



Vaad News & Views



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A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

With Pesach behind us we find ourselves on the threshold of Shavuot. The countdown is soon ending as Matan Torah is rapidly approaching. We have gone through a period when we do not celebrate weddings, listen to music and we subdue our feelings of Simcha, as we remember the Talmidim of Rabbi Akiva who lost their lives during this time.

During this period of time leading up to Shavuot, each year we try to energize and revitalize ourselves in preparation of Matan Torah. It certainly requires tremendous effort on our part to carry out each detail of every Mitzvah on a daily basis. We are not asked to pick and choose, but are handed the Torah to fulfill everything which is written in it. Although some Mitzvos may appear to be more challenging than others, this is the test that we have to live up to. We should relish the challenge and continue to strive to reach higher in our keeping of Mitzvos with each and every detail.

As Klal Yisroel stood together as one to receive the Torah, we did so with a true sense of communal unity. Enormous accomplishments can be achieved whilst working together in the true spirit of Torah edicts.

Similar to a car which requires regular service and oil change regularly, so is Klal Yisroel required to rejuvenate, refresh and feel the vibrancy of the Torah within each and every one of us. Let's use this short time to reignite our commitment to the Torah in preparation for Shavuot. May this period give us Chizuk, the strength to go forward each and every day in the footsteps of our holy Torah.

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ועשב לעבודת האדם

And Grasses For The Service Of Man

Tehillim 104:14

תהילים ק"ד י"ד

By Rabbi Zushe Yosef Blech

Hot beverages have enjoyed popularity in virtually every culture in the world. Before the advent of modern sanitation, boiling water made it safer to drink, and botanicals brewed in it created beverages that have been variously regarded as refreshing, recuperative, and relaxing. In addition, they have become enmeshed in the social and historical fabric of some countries. Perhaps the most famous example of such notoriety is tea. It has given its name to a country (China – “*cha*” being the name for tea in Mandarin and many other languages – in other dialects it is called “*te*”), was instrumental in the independence of another (the Boston Tea Party), and has served as the centerpiece of formal tea ceremonies from Japan to England. *Halachic* issues relating to tea are equally fascinating, and serve as the topic of this month’s article.

The beverage we know as tea is produced by brewing the leaves of an evergreen shrub known as *Cemallia sinensis* (from China) or *Camellia assamica* (from Assam, India) in hot water. Tea was originally discovered in China, adopted by the Japanese, and cultivated in India by the colonial British. Only the top two leaves and bud are harvested from the tree after each “flush” (or sprouting), which are then processed and cut into the product we use for brewing. ” Black tea is produced by allowing the leaves to oxidize, yielding dark tea, while green tea is dried without allowing for signifi-

cant oxidation of the leaf. All such teas contain no additives or flavorings, and are inherently Kosher. [Tea bags also do not contain any non-Kosher ingredients.]

Flavored teas, however, may pose significant *Kashrus* concerns. The most famous of these – Earl Grey – is produced by adding a small amount of oil of bergamot to black tea. Since oil of bergamot is considered inherently Kosher (it is an essential oil derived from the bergamot citrus fruit), it poses no *Kashrus* concern. Other flavored teas, however, use a variety of commercially prepared flavorings, many of which may contain ingredients that pose significant Kosher concerns. Indeed, some flavored teas contain dairy ingredients, and Kosher versions would be certified as Kosher-Dairy. All flavored teas, with the exception of Earl Grey, require reliable Kosher certification.

In addition to having a desirable taste, tea also acts as a stimulant. Originally, scientists gave the name “*theine*” to the stimulating compound in tea, just as they gave the name “*caffeine*” to the compound in coffee that possessed the same qualities. Eventually, scientists realized that these two compounds were one and the same, and the name theine was dropped. A stimulant by any other name is still a stimulant, of course, and many people drink tea to obtain that effect. Others, however, prefer to drink *decaffeinated* tea, where the caffeine is

removed from the tea using chemical solvents, similar to the process used to make decaffeinated coffee. Other than *Pesach* concerns based on the possible *Chometz* status of some of these chemicals, decaffeinated tea and coffee poses no *Kashrus* concerns for year-round use.

Instant tea is produced by brewing liquid tea and spray-drying it into a powder. In most cases, the equipment used to produce instant tea is not used for any other purpose, and *unflavored* instant tea may be used without a *Hashgacha*. Iced tea mix, however, is a blend of instant tea, sweetener, and flavorings, and requires a reliable *Hashgacha*. *Pesach*, however, poses additional concerns for instant tea, since malto-dextrins (either *Kitniyos* or *Chometz*) may be blended with the tea to aid in the spray-drying process. Instant tea for *Pesach* therefore requires a reliable *Hashgacha*.

Bottled iced tea poses another *Kashrus* concern. Many soft drinks are filled at cold temperatures, avoiding the *Kashrus* concerns of the equipment on which they are produced. Iced tea, as well as many juice products, however, must be pasteurized and filled at high temperatures. Since virtually all bottled iced tea is produced in facilities that also handle other beverages – some of which may be non-Kosher – it is critical to ensure the Kosher status of the equipment used to produce Kosher iced tea.

Halachic issues relating to tea are not limited to the realm of *Kashrus*, however. Drinking tea on *Shabbos* requires addressing a number of *Halachic* issues, since tea leaves may not be

cooked in the brewing of the beverage, as is the normal process. For hundreds of year, and perhaps more than any other food eaten on *Shabbos*, *Halachic* authorities have dealt with the best way to make tea, ranging from preparing “*sense*” (tea essence) before *Shabbos*, and ensuring that this tea concentrate be mixed with hot water in a manner that meets *Halachic* requirements. Modern powdered instant tea, however, allows a much easier way to make tea on *Shabbos*.

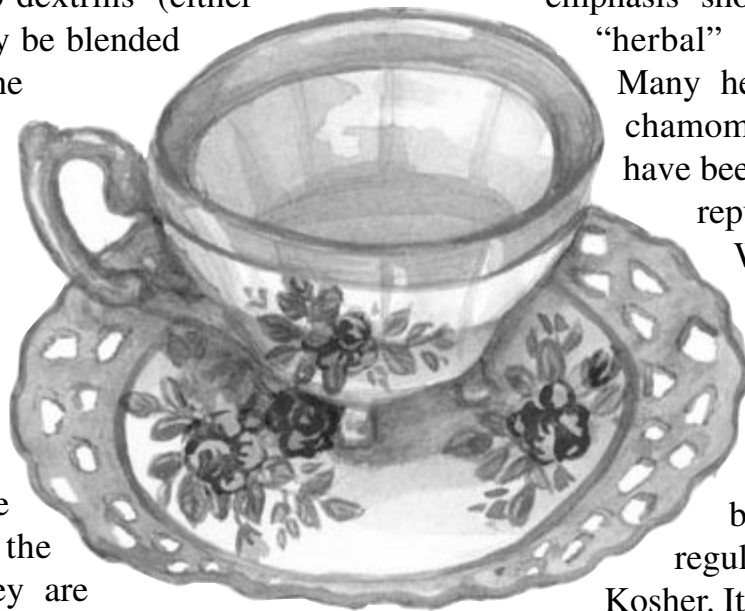
Not all “tea”, however, is truly “tea”. Many botanicals, such as flowers, herbs, and grasses, are sold as “herbal tea”, and while the term “tea” may be misleading – they are not tea – the emphasis should be on the term “herbal” for such products.

Many herbal brews, such as chamomile and peppermint, have been used for years, with reputed health benefits.

While the curative powers of such products have yet to be proven, they clearly do qualify as “caffeine-free”. *Pure* botanical tea, just as regular tea, is inherently

Kosher. It is important to recognize, however, that herbal tea may contain ingredients other than the botanicals that make up the name of the product. Often, additional flavorings are added to such products, which require a reliable Kosher certification.

Herbal teas, however, may have one advantage over the standard beverage. It has long been noted that certain herbs have medicinal qualities, often surpassing those of more modern pharmaceuticals. The *Mezridzer Maggid* explains that herbs had merited such powers based upon their actions at the very time of creation. When



Miriam was punished with *Tzora'as*, Moshe appealed to *Hashem* for her recovery by invoking the name of “*Kel*” (see *Bamidbar* 12:13), which is the Divine Attribute that heals a person. The *Talmud* (*Chullin* 60a) notes that when *Hashem* commanded grasses to be created, He did not specify that they maintain themselves separate from one another, as He did in the case of trees. When the grasses actually sprouted, however, they did so, reasoning that a *Kal va'Chomer* – a conclusion based upon an analogy from a less stringent to a more stringent set of circumstances – required them to do so. [In this case, they reasoned that if trees – which normally remain distinct and noticeable from one another – were commanded to remain separate, all the more so should grasses – which tend to grow together – show their individuality by remaining separate from one another.] The *Maggid* therefore explains that since the power of a *Kal va'Chomer* derives from the first of the thirteen Divine Attributes – which is “*Kel*” – and the grasses were the first creations to invoke a *Kal va'Chomer*, they merited the assumption of the gift of the healing powers of *Kel*. Such an understanding, of course, should provide an entirely fresh insight into the cup of herbal tea one may take next time he has a cold!

