

Kashering Keilim: Back to Basics

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Once a utensil has been used to cook something that is not Kosher it needs to be Kashered. A common example is buying a used utensil from a non-Jew. When a utensil is bought from a non-Jew it must be *Kashered* and *Toiveled* (placed in the Mikva). Unlike putting utensils in the *Mikvah*, Kashering a pot has to do with physical cleanliness. When a utensil is placed in the *Mikva* the status it attains is entirely Halachic in nature and has nothing to do with the physical makeup of the pot. But before a pot can be placed in the *Mikvah* it must be clean. One level of cleanliness is actual food matter that can be seen on the surface of the pot; this must be cleaned off. The second level of cleanliness, which we will focus on tonight, is the food matter that is absorbed into the walls of the pot during previous food preparation.

The source for this idea is a Parsha in the Torah at the end of Bamidbar (31:21-24). Bnei Yisroel defeats Midyan and collects a great deal of spoils. Some of the spoils are cooking utensils and Hashem includes instructions to Bnei Yisroel on how to prepare the utensils before they are used. Most Rishonim understand that this was an explanation to Bnei Yisroel of the above idea. Since the people of Midyan had previously used these utensils for non-Kosher animals and Basar B'Chalav etc. there were remnants of the tastes in the walls of the utensils. Hashem was telling B"Y that these remnants were also a problem and was telling the people how to get rid of them. The Smak, who counts this in his Sefer HaMitzvos, understands that this was not just a way to explain how to get rid of a Kashrus problem it was a Mitzvah for Bnei Yisroel to Kasher their Keilim.

There is a concept in the Gemara (Pesachim 44b) called "*Tam Kelkar*." This means that the taste of a food is like the physical entity of the food itself, so if a food is not permitted neither is its taste. The Gemara derives this principle from a phrase in the Parsha of a Nazir. A Nazir is not allowed to consume wine and other grape products. The Pasuk tells us that a Nazir may not eat "*Mishras Anovim*", water that grapes have been soaked in and then removed. We see that the taste of the grapes that remains in the water is as prohibited as the grapes themselves.

There is a discussion amongst the Rishonim as to the nature of this *issur*. Rashi (Chullin 98b) assumes that it is Rabbinic in nature and the use of a Pasuk is just an *Asmachtah*. Rabbeinu Tam (Avodah Zorah 67a) believes that the *issur* is one of a Torah nature. This argument could relate to the nature of Hagalas Keilim. If *Tam Kelkar* is a concept that applies even on a Torah level then that could also explain the need for HaGalas Kelim. As we mentioned it may be to remove the taste that is left in the walls the taste is as problematic as the food itself so Hashem told Moshe the way to get rid of this taste. If we assume like Rashi, that the principle of *Tam Kelkar* is only Rabbinic in nature so what was going on in the Torah? We could say that Rashi is from the same camp as the Smak. Hashem was not saying that what remained in the utensils was

something that was forbidden yet there was still a Mitzvah of cleaning out the pots before we used them¹.

Let's move on to how exactly we go about removing these remnants of previous food that is left in the walls of utensils. The main phrase that we will be using as our guide is "*KeBolo Kach Polto*." This means that the way food entered the walls of the utensils will also make the food leave. To Kasher a pot we must heat it in the same way that it was heated up when it was used for the non-Kosher item.

There are three different major categories of usage. A utensil can be used for cold, such as a drinking glass for cold beverages (Y.D. 121:1), a utensil can be used for heating or hot food, such as plates and utensils (Y.D. 121:2), and a utensil can be used for roasting, such as a grill (O.C. 451:4). Any time the medium of water is used in the cooking process it will fall into the second category. So boiling (*Bishul*) is the second category unlike roasting (*Tzli*) which is the third category since there is no medium of water.

A utensil that is used for cold food will require *Hadacha* (washing off) and in some cases *Shifshuf* (scrubbing). A utensil from the second category of boiling (or use with hot food) will require HaGalah. So when we speak of Hagolas Kelim it is a little bit of a misnomer, the term HaGolah refers specifically to the second category of use with hot foods, it would not suffice for the third category and is unnecessary for the first category. To Kasher the third category one needs to engage in a process called *Libun* which is essentially burning out the remnants with fire.

The question the Poskim speak about is how to determine what category a utensil falls into. For example, if a *milchik* plate is usually for cold food and every once in a while it is used for some hot lasagna, must we assume that the plate needs HaGolah because of the few times it has been used for lasagna, or can we say that we should follow the majority of use and therefore *Hadacha* should suffice. The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 451:6) says that we follow the majority use, while the Ramo (ibid) says that we must be Machmir for any usage. Achkenzim follow the Ramo so we would have to do HaGolah on the plate.

There is a substantial difference between Hagolah and *Libun*, which creates a number of practical differences. HaGolah is defined by the concept we mentioned earlier, *KeBolo Kach Polto*, the object is to have the "*Bliah*", remnants in the walls, come out of the walls. *Libun* is a different type of Kashering, instead of removing the Blios we are destroying them. The Rishonim use the phrase "*Soref BiMkomon*", the blios are being burned even as they are inside the walls of the utensil, so there is no need to remove them first.

¹ See the Ohr Sameach (Macholos Asuros 9:9) who explains that the Mitzvah of Hagalas Keilim was a result of an issur to use utensils that previously had a *Bliah Issur* (even if the Bliah itself was not assur, it still came from a source that was assur). This could be used to explain Hechsher Kelim according to Rashi's position that *Tam Kelkar* was only DiRabobon.

There are two main practical differences because of this difference. The first is if we need to clean the utensil before Kashering it (O.C. 451:13). If the Blios are going to come out of the utensil during Kashering we need to clean the utensil first. If, however, the process is one of destruction by burning we can also burn any fragments of food left on the surface of the utensil as well.

The second *Nafka Mina* is a *Gezerah* that the Rama (O.C. 451:5) mentions. Chazal instituted that when a utensil is extremely difficult to be cleaned one may not do HaGolah on the utensil because we are concerned that the person will not clean the utensil properly and the HaGolah will not be effective. However, we know that *Libun* is effective even if the utensil is not clean since *Libun* destroys the Blios where they are in the walls of the utensil. So hard to clean utensils can only be Kashered with *Libun*, even though they would theoretically fall into the second category where Hagolah normally is sufficient.

Now that we've explained the nature of Hagolah as opposed to *Libun* let's examine the process of Hagolah more carefully. There is a potential problem with the whole idea of HaGolah. The way to do HaGolah is to place the utensil in a larger pot of boiling water to remove the Blios that are present in the walls of the utensil. The Blios will flow out of the present utensil because of the boiling water thus koshering the utensil. The obvious problem that all the Rishonim raise is that where do the Blios go after they leave the pot, they should go right back in to the pot and even worse they should go into the bigger pot too. Instead of Kashering a pot you end up making two pots Trief!

The basic answer is that this is indeed a fundamental problem and the Rishonim offer a number of possible solutions. Tosfos (Hullin 108b) understands that the Gemara really means that the pot has a cycle it fills up with Blios and then it purges them. When it is done with the purging cycle it once again sucks in more Blios. This would be a good solution, we could remove the pot from the water at the end of the purge cycle before the new cycle of sucking the Blios back in begins. The Rishonim, however, point out that this is very impractical since there is really no way to determine when these cycles are taking place.

The second suggestion made by the Rishonim is to use the principle of Bitul. If there is enough matter that is permissible mixed in with the non-permissible item we consider the *issur* to be null and void, as if it doesn't exist. So in this instance we would make sure that the water has a volume that is sixty times the amount of Blios present in the pot. Then the Blios would exit the pot during boiling and become nullified in the water and would not be able to reenter the original pot, nor the larger pot that is filled with the water. This too is subject to problems, since we can not be sure how much Blios are in the pot we have to assume that the pot is filled completely with Blios so we would need water of a volume of sixty times the volume of the entire utensil that you are Kashering. This could work for small utensils like a fork but for larger pots it is extremely impractical to find a pot that large to do the HaGolah in.

Parenthetically there is an important Ran (Avosah Zorah) who discusses this suggestion. The Ran asks a fundamental question. We know that the institution of Bitul is only B'dieved, not L'Chatchilah. If something *assur* falls into a quantity of *heter* the Torah allowed us to eat it anyway if there is sufficient *heter* in this mixture so that we can say that the *issur* is nullified. However, we are not allowed to purposefully mix something *assur* into an amount of *heter* to cause Bitul to take place! So how can we say that we will place the pot into a large pot of boiling water and nullify the Blios when they come out, aren't we causing *bitul* to happen on purpose? The Ran answers that what is not allowed is to purposely eat *issur*, we can't use the institution of Bitul to allow us to eat forbidden foods. Here, on the other hand, we aren't using the Blios at all, we are throwing out the water afterwards so it would not be a problem.

The final suggestion, which is what we usually assume is the best way to take care of this problem, is a concept called "*Nosen Taam Lifgam.*" This is a caveat to the principle we discussed above of "*Taam Kelkar.*" We only assume that the taste is just as bad as the substance itself when the taste is still a good taste, when the taste is sufficiently "Pagum" it is no longer a problem. The Gemara (Avodah Zorah 67b) learns this from a Pasuk by *Nevailah* which mentions a *Ger*, the Gemara learns that something only retains its status as *assur* if it is fit for a *Ger*, or any person. The Gemara (ibid 76a) applies this concept to a pot which hasn't been used for at least a 24 hour period (Rosh ibid 5: , see Rashi, Tosfos there who disagree and understand that overnight is already *called Aino Bas Yomo*). So once a utensil is left over a 24 hour period any Blios that are inside of it will be *Lifgam* and we would not be concerned if they would reenter the pot or enter another pot.

There are a few more details about Kashering utensils that are important to mention. The water for Hagolah should be kept at a rolling boil both before we drop the utensil in and after the utensil is dropped in. Secondly, Hagolah can be done in parts. As long as all parts of the utensil are submerged in the water at some point it is fine, the entire utensil does not have to be submerged at one time. This is in contradistinction to the idea of *Tvilah* in a *Mikva* that we mentioned at the outset. *Tvilah* requires that the whole utensil is submerged simultaneously. This is for the reason that we mentioned earlier. Kashering a *kli* is a physical purge so as long as all parts of the utensil get under the water all the Blios will be purged. *Tvilah* is not a physical change so in order to have the new status conferred on the utensil the whole utensil must be dunked at once.

Finally, it important to note that earthenware vessels pose a large problem in terms of Kashering utensils. The Gemara (Pesachim 30b) says that one can not do *Libun* on an earthenware vessel because they require *Libun* in an oven where there is a flame on the inside of the oven "*Hesek MeBifnim.*" Since this process can be damaging to such a utensil, Chazal said that it may not be done for fear that people will not leave the utensil in for a proper amount of time due to their concern over the utensil being damaged (O.C. 451:1). Hagolah is also not possible since the material is very porous and we can not remove Blios from it. This can be very relevant since there is a discussion in the Poskim as to the status of glazed clay utensils and china if they are considered earthenware.