



Gebrochts:

May I or May I Not

Rabbi Naphtali Burnstein



The Yom Tov of Pesach has many halachos and minhagim associated with it. Because of the serious nature of the prohibition of eating chometz on Pesach, many chumros or stringencies have evolved to protect us from violating the prohibition of eating chometz on Pesach.

One of the stringencies that has evolved and become accepted in some communities, is the minhag not to eat Gebrochts on Pesach. In order to understand this minhag an explanation must be given of what lead to this minhag or custom.

During the Yom Tov of Pesach, we are forbidden to eat any of the five grains specified in the Talmud, if they have been “leavened.” The five types of grains are wheat, barley, spelt, oats and rye. Leavening is defined as flour of one of these grains combined with water and allowed to sit for more than 18 minutes before being baked. Once flour has been mixed with water and baked into matza, it is no longer subject to leavening or chametz. It would seem from the Talmud that matza soaked in water would be permissible to eat on Pesach.

However, later on in our history, primarily amongst Chasidic Jews the custom evolved to avoid putting matzah or any matza product into water or any liquid. This avoids the concern that a clump of flour that was not properly mixed with water may come in contact with a liquid.

The name of this type of food became known as Gebrochts. As was mentioned earlier, it was adopted primarily in the Chasidic communities. This tradition is actually mentioned in the Shulchan Aruch Harav,

amongst other sources. Their concern was that perhaps the matza was not kneaded sufficiently, and some unbaked flour remains on the matzah. The soaking will then bring about a potential fermenting process.

As a result of this caution the adherents of this custom do not eat matza ball soup or matza brei on Pesach. Non-gebrochts recipes and products generally substitute potato starch for matza meal. There is even a mix available to make matza balls out of potato starch (who said you can’t have your cake and eat it too). Today many of the hotels that are kosher for Pesach advertise that they are Gebrochts-free, to attract the adherents of this custom.

Outside of the communities who follow this tradition, many people do not keep this custom. Their rationale is that there is no reason to assume that the flour was not baked through and they are not concerned of the clumping of flour that was not completely mixed with water. In addition, they feel that this custom makes it more difficult to enjoy the Simcha of Yom Tov by placing chumros on ourselves.

Even the adherents of this custom, do not follow this stringency on the eighth day of Pesach. Since the last day of Pesach is only Rabbinic, the tradition was not to follow the stringency on the last day. In addition, the utensils used for gebrochts on the last day of Pesach may be used the next year on Pesach without any concern.

As is true of so many areas of our tradition we should follow our family traditions and enjoy the spirit of Pesach and its message of Zman Charoseinu. 🥰