

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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Posted March 20, 2012, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

TO NOSH OR NOT TO NOSH, THAT IS THE QUESTION

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By now, many of us have begun stocking the kitchen with boxes of matsah, Passover cake mixes, macaroons and the like. The question is, "When are we allowed to begin eating all this Passover food?" It's not as easy a question to answer as you might imagine. You can eat the macaroons and so forth at any time. It's the matsah itself that constitutes the problem. Here's our Yerushalmi on the topic:

A person does not eat on the afternoon before Passover until it becomes dark. (M. Pesachim 10:1)

Rabbi Yudah taught: One does not taste anything on Friday afternoons until it becomes dark so that he will enter Shabbat with a keen appetite.

Rabbi Yosah disagrees and says: One may continue noshing until the day is over [right up to the start of Shabbat].

What if you want to eat snacks (e.g., sweets, nuts or chips) or fruits or meats on Friday afternoons?...

Rabbi Levi said: One who eats matsah on the afternoon before Passover is like one who has intercourse with his fiancée in his father-in-law's house. And one who does this is liable to lashing. (Y. Pesachim 10:1 81b3-82a4)

When you think about it, it's a great analogy. After you're married, you can enjoy sexual intercourse with full permission from all the parties involved. However, if you have sex before the wedding (in your father-in-law's house, no less), you aren't just crossing the boundaries of propriety but you're betraying the trust your host has placed in you.

Discussion Questions:

1. It seems clear that, while you may be allowed to nosh as you're preparing your seder, eating matsah itself is forbidden. Your first taste of matsah should be at the seder. Will you try observing this piece of Talmud this year? Is this already the practice in your home? How does it enhance your holiday observance? (Does it enhance or does it detract from the holiday's joy?)
2. What can we learn about "border crossing" from these rules about matsah? Does discipline and control of an appetite, be it for matsah or sexual intercourse, increase the enjoyment of indulging that appetite within the proper boundaries? What greater lessons can we learn from this? Is there something else in life that's better when we stay inside the boundaries?

3. We know that children certainly were snacking on the afternoon before the seder for we learn on B. Pesachim 109a that Rabbi Akiba would give the children nuts and roasted grain to the children on the afternoon before the seder so that they could stay awake. This brings up an interesting question. Rabbi Akiba is THE MAN in terms of religious observance yet I doubt anyone follows his example today. More and more foods seem to be prohibited for Passover with each year. Roasted kernels of wheat (or popcorn) are considered off-limits as are peanuts, rice, legumes, etc. Why are some people drawing the boundaries more and more restrictively when it comes to Passover? How can we introduce some sanity back into this system?

Looking forward to your answers, as always! Happy cleaning!

[NOTE: Maqom is now a discussion group, [Maqom613](http://groups.google.com/group/maqom613), at Google groups. To leave a comment on the above passage, go to <http://groups.google.com/group/maqom613> and join the group. Also, you will need a gmail account to log in, so if you don't have one, then first go <https://mail.google.com/> to set up your email account.]