

To the Congregation:

As we approach the holiday of Pesach, many of you have asked questions concerning an article that appeared in the Conservative Judaism Kolot magazine about the eating of kitniyot, usually translated somewhat incorrectly as legumes, on Pesach. Here is a link to the article:

<http://www.cjvoices.org/article/the-kitniyot-dilemma/>

In this Halachic statement, Rabbi David Golinkin argues that it is no longer necessary for Ashkenazi Jews to observe the custom of refraining from eating kitniyot and provides a historical background and analysis regarding the entire tradition. Briefly, he teaches that the tradition arose in France and Provence in the 13th century and there are conflicting reasons given to the prohibition, most of them centering around the idea that eating beans, corn and rice might lead one, in one way or another, to eating hametz.

It is important to note, as Rabbi Golinkin does, that the word hametz, designating foods which are forbidden on Pesach, only applies to the leavened products of wheat, barley, spelt, rye and oats. These are the only foods which are universally prohibited on Pesach. Any product containing any of these grains, in whatever form, must have a hescher, a mark of kashrut supervision, designating it as kosher for Pesach.

But what about kitniyot - corn, beans and rice? Rabbi Golinkin argues that it is time to move away from the prohibition against kitniyot in order to enhance the enjoyment of the holiday, and that we should not feel tied to a custom which is of dubious origin. He says that it is perfectly permissible for all Jews to eat kitniyot over Pesach provided that one purchases them in their pure form before the holiday. He makes it clear that any processed product containing anything other than the pure ingredients must have a hescher for Pesach.

So, as to the question of kitniyot, here is our answer:

There are many who want to hold on to the custom of not eating kitniyot on Pesach because it is the tradition they grew up with and because "it just doesn't feel right". This is by no means insignificant and, taking into account the seriousness of custom in Jewish tradition, it is perfectly appropriate to continue the prohibition and is not by any means foolish. If you do retain this custom, it is especially important to check to make sure that items you purchase with a hescher for Pesach are not identified as only being kosher for those who eat kitniyot. This can cause some confusion in the Pesach sections of supermarkets. Most foods do not have such a hescher, but some do and you should be careful.

However, in accordance with Rabbi Golinkin's article, those Ashkenazi Jews who choose to eat kitniyot can do so (provided they follow the restrictions above concerning purchasing only pure items and doing so before Pesach) and should feel comfortable that they are not breaking the laws of Pesach.

There are some legitimate reasons to move away from the prohibition: enhancing the joy of the holiday and providing more variety of foods for the festival. There are, as well, legitimate reasons to continue the prohibition based on one's commitment to the tradition of their families.

Therefore, the ultimate decision rests on each individual to decide based on what criteria are most important to them. We will continue to use only products which do not contain kitniyot at the synagogue in order to respect everyone in the congregation. Similarly, should you choose to eat kitniyot on Pesach, please be respectful of those who do not and take that into consideration when inviting guests for the Seder and for other Pesach meals.

I would be glad to answer any other questions you might have.

Rabbi Dobrusin