

The Use of Cheese on Pesah

RABBI KASSEL ABELSON

This paper was adopted on June 5, 1985 by a vote of 6-3-3. Members voting in favor: Rabbis Kassel Abelson, Isidoro Aizenberg, Morris Feldman, Judah Nadich, Mayer E. Rabinowitz and Seymour Siegel. Members voting in opposition: Rabbis Barry S. Rosen, Joel Roth and Alan J. Yuter. Members abstaining: Rabbis Jacob B. Agus, David H. Lincoln and Morris M. Shapiro.

SHE'ELAH

May cheese that does not have a specific *hekhsher* for Pesah be used during Pesah?

Many small communities do not have access to *kasher lePesah* cheese products. In yet other communities, the prices of such products with *kasher lePesah hekhsherim* have been raised far beyond the normal profit margin. Hence, it is important to ascertain under what conditions cheese without special Pesah certification may be used.

The question of the kashrut of cheeses has been discussed at length by Rabbi Isaac Klein. Many Conservative Jews accept cheeses as kosher for year-round use. The question is then, "May ordinary cheeses be used on Pesah without a *hekhsher*?"

TESHUVAH

The basic principle related to this subject is to be found in *Orah Hayyim, Hilkhoh Pesah 447:2*, which states:

חמץ שנחערב משש שעות עד הלילה אינו אוסר במשהו, אלא דינו כשאר איסורין
(אורח חיים, פסח תמז:ב).

Rabbi Mayer Rabinowitz, in the Pesah Guide prepared for this Committee (which also appears in this volume), explains the general application of this principle:

During the eight days of Pesah, *hametz* cannot lose its identity in an admixture. Therefore, the minutest amount of *hametz* renders the

whole admixture *hametz* and its use on Pesah is prohibited. However, during the rest of the year, *hametz* follows the normal rule of admixture, i.e., it loses its identity in an admixture of one part *hametz* and 60 parts of non-*hametz* (*batel beshishim*). This affords us the opportunity to differentiate between foods purchased before and during Pesah.

This same principle can be applied to cheeses. If the cheeses are purchased before Pesah, to be used on Pesah, then we can rely on the principle of *batel beshishim*. In other words, if the percentage of *hametz* is less than 1.6% in the cheeses under discussion, then it should be permissible to purchase such cheeses before Pesah for use on Pesah.

- (1) *Cottage cheese*. The starter culture (bacteria) added to the milk constitutes only 0.1% of the finished product. The rennet added to the milk is, in this case, of microbial origin and would be less than 0.1%. Then there is a stabilizer added to the cream used as dressing for the curd. The stabilizer is invariably a hydrocolloid gum. These are limited by law to a total of 0.33%. The most popular gum is locust bean gum and this comes from the seed of the locust tree. Sometimes, guar gum is used; this comes from a legume seed. Other possible gums are not of cereal origin, but are obtained from bacteria, algae, trees, bushes and seaweed. Finally, they can add an acid; this is either sodium citrate, which is made by fermentation of sugar, or sodium phosphate, which is a mineral; the maximum is 0.1%.
- (2) *Cream cheese*. This has a Standard of Identity and the Federal Register shows that the maximum content of the gum (see above) is 0.8%; it is usually 0.3%. Only salt (0.75%) is added to the dairy components.
- (3) *Ripened cheese*. These are made by preparing a curd from the milk, as in cottage cheese, inoculating it with bacteria or mold, and storing at a controlled temperature until the desired changes have taken place, called curing. This includes all except the first two categories above, which are unripened. Examples are Cheddar (hard), Muenster (semi-soft) and Camembert (soft). These natural cheeses contain lactic starter culture, rennet, salt and annatto color. However, no additives such as gums, stabilizers, etc., are allowed.
- (4) *Processed cheese, cheese food and cheese spread*. These are made in the same manner, but with increasing amounts of water. Here sodium citrate, sodium phosphate, vinegar, lactic acid and citric acid may be added, but the amounts are small, not over 0.1%. The color added is annatto, which comes from a berry. The only problem in my investigation is the finding that processed cheese spreads can contain starch as one of the water binders; however, the total of starch, corn

The Use of Cheese on Pesah

syrup, sugar and gums can be a maximum of only 0.8%.

CONCLUSION

Cottage cheese and cream cheese seem to present no problem, for they do not contain any cereal derivatives, and the percentage of added products is less than 1.6%. Ripened cheeses, such as Cheddar (hard), Muenster (semi-soft) and Camembert (soft), present no problem. Processed cheese presents the problem of the presence of starch used as a water binder. Though the maximum is less than 1.6%, we should be strict when we know that there is a probable *hametz* ingredient (starch) added to the cheese.

Hence, cottage cheese, cream cheese and ripened cheese, if purchased before Pesah begins, may be used without a specific *hekhsher* during Pesah. However, processed cheese (American) and cheese foods are not permitted.

Note: The technical data that is contained in this paper was obtained by Dr. Marvin P. Steinberg, Professor of Food Engineering at the University of Illinois, Urbana. His consultants were Professor R. Speckman, a dairy technologist in the Department of Food Science and Dr. D. Green, Director of Research for Dean Foods Company, a large dairy.

XIII.

SHABBAT

