their families to do the same. The minhag is, in fact, mentioned in the Shaarei Teshuvah on Orach Chaim, who writes as follows: "There are those who are machmir and

don't eat matzah other than on the first night of Pesach... Many have deviated from this minhag because of simchas yom tov and I would characterize both of these groups of people, whose sole intention is toward heaven, as kulam tzadikim, all righteous."

So why would anyone refrain from eating matzah throughout Pesach? The origin of this minhag stems from Klal Yisrael's scrupulous quest to ensure a chametz-free Pesach. Even though our matzahs are baked in a manner in which there is no real fear of it becoming chametz, the minimal possibility is enough of a concern for followers of this minhag to avoid unnecessary matzah. This is the same reason why some people have the custom not to eat gebrochts ("broken" in Yiddish, referring to the form in which matzah tends to be mixed with liquid). These people are concerned that a small part of the matzah was not kneaded thoroughly and that there is still a pocket of unbaked flour that can become chametz through contact with liquid. In the same way, those who do not eat matzah at all are concerned that some of the dough may not have been baked within 18 minutes, continuing to rise enough to become chametz. In fact, this is why many people value matzos baked in bakeries with higher standards of kashrus and that implement more stringencies. Many earlier Torah sages kept this custom, including the Arye D'Bei Ilui—Rav Lifschitz, the Baal Ari Sh'Bachubarah, Reb Pinchos of Koritz, Reb Shayale Kerestirer, Reb Meir of Premishlan,

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and others. While origins of the minhag can be traced as far back as the time of the Arizal, the first person famously documented to have practiced it was the Yismach Moshe of Ujhel, Hungary, Rav Moshe Teitelbaum (1759-1841). Not only did he keep this minhag his whole life, he encouraged his family to accept it as well. Over generations, however, his descendants decided to discontinue it, as they felt the mitzvah of simchas yom tov they fulfilled by eating matzah overshadowed the slight fear of eating chametz.

The Satmar Rebbe, Reb Yoel, zt"l, once discovered a small pocket of unbaked flour in one of his matzos during Pesach. Horrified, he said, "If this could happen in our [Satmar] matzah bakery, in which I instituted the highest level of stringencies and hashgachic care, I can truly understand why my grandfather—the Yismach Moshe—had the minhag not to eat matzah on Pesach at all." That year, the Rebbe refrained from eating gebrochts even on the last day of Pesach, though his reasons were ultimately known only to him (those who refrain from eating gebrochts typically only do so for the first seven days).

Some early Torah leaders held to a variation of this minhag; in addition to the minimum required amount of matzah that they would eat during the seder, they would also eat a kezayis at each of the yom tov and Shabbos meals, but would refrain from eating matzah otherwise. Many Brisker followers also try to minimize their matzah consumption throughout Pesach.

It is important to note that although many leaders of yesteryear felt strongly about the minhag, there were many other leaders who were vehemently against it as well. Most notable amongst its detractors was the Divrei Chaim—Reb Chaim Halberstam of Sanz. He wrote in a letter in the mid 1800s: "In regards to keeping this minhag of not eating matzah throughout Pesach, this is not the correct thing to do in our times, since we are a weakened generation. Keeping this minhag leads to a bitul (loss) of simchas yom tov and therefore one shouldn't keep it. . . . Rather, [those how have kept it] should be matir neder (absolve their commitment) immediately." This sort of opposition to the minhag certainly led to its decline. When considering this minhag, there are many questions that immediately come to mind, including "What about the mitzvah to eat matzah?"; "What about simchas yom tov?"; "Don't you have to wash at every yom tov seudah?" Covering the whole topic of eating matzah on Pesach is beyond the scope of this article. It will, however, cover some of the answers to the common questions of curiosity and will add a variety of other fascinating facts associated with this minhag. No halachic conclusions should be derived from this discussion, as its sole purpose is to trace and support this minhag. A token of appreciation is owed to R' Ezra Friedlander, president of the Friedlander Group, and to R' Yisroel Friedlander, founder of Machon Dor L'Dor, for providing me with a

wealth of Torah on the subject.

Another fascinating reason for this minhag is brought in the Sefer Segulas Yisrael, by Rav Shabsi Lifschitz, based on the practice of the Karaites. Although the pasuk says, "shivas yamim matzah tocheilu—for seven days eat matzah," Rashi quotes the Gemara in Pesachim that, aside from at the seder, the mitzvah of eating matzah on Pesach is a reshus—it's entirely optional. The Tur and the Shulchan Aruch (475:7) follow this and rule that the mitzvah min haTorah only applies on the first night (and second night outside of Eretz Yisrael) and that eating matzah for the rest of Pesach falls under the category of reshus. The Karaites, however, who do not recognize the Torah she'baal peh, do not accept this halachah. They adopted the literal reading of the pasuk and would make a point of eating matzah on each of the seven days of the holiday, considering it a biblical requirement. In order to establish that the Karaites were falsifying the Torah, says the Segulas Yisroel, many began this custom, refraining from eating matzah on Pesach with the sole intention of rejecting the Karaites' distortion of halachah.

Among all of the early Chassidic Rebbes who kept the minhag, no one felt as strongly about keeping and promoting it as much as Reb Tzvi Hersh of Liska, known for his sefer, the Ach Pri Tevuah. While many Rebbes felt spiritually strong enough to accept it upon themselves, most would not expect others to do so as well—except for the Liska Rebbe. He would often mention this minhag to people he encountered and urge them to accept it upon themselves.

When being mesader kiddushin at a wedding, he would even require the new chassan to accept the minhag upon himself before proceeding. It is also written in the sefer Darchei Hayashar that when a Chassid was in the need of a yeshua (miracle), the Rebbe would promise to honor his request on condition that he would accept this minhag. It is due to the Rebbe's strong feelings about this minhag that his Chassidic court is the one place you can find this minhag being followed today.

The current Liska Rebbe graciously welcomed me into his home in Boro Park to discuss this minhag, which is a mantle of pride in the family and throughout Liska Chassidus. While the name Liska is known throughout the Jewish world, today, Liska is not a large Chassidic court. The Liska Rebbe, by his own admission, is not someone who is looking to spread his Chassidus. It is precisely for this reason that the knowledge of this minhag is a relative secret and a surprise to most people.

The Rebbe has vast knowledge of the history and of the many halachos and customs pertaining to not eating matzah on Pesach. He published an extensive, 11-page halachic teshuva (responsa) in his sefer Chamudai Tzvi that deals specifically with this minhag.



Rav Tzvi Hersh Friedlander, the Liska Rebbe.

I asked him why his family continued to keep this minhag while descendants of its original followers abandoned it over a century ago. The Rebbe admitted to me that he once questioned himself about whether he should discontinue the minhag, but decided against it. He related that he was once visiting a matzah bakery and after the prescribed 18-minute shift, he noticed a small clump of dough in the middle of the table. A young woman working at the bakery, obviously not wanting to get into trouble, ran over to the overlooked dough and furiously started to flatten it, saying, "Sorry, it was for me." The Rebbe asked for the dough (to prevent the obvious chametz problems) and said, "No, that dough was for me. It is a sign from heaven that I should not abandon the ways of my ancestors." That incident erased any doubt in his mind as to the significance of adhering to the minhag even in today's generation.

After I pressed him for more sources, the Rebbe told me that literally that day he had come across a fascinating Ohr Hachaim on Chumash that he felt directly correlated to his family's minhag. While discussing the different pesukim that discuss eating matzah on Pesach, the Ohr Hachaim draws the conclusion that not eating chametz during Pesach is considered equal to eating matzah all seven days. Thus, one could fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah on Pesach for all seven days, by making sure not to eat chametz throughout yom tov. Interestingly, women and boys under bar mitzvah would not keep this minhag, even in families in which it was otherwise kept. The women of the house would actually wash before the seudah was

commenced. The Rebbe said he remembers that in his home, his father—Rav Yoizef Friedlander, the previous Liska Rebbe, zt"l (of the first Chassidic Rebbem in Boro Park)—would make it a point to wait until his Rebbetzin washed and ate her matzah before continuing his seudah. Perhaps, says the Rebbe, while not going into the halachic considerations, the tradition of washing for matzah is symbolically being fulfilled in the household through the woman.

Many who refrain from eating gebrochts during yom tov will eat it on Shemini shel Pesach, the last day of yom tov outside of Israel, which is rabbinically ordained, and the followers of the minhag to not eat matzah do so as well.

The Rebbe pointed out a Chassidic explanation for the minhag to eat gebrochts on the last day of yom tov. The common conception is that the eighth day is an extra day of yom tov, added because the date of the first day of yom tov is not clear. Since the eighth day is a rabbinic enactment, there is no fear of eating chametz on Pesach itself, and therefore the stringencies are minimized on that day. The Rebbe offered another explanation brought down in Chassidic sources: "On Pesach, many have the minhag that 'misht zich nisht,'—we don't intermingle, for meals, on Pesach. Because of our family's minhag not to eat matzah during Pesach, this most definitely prevents meal intermingling. While the reasons we don't eat with others is steeped in holy traditions, it still causes a certain distancing between family and friends. So on the last day of yom tov, we all eat the same things to show that we are b'achdus, in unity, one nation." ●