

Pesach Kashering

Conundrums

This article is based on conversations between Rabbi Yitzchok Hisiger; Rabbi Sholem Fishbane, Kashrus Administrator, cRc Kasher; and Rabbi Aaron Mendelson of Kosher Services, in The Kashrus Awareness Project podcasts, taken with permission from kashrusawareness.com.

Kashering Confusion

Rabbi Yitzchok Hisiger: So, we're here to discuss a very important topic, especially as Pesach is approaching, and that is the topic of *kashering*. Many people don't venture to try to *kasher* themselves. They very often engage services. They'll see signs up in their neighborhoods or their shul, "We do *kashering*." Many people are very well-meaning, but they don't know the details. They don't know how you determine if something could be *kashered*, who should they rely on, is it something that they should endeavor to do themselves... Both of you have a tremendous amount of experience *kashering*. What should we know?

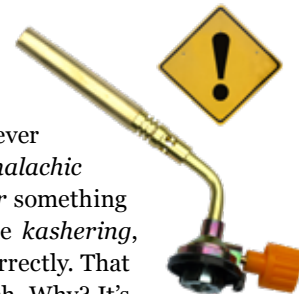
Rabbi Sholem Fishbane: That's such a great introduction in that putting up a sign that "we *kasher*" is well-meaning, it's a good way of making a few dollars, it's *bein hazmanim* (while the schools are on vacation) – but it may be problematic. In recent years we had a couple of companies that wanted to *kasher* under the cRc. We spoke to them and interviewed them, and not only did we reject them, but we discovered that what they had been doing the last few years was, frankly, on a good day, *bedieved*. Well-meaning people, they learned the *halachos*, maybe they saw it at home... but not what we're looking for. So, it became a red flag that you really, really need to be an expert in both the machinery and the *halachos*. And if we can take one thing away from today, it's if you're going to utilize one of these companies, either get one with a *hechsher*, like Pristine Kosher under the cRc, as an example, or get one with the approbation of a

Rav. Maybe even call the Rav beforehand and ask him, "By the way, the people that you're approving, are they checking in with you, how are they doing that", etc. But that would for sure be an important takeaway to start off with.

Rabbi Mendelson: The most important point for this, especially for Pesach, is that you ask the person, "Who trained you?" If he says, "Well, I'm doing it because the other *bachurim* are *kashering*," that's not training. Ask, "Do you have a *hechsher*? Has the Rav trained you?" I'm not saying that everybody is no good. I'm just saying to make sure it's done properly.

Rabbi Hisiger: I love the point you're bringing up, because many people might think that *kashering* is a nice *bein hazmanim* activity. "I do car cleaning, and I do this other job, and I'll also do *kashering*." It's a real expert skill, you really have to know the *halacha*, aside from the practical knowledge of using blowtorches, and other types of equipment, whatever is used for *kashering*.

Rabbi Fishbane: Can I jump in on the blowtorches? I want to explain that at the cRc, as an example, we almost never use blowtorches. And why is that? The *halachic seforim* talk about how you can't *kasher* something that you're afraid will break during the *kashering*, and because of that you won't *kasher* correctly. That description clearly applies to a blowtorch. Why? It's such a powerful thing. We have watched over and over again people taking these powerful blowtorches, and because they're afraid of burning down someone's home, they won't do it properly. And because of that, we actually discourage using blowtorches. I know this is going to be a shocker, but if you think about it, if you want to do it right, you follow the *Shulchan Aruch* how to do it, whether it's *hag'alah*, or there are other ways of doing



libun correctly. [See <https://consumer.crckosher.org/consumer/kashering/> for more details.] If you see somebody walking around with a blowtorch, that might actually be a red flag.

The Takeaway

- If you plan to have someone *kasher* your kitchen – especially for Pesach – make sure they're properly trained and/or have a proper *hashgachah*.
- Do not use dangerous equipment without proper training.

Tips for the Home

Rabbi Hisiger: So, let's say I have a good agency, I have Rav Aaron Mendelson coming down, I have the best. As a homemaker, what tips would both of you give to prepare the kitchen for *kashering*? Especially things that people don't realize.

Rabbi Fishbane: Two things – Once you get the Rav Aaron Mendelsons or those out there that have good *hashgacha*, there are two important points: 1) It has to be *aino ben yomo*, it has to be 24 hours that no heat has gone in, and 2) Make sure it's clean. When we go to *kasher*, they say, "Oh, don't worry, this is clean..." No, this has to be as if you bought it new. Really clean. We have to unscrew nuts and bolts because that's where *shmutz* gets in.

Rabbi Hisiger: So, like under the counter, sinks...

Rabbi Fishbane: Really clean. Take that toothpick, and you know... You could take a cold scrub, steel wool, that's okay.

Rabbi Aaron Mendelson: Let me tell you a story. This happened exactly one hour ago. I went to *kasher* a large kitchen, and they said that everything is clean. I said to the guy who was there, "Take off your gloves, and put your hand over here." There was not just a little residue. There were tons and tons of food, in a place that you couldn't see – just by putting your hand in a hidden place – it was full of food! It took me an hour to clean it. Then there were different cracks and crevices, cleaning it and hosing it, cleaning and hosing, and then we had to do the *kashering*. So, it took an extra-long time.

Rabbi Hisiger: Right there, this is a tremendously important thing. The cleaning of the appliance or whatever it is that's being *kashered*, someone might come in, they might know what they're doing, but they're not vigilant about making sure that it's spotless before they start the *kashering*.

Rabbi Mendelson: Right. Sometimes, I come into a house to *kasher* the sink, and then I have to re-clean the sink, because the sink is not cleaned to perfection.

Rabbi Fishbane: And I want to add to that, since Rav Aaron is saying an incredibly important point. The expertise of someone

who knows how to *kasher* a home is understanding crevices and cracks. There are certain things you're allowed to *kasher*, but not if there are cracks. So, you have to know where the cracks are, what's called a crack according to *halacha*, what's called a crevice, coiled hoses, dishwashers, you know, all of these things. It takes expertise to go directly to those areas, and to determine for each and every area, this can be *kashered*, or it can't be *kashered*.

When we *kasher* at the cRc for the community, we have one day when everybody comes to our Pesach Fair. We have a line of people who show us the stuff they want to *kasher*, and sometimes we have to tell them, "No, I'm sorry – too small of a hole, too big of a hole..." You know, there are various things that go into it. So, this is a great point, where it can't just be, well, it says on the cRc website that you can *kasher* granite, let me just walk in and do the *kashering*. There's actually expertise involved in figuring it out.

Rabbi Hisiger: Any final word before we wrap this up?

Rabbi Fishbane: You know when we say you should have a *chag kasher v'sameach*, we really mean the "*kasher*".

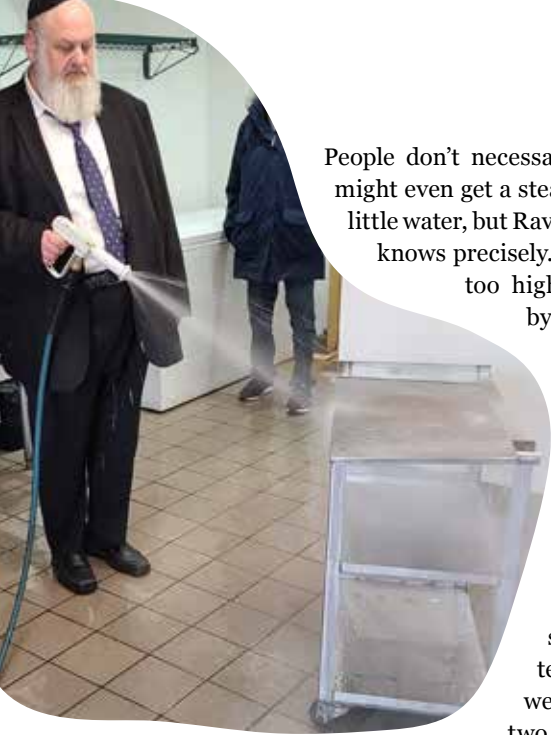
The Takeaway

- Make sure all equipment, appliances and/or surfaces are completely and thoroughly cleaned.
- Some items, especially those with cracks and crevices, may not be *kashered*.
- Everything being *kashered* must not have been used (for hot) for 24 hours.

Full Steam Ahead

Rabbi Fishbane: Another area which we should discuss is about "steamers". For example, on Amazon you can buy these steamers for \$50, \$100, and people might be "*kashering*" with the steamer, and it looks like it's really hot and all that. And we cringe when we see people using this. Why? The *halacha* is you're only allowed to *kasher* with water. You're not allowed to *kasher* with steam.





People don't necessarily know that. You might even get a steamer that does have a little water, but Rav Aaron can tell you, he knows precisely. If you're half an inch too high, above the surface, by the time it hits the surface, it's not hot enough, it's below boiling point (*k'dei resicha*). You're not *kashering*. We have done so much research in our office. We have bought many steamers, and we tested them a lot, and we came down to one or two that actually do the job where you're *kashering*

with water, and that's in the \$1,200 range.

Rabbi Hisiger: So, why would someone even bother using a steamer?

Rabbi Fishbane: Well, it looks like you're *kashering*! But you have to know the *halacha* that steam doesn't *kasher*, you have to understand how to do it properly... And the cheaper \$100, \$200 steamers, they're not doing the job. So, again, if somebody walks in, and they're opening a *kashering* business, and they go quickly on Amazon...

Rabbi Hisiger: By the way, I wonder if this is where the misconception comes from regarding *kashering* with steam. Steam gets so hot that people thought that this must be even better than water!

Rabbi Fishbane: Bottom line, you need someone who is trained – expertise, knowledge about the machine, and patience.



And I just want to say one other thing on another topic about *kashering*, and that is that people have forgotten an important *halacha*, at least as Ashkenazim. *L'chatchilah*, you cannot *kasher* once the *z'man biur* starts on *Erev Pesach*. On *Pesach* itself, even *b'dieved* it doesn't work. That's it. It's done. Whatever happens, happens. So, people who go on *Chol Hamoed* to a vacation house, or the like, "*ee efshar*", as they say in Israel – you cannot *kasher* the kitchen on *Chol Hamoed*. Once *Pesach* begins, you cannot *kasher*. So, keep that in mind as you plan your *Chol Hamoed*.

Rabbi Mendelson: Practically, if you're going into another

kitchen on *Chol Hamoed*, don't *kasher* any counters, don't *kasher* any sinks. Cover all the counters, clean the sink well, and put in an insert or something to hold the dishes.



The Takeaway

- A steamer can only be used for *kashering* if two conditions are met: a) The steam must condense to the point that the whole area being *kashered* is covered with water, and b) that water must be at approximately the boiling point (212° F). Most steamers sold for cleaning purposes do not meet these criteria and cannot be used for *kashering*.
- *L'chatchilah*, you cannot *kasher* once the *z'man biur* starts on *Erev Pesach*. On *Pesach* itself, even *b'dieved* it doesn't work. If you will be arriving in a non-*kashered* kitchen on *Chol Hamoed*, such as a hotel or vacation rental, you can only cover things like the counters and sink – not *kasher*.

To watch the complete conversations above, go to:
Kashering Confusion and Tips for the Home: <https://www.kashrusawareness.com/post/kashering-confusion>
Full Steam Ahead: <https://www.kashrusawareness.com/post/full-steam-ahead>