



COFFEE AND TEA FOR PESACH

By Rabbi Dovid Cohen

What is in coffee and tea that might make them unsuitable for *Pesach*? Although coffee beans and tea leaves are inherently kosher for *Pesach* (See *Sha'arei Teshuvah* 453:1), we will see that there are three processes done to the beans or leaves which potentially raise *Pesach* concerns, namely decaffeination, drying, and flavoring. Before we discuss those processes, it is worthwhile to discuss the two other processes which all coffee beans must go through to release their flavor, i.e. roasting and brewing. [Our discussion will focus on coffee, and tea will be discussed at the end of this article].

The process of roasting coffee beans changes their color from green to brown and helps develop the flavor; brewing the (ground) beans then discharges the flavor into the water. Just about all coffee sold in stores is already roasted, and a considerable amount of coffee is brewed in the factory and sold as "instant coffee". Instant coffee is produced by removing the liquid portion of the brewed coffee to create particles of solidified coffee; these particles can be diluted in water to create a cup of instant coffee. The roasting and brewing steps do not present a *Pesach* concern.

Note: Whichever type of coffee you use for *Pesach*, whether it is the type which requires special *Pesach* supervision or the type which can be used without special certification for *Pesach* (as explained in this article), one **should not** use the same jar/canister which has been used throughout the year. A new jar/canister should be purchased for use for the duration of *Pesach*. If you have put away a *Pesach*-designated jar/canister at the end of the previous *Pesach* and **have not used it** during the year, you may use it again during this year's *Pesach* season.

We now turn to the other three processes.

Decaffeination

For the many people who enjoy the taste of coffee but do not want the stimulation provided by the caffeine, companies have developed a few methods of removing caffeine from the beans before they are roasted. The common denominator between the different methods is that the beans come in contact with a (hot) liquid which draws the caffeine out of the bean.

The liquid used for decaffeination may be water, a chemical solvent (i.e. ethyl acetate, methylene chloride, carbon dioxide), or a combination of the two (i.e. water extracts the caffeine from the beans, and then the solvent is used to extract the caffeine for the water before the water is reused). In cases where the chemical solvent has direct contact with the beans, the beans are often soaked in hot water or steam to soften them before the solvent is applied.



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The *Pesach* issues with these processes are that (a) ethyl acetate may be derived from *chametz* and (b) the water used in the process is sometimes purified (hot) on a carbon bed, which is in turn purified with hot ethyl alcohol, which may be derived from *chametz*. Due to these concerns, decaffeinated coffee is only recommended on *Pesach* if it bears a reliable kosher certification, which guarantees that the decaffeination process has no traces of *chametz* or *kitnios*.

Drying

As noted, instant coffee is brewed in the factory and then the liquid coffee is “dried” into particles which the consumer reconstitutes with hot water. The roasting, brewing, and drying equipment used for coffee is generally assumed to be dedicated to processing pure coffee and therefore there is no real concern that it had been used for *chametz*.

A few years ago it was discovered that some companies add maltodextrin to the liquid coffee before they dry it, and they are not required to list that additive on the ingredient panel. Maltodextrin may be *chametz* (or *kitnios* or innocuous), and therefore the discovery that it may be in coffee made people assume that all instant coffee requires *Pesach hashgachah*. However, after more careful analysis, it became clear that this restriction could be modified somewhat, based on the two methods of drying instant coffee – spray drying and freeze-drying.

Spray-drying is a straightforward process where tiny particles of liquid coffee are sprayed into a chamber which is so hot that all of the water instantly boils out of the coffee. Spray-drying is used in many industries and is relatively cheap and simple. On the other hand, freeze-drying is an expensive and time-consuming process which slowly removes moisture from frozen coffee under vacuum using “sublimation” which allows the liquid to go from being frozen to vapor without ever being in a liquid form.

So, why would anyone spend so much money and take 24 hours to freeze-dry their coffee if they can just spray-dry it? The answer is that freeze-dried coffee has more of the original flavor and hydrates more quickly than spray-dried coffee. As relates to *Pesach* there is also another difference; maltodextrin is useful in preparing spray-dried coffee but would not be used in freeze-dried coffee. Therefore, we can clarify the restriction noted above to be that *spray-dried* instant coffee should not be used without *Pesach hashgachah*.

Is there any way to know whether a particular brand of instant coffee is spray-dried or freeze-dried? The surprising answer is that it's actually quite simple. As can be seen in the pictures, freeze-dried coffee comes out of the drier in (small) chunks while spray-dried coffee is a powder. Many companies use a second process known as agglomeration on the spray-dried coffee to get the particles to clump together (so they will look more like expensive freeze-dried chunks and so they will hydrate faster),





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but if one squeezes the agglomerated clump between their fingers the clumps will immediately return to their powdered form. As such, anyone who experiments with a few samples of coffee can easily learn to distinguish between freeze-dried instant coffee (which does not pose a *Pesach* concern) and spray-dried (which should only be used with *Pesach* certification).

Flavoring

A fair amount of flavor is lost when the coffee beans are decaffeinated, roasted, brewed, and dried. For decades, coffee companies have made special efforts to capture the escaping flavor and reintroduce it to the finished product, and in that sense, just about all coffee is “flavored”. However, this type of flavoring is assumed not to pose a *Pesach* concern, since we assume that the companies are just producing coffee and nothing else of significance.

On the other hand, in recent years, the concept of (truly) flavored coffee has become more popular, and one can purchase coffee flavored to taste like cinnamon, almonds, pumpkin, hazelnut and even Vienna Strudel! The flavor is typically added just before packaging and may be found in all varieties of coffee including regular, decaffeinated, freshly ground, and instant.

A general rule in *kashrus* is that any item which is flavored requires kosher certification whether the flavor is labeled as natural or artificial, and flavored coffee is no exception to the rule.

To illustrate this, I looked at the formulas for French Vanilla coffee flavor made by two different flavor companies. One company had a relatively simple formula which consists of just two ingredients, one of which has a carrier which may well be *chametz* but would not be an issue *b'dieved*, and the other which is almost certainly not *chametz*. The second company's formula contained 12 ingredients as well as sub-formula which contained 26 ingredients and a sub-sub-formula which contained an additional 12 ingredients! Of the 50 ingredients in this formula, I identified 9 that contribute flavor and might be fermented from wheat, a whisky byproduct, or produced from grain alcohol.

Tea for Pesach

Black, green, white, yellow, oolong, and jasmine tea are all inherently kosher for *Pesach*, but the issues of decaffeination and flavoring apply to tea in the same way that they apply to coffee. For that reason all decaffeinated tea and all flavored tea (which includes most herbal teas) should only be used on *Pesach* if they bear an appropriate *Pesach* certification.

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