



Eating Matzah for Health Reasons in Nisan

לעילוי נשמת
יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

Question: I now eat *matzah* throughout the year as a replacement for bread as a big part of reducing salt intake, on doctor's orders. My family *minhag* I have always kept is to suspend eating *matzah* from Rosh Chodesh Nisan. May I continue to eat *matzah* until *erev Pesach*?

Answer: The Yerushalmi (Pesachim 10:1) forbids eating *matzah* on *Erev Pesach*, comparing it to having relations with one's fiancée before their wedding. One explanation is that when eating *matzah* is about to be a *mitzvah*, one should wait to eat it as a *mitzvah* as opposed to personal desire (see Levush, OC 471:2; Igrot Moshe, Orach Chayim 1:155). The Rambam (Chametz U'matzah 6:12) says that it is to make the *mitzvah* of *matzah* recognizable. There is a *machloket* among *Rishonim* whether this restriction is only at the time of day when it is already forbidden to eat *chametz* (Rosh, Pesachim 3:7) or is all day (Ramban, Pesachim 15b of Rif's pages, accepted by the Rama, Orach Chayim 471:2). *Poskim* disagree regarding the night before (see opinions in Dirshu 471:7). (This is important when *Erev Pesach* is on Shabbat – see Living the Halachic Process IV, D-15). Before this time, no one forbids eating *matzah* on

standard halachic grounds.

The expansion to well before Pesach comes at the time of early *Acharonim*. The Sheyarei Knesset Hagedola (471, HBY 3, quoted as an option by several *Acharonim*) cites a *minhag* in Constantinople to refrain from eating *matzah* from Rosh Chodesh Nisan. Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igrot Moshe *ibid.*) explains the logic as follows. Once one is already supposed to be thinking about Pesach, there is logic to avoid eating *matzah* before it is a *mitzvah*. The earliest time is 30 days before Pesach (see Pesachim 6a), which is too early to expect of most people, but it is positive if righteous people accept it upon themselves from Rosh Chodesh or even 30 days.

The Sheyarei Knesset Hagedola seems to understand the rationale differently. He connects the *minhag* to a *minhag* the Rama (*ibid.*) brings to eat a minimum amount of *matzah* on the first day of Pesach in *chutz la'aretz* to help go into the second *Seder* with an appetite for more *matzah*. This stresses the “experiential” rather than the *matzah's* halachic status.

Even on *Erev Pesach*, a few leniencies might apply to your case. It is agreed that it is only for the type of *matzah* one can use for the *Seder*, which excludes at least *matzah ashira* (egg matzahs) (Shulchan Aruch, OC

471:2). It is a good question whether it applies to *matzot* whose physical qualities are like *matzot* for Pesach but were not prepared with the *halachot* of *matzot* for Pesach. The Rivash (Shut 402), stressing the halachic side, forbids eating such *matzah* on *Erev Pesach* because of the opinions that permit them for the *Seder* if proper *matzot* are not available. The experiential approach helps us understand the lenient opinion regarding the “extension time” that those who always eat hand-*matzot* at the *Seder* may eat machine *matzot* before, because they taste different (Piskei Teshuvot 471:4 based on unnamed *poskim*).

Based on regular halachic rules, there is no need to be *machmir* on an optional extension of a Rabbinic *halacha* in the face of important health considerations. (Even if you can find dietary alternatives, few people are good at effectively changing a system that is working.) The problem is that you have been refraining even from *matzah* that is not for Pesach. While a family *minhag* is

weaker than the *minhag* of a place (Pitchei Teshuva, Yoreh Deah 214:5), since you have been following it as an adult (ibid.) and especially if it has been in your family for generations (see Kol Nidrei 75:8), it should be binding on you.

You might draw on the Divrei Yatziv's (OC 188) logic – it should be permitted to eat *matzah* due to sickness, because it is not giving in to desires. Even if we will not rely on that logic, we usually assume an originally optional family *minhag* does not apply when a special strong need exists to not follow it (see Chayei Adam II:127:6). However, it is best to also do *hatarat nedarim* on the *minhag* (see Kol Nidrei 76:3). ■

Having a dispute?



For a Din Torah in English or Hebrew contact:

Eretz Hemdah - Gazit
Rabbinical Court

077-215-8-215 • Fax: (02) 537-9626
beitdin@eretzhemdah.org



Oded
Lewensohn,
Adv. & Notary

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Adv. & Notary