

## May China be Kasherred?

The essential principle that underlies the kashering process of purging a vessel of any forbidden substance it might have absorbed which renders it unfit for use is *kevole'o kakh poletu*, "as the vessel absorbs, so does it rid itself of what it absorbed" (*Pesahim* 30a).

The Talmud (*Pesahim* 30b) notes, however, that "...The Torah testified regarding earthenware vessels that it never loses its defect." For this reason the standard halakhic rule is that earthenware, enamel, porcelain, and glazed chinaware cannot be kasherred (*Orah Hayyim* 451:1; Rabbi Eliahu Schlesinger, *Sefer Ma'aglei Eliahu*, par. 1, pp. 23-24; Rabbi Aaron Felder, *Oholei Yeshurun*, vol. 1, p. 74; Rabbi Isaac Klein, *Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, p. 113). The impossibility of kashering earthenware vessels applies to substances absorbed through the medium of heat. Substances absorbed through long-term soaking, though technically considered "cooked", may be removed through soaking or purging (*Shulhan Arukh of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady, Orah Hayyim* 451:61).

Even the more stringent form of kashering called *libun*, that is, heating by flame until the object to be purged glows from the heat, may not be efficacious for these materials since the owner may not apply sufficient heat over sufficient time because of the fear that the items to be kasherred may break on account of the heat (*ibid.*). The sole exception, according to some authorities, would be when items made from such materials are returned to the potter's furnace (*ibid.* and also Rabbi Samuel Burschtein, *Ma'adanei Shemuel* 116:4). In this case there is no concern that the vessel in question would be prematurely removed from the heat. Today, few if any Jews have access to such a procedure, making it no more than a remote halakhic solution.

The less stringent form of kashering called *hag'alah*, that is immersion in boiling water, is even less efficacious considering the porosity of earthenware and china. Thus, Rabbi Joseph Karo permits the kashering of earthenware utensils by

three successive immersions only in cases where scriptural law does not apply, for example, vessels in which Gentiles had cooked food which are prohibited only by rabbinic legislation (Shulhan Arukh, *Yoreh De'ah* 113:16 and see Burschtein, *op. cit.* 116:3).

Notwithstanding the Talmud's absolute stand against kashering of earthenware vessels ("never loses its defect"), in the case of earthenware left unused for a long period of time, one major early modern rabbi questioned whether the Talmud's ruling should be taken so literally. In 1709 the *Hakham Tzvi*, Rabbi Tzvi Ashkenazi, one of the leading authorities in Germany, responded to a case where one of his students wanted to forbid the food cooked on Passover in an unpurged metal pot that had once been used for year round cooking but had not been used for two years (*Responsa Hakham Tzvi*, no. 75). His student reasoned that the leaven absorbed in the walls of the pot would linger and the impaired flavour imparted into the food would make it unfit for Passover use. If, however, this logic were accepted, argued the *Hakham Tzvi*, even after a thousand years the pot would still be unusable for Passover, and this did not make sense.

Rather, he ruled, after twelve months have elapsed, that which was absorbed into the pot is now to be considered "like dust" and is therefore of no consequence. Moreover, he extended his ruling even to earthenware and to year round—not just Passover—purging. He was even inclined to rule that the twelve month limit applies not only retroactively to Passover foods accidentally prepared in a pot which had remained unused but even to cases where one intentionally leaves a pot unused so that it could be "kashered" in this manner. However, he could not bring himself to go that far.

Subsequent authorities are divided as to whether to accept *Hakham Tzvi's* ruling. For a comprehensive list, see Rabbi Samuel Burschtein, *Sefer Ma'adanei Shmuel*, section 116:1, subparagraph 1. The upshot of both the lenient and strict views is that the view of the *Hakham Tzvi*, if it is accepted at all, is accepted after the fact (*bedi'avad*), that is, if the pot was already used for cooking, then the food is not forbidden. The *Hakham Tzvi* himself, as was noted, was unwilling to go one step further and allow kashering earthenware vessels through "aging" in the first instance (*lekhathila*), even though he did make the theoretical case for such permission. Facing particularly urgent situations, some contemporary rabbis, however, have relied on the view of the *Hakham Tzvi* to allow kashering and subsequent use of porcelain or earthenware dishes. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (*Hazon Ovadia*, p. 48, footnote 28), cites a decision of the Israeli chief rabbinate allowing hotel keepers to use porcelain vessels for Passover after they have been purged three times in boiling water, but he cites several rabbis who object to this permission. When he was chief rabbi in Cairo in the late 1940's, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef himself had to find a way to make kosher the facilities in Cairo's Jewish hospital,

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knowing full well that community officials would be unwilling to make a large outlay of funds to replace all the dishes. Faced with the alternative of the hospital's remaining non-kosher, Rabbi Yosef ruled that the staff could kasher the porcelain dishes (after they had remained unused for 24 hours) by immersing them three times in boiling water (Resp. *Yabia Omer*, *Yoreh De'ah*, Part I no. 6). Rabbi Yosef's ruling refers to an emergency situation, and it is doubtful that it could be applied universally (see, however, *Sha'arei Teshuvah* on *Orah Hayyim* 451, subparagraph 1).

On the basis of the above sources, we find that enamel, porcelain and glazed china can be kasherred only if a great loss (*hefsed merubeh*) would be incurred by the owner and only after passing of a full twelve months since the dishes were last used (Rabbi Hayyim Hezekiah Medini, *Sedei Hemed*, *Hametz uMatza* 7:2; Rabbi Aaron Felder, *Oholei Yeshurun*, p. 74 and notes). If such leniency would aid in encouraging particular families to make their homes kosher, this would be an additional reason in favor of following the Hakham Tzvi's precedent (Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Resp. *Iggerot Moshe*, *Yoreh De'ah* part 2 no. 46).

Authorities are divided on the procedures to be followed at the end of this period. Rabbi Aaron Felder (*op. cit.*) insists that after the passing of twelve months, the utensils in question must still undergo three successive immersions in boiling water, changing the water each time. Most of the authorities cited above, however, make no mention of any special procedure to be followed at the end of this period. Nonetheless, it would still be appropriate to rinse the dishes off after the twelve month period just as all utensils are rinsed after kasherred (Shulhan Arukh. *Orah Hayyim* 452:7).

See also *Tomeikh kaHalakhah*, vol. 1, p. 51.

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