

The Halachic Acceptability of Soft Matzah

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Introduction

The Torah (*Shmot* 12:18) commands all Jews, men and women alike, to eat matzah on the first night of Pesach; yet nowhere does it explain how to make this required product or how it should look. For most Jews today, matzah is a thin, hard, cracker-like bread, that is often baked months in advance of Pesach and can be stored for long periods of time. In the last few years, “soft-matzah,” which is thicker and pita-like (but without a pocket, i.e., like a laffa), has become commercially available. This availability has raised a number of questions, including whether or not modern commercial soft matzah is the same as what was used in yesteryear and whether there are halachic concerns that should encourage or discourage one from using either hard or soft matzah.

Definition of *Chametz* and the Leavening Process

There are two significant differences between what is commonly known as “Ashkenzai” and “Sephardi” matzah: the former is exceedingly thin and hard, while the latter is relatively thick and soft. Both of these characteristics, which are not necessarily inter-dependent, will be examined to see if

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they have halachic significance. Because each type of matzah has exactly the same ingredients, flour and water,¹ the explanation of how they look and feel so different must lie elsewhere. While it may seem simple, there is in reality, a complicated chemical and physical relationship between oven type, temperature, and flour-to-water ratio² on the final product.³ The process is so sensitive that every year, the flour itself requires different amounts of water to achieve the same consistency of dough. Typical Ashkenazi matzah uses a vastly drier batter than what is used to make soft matzah. In a machine factory with powerful mixers and kneaders, the ratio of water to flour is about 300 ml of water for a kg of flour, while in a hand factory it is between 400 and 480 ml for the kg. Compared to that, soft matzah uses a much wetter, looser batter. In the various (hand) soft factories we visited, the ratio was between 550-830 ml per 1 kg of flour. The *Chazon Ish*, echoing contemporary Ashkenazic practice, wrote⁴ to be careful not to use too much water and that the batter should be as hard, i.e. dry, as possible. The ratio that he used was ½ a kilo flour with half a cup (?) of water and that yielded a dry

1. There is a long history regarding the preference, indifference, or objection to adding salt to matzah, and to this day some Yemenites still add salt as an ingredient. See: *Melach b'matzot – issur, heter, oh hidur*, *Madrich Hakashrut of Badatz Yoreh De'ah*, 5772 (volume 15), pages 33-111 as well as *Yabia Omer* 9:OC:43, and *Yisrael Ta-Shma, Minhag Ashkenaz haKadmon*, 5752, ch. 12 *Matzahh M'lucha b'Pesach*, pages 249-259.

2. Keeping track of a “good” ratio is important. The Chatam Sofer wrote (*shu”t OC 127*; p. 315 5771 ed.) that he had been baking matzah for almost 30 years and used the following ratio: a *log* of flour with a little under a *revi’it* water, i.e., the water should be less than a quarter the amount of flour

3. See *Pesachim* 37a which contrasts the baking properties of dry wood to wet wood, a hot oven to a less hot oven, and a metal oven to an earthenware oven, in which all of the former prevent *chimutz* more than the latter. Regarding the baking process Rabbi Akiva stated (*Pesachim* 48b): “Not all women [bakers], not all wood, and not all ovens are alike”. The *Ohr Zarua (Hilchot Challa 226)* suggested that oven type can affect the leavening process.

4. *Kovetz Igrot*, vol 1, letter 185, *se’if* 9.

batter.⁵ Using our standard cup size (which he may not have been referring to), that means 1 kilo of flour with about 236 ml of water, a ratio not possible even with machine matzah.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 459:2) says that from the moment the flour and water touch, if it is not continuously worked, it takes the time of an average person to walk a *mil* for the dough to become *chametz*, which he says is 18 minutes.⁶ The Ramo (*ibid*) is concerned that other factors, such as heat and friction from the hands working it, can cause the process to be accelerated and he therefore says that it should be done as quickly as possible. This makes sense chemically, as heat will cause the fermentation process of the yeast to happen quicker, hence causing leavening.

Indications of what type of matzah was used in past generations

Unfortunately, in the traditional sources there are few physical descriptions of matzah or the baking process. There was simply never a need to describe it. Everyone was intimately familiar with the process because, until close to the modern era, one and all baked their own matzah. Some Jewish communities, for example Yemenites, never lost the custom of baking soft matzot. They offer a living tradition from which we can learn what (a type of) soft matzah might have been like. Yemenite women typically bake three thicker matzot, about the thickness of an adult's finger, each with multiple *kezaytim*, and from the instant of mixing the flour and water they are fully baked within 5-6 minutes.

The Moldy Bread Proof

The Gemara (*Pesachim* 7a) discusses the case of a moldy loaf found in a bread bin about which one is unsure if it is *chametz*

5. *Haggada shel Pesach: Chazon Ish*, 5764, page 29.

6. See *Biur Halacha* 259:2 for alternative times of 18, 22.5 and 24 minutes.

or matzah. To the modern ear this sounds strange; after all matzah and bread as we know them look very different. How could it be that one could not tell the difference? Clearly, in Talmudic times matzah and bread looked the same, and indeed the Torah calls matzah “*lechem oni*”, poor man’s bread (*Dvarim* 16:3), so it makes sense that it resembled bread. Modern Yemenites refer to matzah as “*lechem*” (bread) and their matzot and pita actually look quite similar, the difference only being yeast, oil, and flavorings in the bread. Indeed the *Mishnah Berurah* (446:12) explains that this case is referring to a period when the custom was to bake thick matzot that resembled *chametz* loaves. And lest one suspect that they had both kosher-for-Pesach, hard matzah and *chametz* hard matzah, as is sold nowadays,⁷ the continuation of the Gemara makes it clear as to how the matzah looked. The Talmud explained that if several “matzah days” had passed, it can be assumed that matzah was baked daily and that each day fresh matzah was thrown into the bin, causing the older one to become moldy. This only makes sense for a description of soft matzah, for no matter how much “new” fresh thin hard matzah is thrown on top of a hard dry crackery “old” matzah, it will not become very moldy within a week. However, soft, pita-like matzah will indeed become moldy that way.⁸ From this Gemara it is clear that in Bavel in the Talmudic period matzah was soft and resembled the bread of the time.^{9,10}

7. Although the *Aruch Hashulchan* (OC 446:12) does at first suggest something similar, he says that really this halacha is simply not applicable in our times.

8. We experimented, and indeed pita put into a closed container quickly became moldy. Yet a sealed plastic bag in a new box of hard machine matzah does not become moldy.

9. It seems that bread in the Talmudic period was typically flat, relatively small, and pita-like as evidenced by the numerous references to “*r’diat hapat*”, removing bread stuck on the wall of the oven. Rarely (e.g. *Pesachim* 31b and *Beitzah* 34a) the Gemara refers to “*pat porni*” – large-oven bread that required a large oven with a door.

10. In the course of discussing Yemenite matzah with Rav Shlomo

The Finger in the Dough

The Gemara (*Pesachim* 37a) states that for the mitzvah of matzah at the seder one can use “matzah *hina*”, which Rashi describes as not fully baked matzah. The Gemara then queried as to how to determine if it is sufficiently baked so that it will not become *chametz*. It responded that the matzah must be baked so that, if broken, “threads” of uncooked, still sticky dough will not pull from it when the parts are separated. When the *Shulchan Aruch* cites this case, the *Mishnah Berurah* (461:13) describes another sign of sufficient baking not mentioned in the Talmud. He says that sticking a finger into it and having it come out dry is a sign of its being sufficiently baked.¹¹ The Chazon Ish points out¹² that with the very dry batter used to make our cracker-like matzah, the finger will come out dry even if it is not baked at all. As a result, it is evident that the Gemara and *Shulchan Aruch* are addressing a reality different from the extremely dry batter used for modern hard, thin matzot.

The Isaron Matzah Proof

The *Tur* (end of OC 475) quoting his father the Rosh (early 14th century) wrote that the custom in France and Germany was to make the three matzot for the seder from one *isaron* (a tenth of an *ephah*) of flour. An *isaron*, equal to 43.2 eggs, is the amount that is obligated in *challah* and even according to

Machpud, a leading Yemenite *posek* in Israel, we asked him about when *erev* Pesach falls on Shabbat. In such a case one needs to eat *lechem mishna* before the time that bread becomes forbidden because matzah may not be eaten *erev* Pesach. However, if the bread and matzah are essentially the same, why can *chametz* bread be eaten? He explained that bread batter is mixed with oil and yeast and other ingredients and has a richer taste than matzah. What is evident though, is that the matzah and bread of the Yemenites were similar in physical appearance.

11. Even today, a cake is checked to see if it is fully baked by inserting and removing a tooth pick and checking if any batter sticks to it.

12. *Sefer Chazon Ish OC, Moed* [5733] 120:17, page 190a.

relatively small measurements it is over 1200 grams, yielding matzot of at least 400 grams a piece. This practice is mentioned by the Ramo (475:7) 250 years after the *Tur*. The *Mishnah Berurah* (475:46) observes that in the 19th century this custom had been forgotten in some places, clearly implying that in many places it was still observed. Such a practice can only be accomplished with very large matzot or thick matzot. The standard, modern thin hand matzot are each only about 70 gram. Even using the smallest *isaron* opinion, that would mean that a thin matzah made from a 1/3 of an *isaron* comes out to be the surface area of many times a modern matzah, many feet in diameter, [!] something not realistic, as it would not fit in an oven. In addition, the Ramo (454:1) says not to make the matzah too wide. The fact that 3 matzot were made from one *isaron* indicates that their matzah had to be significantly thicker than any modern matzah.

This proves that in the past they used thick matzah and most likely it was soft. If each matzah were made from a 1/3 of an *isaron*, the sources that instruct to give a *kzayit* to each member of the family from the 3 matzot from the seder plate make sense, for those matzahs would indeed suffice. Owing to the desire to give everyone a *kzayit* from the 3 seder matzot, the *Darkei Moshe* (OC 475:6) suggests that someone with many children should combine several batches of dough in order to make 3 matzot that have even more *kzaytim*. But today each matzah has barely more than one *kzayit*. Either their *kzayit* was much smaller or their matzot were much thicker. Or both. The *Chok Yaakov* (d. 1773; 475:26) writes that the middle matzah should be extra-large, such that every member of the household can get two *kzaytim* from it. He can only mean thicker than usual because diameter is limited by oven size. The Chatam Sofer gave each person a *kzayit* from a whole matzah and a *kzayit* from the broken matzah.¹³ Today's

13. *Minhagei Maran ba'al haChatam Sofer* (d. 1839); 5731, 10:17 [page 51]. This is especially interesting in light of the fact that Chatam Sofer most likely

standard hard, thin matzot have barely 2 *kzaytim* in them, certainly not two for each person, while a standard soft Yemenite matzah easily has over 10 *kzaytim* in it.¹⁴ Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Iggerot Moshe* OC 5:16:4) explains that it used to be that each matzah had much more than a *kzayit*, but for more than 100 years now we use thin matzah with barely 2 *kzaytim* in each, and he therefore recommends that each person at the seder have their own set of 3 matzahs.

The Not-Too-Thick Proof

The *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 460:5) says not to make matzah too thick. But what is too thick? Not more than a *tefach*, somewhere between 3.5 – 4 inches¹⁵ (see *Yerushalmi Pesachim* 2:4; *Pesachim* 37a).¹⁶ The Ramo (OC 460:4) was concerned about such thick matzah¹⁷ and advises to make the matzah “*r’kikin*” i.e. thin matzot, because they are slower to leaven than other bread. The lack of a specific thickness in the Ramo’s statement might lead one to believe that the Ramo is advocating paper-thin cracker-like matzot similar to what is used today. However, this is not so. The *Be’er Heitiv* (460:8) cites the *Beit*

used thin matzah, having reported (see *shu”t* OC 121) that thick matzah does not bake well and that in most Ashkenazi communities they made enactments not to make them.

14. In one soft matzah factory, a Yemenite rov showed us how they would put 4 fingers on the matzah with their thumb underneath and pull off that amount. He said, this was a *kzayit* and each person received it from the matzah of the *ba’al habayit*.

15. *Iggerot Moshe* OC 1:136.

16.. See MA 460:4 that *post-facto* even thicker can be kosher and *Machatzit Hashekel* 460:4 who seems to permit even *ab initio* if done correctly. However see *Biur Halacha* 460:pat *aveh* who takes issue with the lenient position.

17. In general, in the pre-Ramo era, it was the Ashkenazi *rishonim* who were lenient and permitted thick matzah up to a *tefach* and the Sephardim who were more concerned. See a list in Yaakov Spiegel, *Matzot avot b’Pesach*, *Yerushatenu*, 5774, pages 195-196. Note that the *Talmidei HaRosh* (*Moriah* 5771, page 11) say that the matzot should not be too thick, rather average, but the matzah *shmura* is customarily made very thin and that is proper.

*Hillel*¹⁸ that the custom was to make matzah thinner than normal bread and to make them an *etzbah* (finger) thick, i.e. thicker than even today's commercial soft matzah. The *Pri Megadim* (*Eishel Avraham* 460:4) says an *etzbah* is the width of a thumb, and that this was for the matzah that was ground to make matzah meal. Apparently, his matzah was hard and thus finger-thick matzah could not realistically be eaten so he assumes that such thick matzah was ground, while thinner matzah was made to be eaten. In addition, while *r'kikin* means thin breads, it clearly does not mean exceedingly thin as some might understand it. In fact, the Rambam, who we assume had soft matzah,¹⁹ makes reference to his own matzot as *r'kikin* (*Hilchot Chometz u'Matzah* 8:6). Even most of today's soft matzahs are thinner than an *etzbah*. It is likely, though not definitive, that most *etzbah* thick matzah was soft. If today's hard matzahs are compared to cardboard, a hard matzah that is an *etzbah* thick would be like a tree trunk!

Summary

From the data presented above plus other historical evidence, it is clear that over time there was a move away from the daily baking of matzah that was thick and resembled *chametz* bread. First, for halachic reasons there was a move to bake all matzah before Pesach. This was followed by a tendency to make drier and thinner batter, again for halachic reasons. Eventually, possibly thanks to matzah-making machines, commercial ovens, and the commercial production of matzah meal, sometime in the early 20th century, the ultra-

18. *Yoreh De'ah* 97 [page 35a in 5451 edition]; died 1690.

19. Some have suggested a proof that Rambam had soft matzah from the fact that he said (*Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah* 8:6) to put the broken piece in the whole piece. However, the Rambam is merely citing *Brachot* 39b and the meaning seems to be under and not within. Rashi actually seems to have a text that explicitly states "under" and Tosafot understands that it means under. The *Bach* (473, *sv u'mashekasuv chetzayah*) says that all the commentaries understood it as Rashi did.

thin, cracker-like matzot that are ubiquitous today become the overwhelmingly dominant matzah.

Halachic Issues With Thick Or Thin matzah

There are indeed authentic halachic concerns with both standard ultra-thin hard matzah and with commercial soft matzah. Some of these will now be presented.

Thick matzah: The *Kol Bo* (≈14th century; Siman 48) and later the *Levush* ([d.1612] OC 475:7) quote the Ra'avad as saying that for the matzot mitzvah one should make the matzah *r'kikin* and small, not thick and large, because thick and large is not *lechem oni*. While they were concerned that thick, large matzah is not *lechem oni* this is likely not a concern with today's soft matzah which is not nearly as thick as matzah was centuries ago.

With the way that soft matzah is made today, there is a very real concern of *chametz*. We have visited many matzah factories and in some of the soft matzah bakeries we saw what appears to us to be not fully baked dough, as opposed to fully-baked soft bread. The *Shulchan Aruch Harav* (460:10) says that thick matzot are kosher – in theory. But one must inspect them carefully to ascertain that they are truly baked through the entire thickness. His admonition should be taken very seriously. Note that soft matzah is often made much faster than hard matzah. Recently, a Yemenite woman who is in Israel only four years showed us how she made the matzah in Yemen. There is no rolling or *reddling*; it is simply kneaded and put in to the oven. From start to finish it was under 5 minutes. Thus, in that regard soft matzah has less of a *chametz* concern than hard matzah.

Concern relates to the degree to which the interior of the matzah is baked. It is disconcerting that the modern soft matzot are baked mimicking the process used for Ashkenazi matzot during the last 150 years. However, the ovens of soft matzah were different years ago, and certainly not as hot as

modern matzah ovens, where a hand matzah is often baked within 30 seconds. Such hot furnaces will quickly heat the outside of the thick matzah, making it look well baked but not yet baking the inside. Removing it from the oven will yield a soft matzah looking well-done outside, yet possibly *chametz* on the inside. This is not a new concern – the Chatam Sofer reported (*Shu"t* OC 121) that thick matzah does not bake well. Soft is not what should be looked for, rather fully baked is required.

Issues With Hard Thin Matzah

Bracha: The assumption is that matzah is the normal bread for Pesach and therefore, like all bread, should require the *bracha* of “*hamotzi*”. The Gemara (*Brachot* 41-42) discusses the rules of *Pat Haba’a Bekisnin* – a type of pseudo-bread (*Shulchan Aruch* OC 168:6) that if eaten in small quantities gets a blessing of *mezonot*. There is a major three-way *machloket* (conflict) of how to define *Pat Haba’a Bekisnin*, with one opinion being that it means thin, hard crackers. This would seem to exactly describe modern matzah. Based on this, many authorities ruled that one says *mezonot* on hard matzah. The *Shiurei Knesset Hagdola* (OC 158, *Hagahot Beit Yosef* 1) says that matzah gets *hamotzi* because it is not so hard, implying that his matzah was neither soft like bread nor hard like crackers and therefore he ruled to say *hamotzi*. It seems that he would rule to say *mezonot* on modern, very hard matzah. Rav Ovadia Yosef (*Yechave Da’at* 3:12) cites a laundry list of similar-minded authorities, and that is standard practice among most Sephardim. Nonetheless, there are significant Ashkenazi authorities (e.g. *Minchat Yitzchak* 1:71 and *Tzitz Eliezar* 11:19) who labor to defend the Ashkenazi practice of saying *hamotzi*. The primary explanation for why it receives *hamotzi* is that, when eaten, it forms the basis of the meal (*kviat seudah*), implying that it is not inherently “real bread”. An indication of this is that on real bread there is no minimum *shiur* (amount); even the smallest piece gets *hamotzi* (*Shulchan Aruch* OC

168:10; *MB* 168:47, 60). However small pieces of matzah, i.e. matzah crackers, even if they are identical to matzah, get the blessing *mezonot* because they are eaten as a snack. This is a strong argument against modern matzah being considered “*lechem*”, and raises a concern about using it for the seder.

In addition, the *Mishnah Berurah* (168:37) writes that for very, very thin (*dak min ha’dak*) crackers that are baked (see *Sha’ar haTziyun* 168:36) by putting the batter between two metal plates and baking instantly, the *bracha* is *mezonot* even if one makes a meal out of it. These crackers are halachically less significant as bread than *Pat Haba’a Bekisnin*. Rav Moshe Sternbuch (*Tshuvot v’Hanhagot* 3:73) raises the possibility that hard machine matzah falls within that category and therefore should not be *hamotzi* and not be acceptable for the mitzvah (see Rambam, *Hilhot Chametz u’Matzah* 6:7). He justifies using them because they are not baked instantly and are thus *dak* (thin) and not *dak min ha’dak* (ultra-thin). He concludes that they may be *Pat Haba’a Bekisnin* and one who wants to be *machmir* (strict) should only eat them as part of a bread meal. It seems to us that while machine matzah does not bake instantly, there are hand matzah factories that take pride in the paper-thinness of their matzah and the fact that the oven is so hot that the matzah bakes in mere seconds. According to Rav Sternbuch, those matzot may indeed be truly problematic.

Gebrocht – there are two reasons suggested for the *chumrah* (stringency) of *Gebrocht*.²⁰ The *Sha’arei Tshuva* (460:2), *Machatzit Hashekel* (458:1), and *Mishnah Berurah* (458) explain that the concern is for unkneced dough within the matzah, and that the unbaked flour will not even be roasted. As the *Mishnah Berurah* explains, this is less of a concern nowadays with ultra-

20. There is actually a third reason not related to a concern of *chametz* with what is being eaten. Rather it is a regulation instituted (*gzairah*) lest people get confused and bake with real flour instead of matzah meal (see *Tur* OC 463; *Knesset Hagdola* 461; Rav Shlomo Kluger in *Chochmat Shlomo* 463; Rav Yosef Engel, *Gilyonei HaShas* to *Pesachim* 40b).

thin matzah. The *Shulchan Aruch Harav* was concerned for flour on the surface of the matzah, and he says this is a bigger concern with the modern dry batter. It is clear that the concerns relate to the reality of the situation,²¹ and as opposed to *Sha'arei Tshuva*, *Shulchan Aruch Harav* was concerned more with the very dry matzah, which can be a real issue with modern matzah. With very wet batter there is no concern of flour not being mixed with water and indeed no one mentions that concern until the last several hundred years.

Old matzah – Hard matzah affords the ability to bake well in advance, which means that many people are eating matzah for the mitzvah that is older than 30 days. Matzah older than 30 days is debated in the Yerushalmi (*Pesachim* 2:4; see Gra OC 458). The *Beit Yosef* (OC 458) discusses this Yerushalmi text, and the *Mishnah Berurah* (458:1) observes that the consensus is that “old” matzah, if made for Pesach, is acceptable. Nonetheless, the *Bach* rules otherwise and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach²² made sure that all matzah he used for the mitzvah was baked within 30 days of Pesach. Interestingly, the innovation that has permitted the recent commercialization of soft matzah is the ability to freeze it. Thus, although it is less than that for hard matzah, a certain percentage of soft matzah is also baked more than 30 days before Pesach.

In order to fulfill the mitzvah, the matzah must be defined as

21. *Iggerot Moshe* (OC 3:64) says that regarding modern, ultra-thin matzahs there would seem to be no concern. Nonetheless, he says, if there is a *minhag* (tradition) to prohibit, then *gebrochot* is forbidden even if there is only a small concern. On the other hand, it would seem that with machine matzah there is no *chashash* (concern) and no *minhag*.

Rav Shmuel Auerbach related (*Orach David*, Jerusalem, 5771, page 106) that his father, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, once asked the well-known Yerushalayim *tzaddik* (and son-in-law of Rav Akiva Yosef Shlesinger) Rav David Baharan what *chumrot* are appropriate for Pesach and he responded to eat machine matzah and to eat *gebrocht* because of *oneg yom tov*, the joy of the holicay. (The Chacham Zvi is similarly quoted (see end *Sha'arei Tshuva* 460:10) that avoiding *gebrocht* is a *chumra* that impinges on *simchat yom tov*).

22. *Halichot Shlomo*, ch.7 note 54 [page 159].

"lechem" (see Rashbam to *Pesachim* 119b, sv *sufganim*). Among the types of matzah that the Gemara says (*Pesachim* 119b) is **not** acceptable for the mitzvah because it is not *lechem iskreetan*, which Rashi defines (*Pesachim* 37a sv *iskreetan*) as matzah made from very thin dough. Modern hard matzah might fall into this category.

Acceptability Of Soft matzah For Ashkenazim

Pre-modern discussions: The *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 486) explains the measure of a *kzayit*. In commenting on or paraphrasing that section, the *Mishnah Berurah* 486:3 (by the "Chafetz Chayim", d. 1933) the *Shulchan Aruch Harav* 486:2 (by Rav Shneur Zalman of Liady, d. 1812) and the *Aruch Hashulchan* 486:2 (by Rav Yechezkel Michel Epstein, d. 1908) all discuss the minimum size requirements in order to fulfill the mitzvot of matzah and *marror*. They all note that the measurement does not include air gaps that are found in the folded leaves of the vegetable used as *marror*. Furthermore, they state, air pockets in the matzah are also not included. They then all make a statement that is based on a ruling of the *Machatzit Hashekel* that is based on a Mishnah in *Uktzin* (2:8). They state that matzah that is "soft and spongy" can be evaluated as is and the air pockets need not be excluded.

There is little question that all three of these giants of Ashkenazi halacha ate thin hard matzah and in all likelihood never saw soft matzah. Yet all three discuss the halacha of soft, spongy matzah even though it is not mentioned explicitly in the *Shulchan Aruch* or the *Machatzit Hashekel*. And most importantly, all three: the *Mishnah Berurah*, the *Aruch HaShulchan* and the *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, mention soft, spongy matzah without giving any value judgment. They simply state the halacha regarding the way to measure the *shiur* without any qualifications regarding its appropriateness. They seem to accept the possibility that a good, eastern European Ashkenazi Jew might indeed use such matzah.

Modern Discussions

There are those who suggest that it is better if an Ashkenazi does not eat soft matzah. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach²³ said that although one may, according to the letter of the law, make thick matzah, today the custom is to make all matzah very thin, and an Ashkenazi should not eat matzah thicker than what is today customary. He does not discuss hard vs. soft.

Rav Asher Weiss²⁴ writes that the basic halacha is that soft matzah is permissible, but he is concerned that we are not experts in making them soft and thick and guarding against *chimutz*; there is therefore a concern about *chametz*.²⁵ He suggests that possibly that concern led to Ashkenazi matzot being so thin and hard. Furthermore, he says that he is wary of innovation and such things fall under the rubric of “do not forsake the Torah of your mother” (*Mishlei* 1:8), and certainly on Pesach it is worthwhile to accept stringencies.

Rav Herschel Schachter disagrees and both in a personal conversation and in a letter (dated Purim Kattan 5771) stated that eating spongy matzah is certainly permitted for Ashkenazim and is not considered changing a *minhag*. He compares it to changing the color of the *perochet*; color is obviously not an essential part of the *minhag* and can certainly be changed. He explains that when the Ramo wrote (OC 460:4) to make them thin he did not mean hard, but he meant not thick as a *tefach* or an *etzbah*. But certainly it is not necessary to make it like a cracker.²⁶ An argument in line with what Rav

23. *Halichot Shlomo* chap. 9 note *peh*, page 281; *Mikraei Kodesh* [Harari], *Halichot Leil Ha-seder*, page 286.

24. *Hagadah Minchat Asher*, 5764, *siman* 15, page 322.

25. Indeed the *Sha'arei Tshuva* 460:10 says that it is because of the extra care needed in making thick, soft matzah that there is a real concern for unkneced portions.

26. The Munkatcher Rebbe (*Nimukei OC* 394:2) and Rav Moshe Sternbuch (*Hagadah Moadim U'zmanim* (5747) p. 97, both note the matzahs in the time of the Ramo were much thicker than what is used today.

Shechter describes was raised during the "machine matzah wars."²⁷ The anti-machine camp in *Modaah L'bet Yisrael* written by Rav Shlomo Kluger in 1848 cited the fact that machine matzot are square as a reason to forbid them. It seems that the custom of round matzot was the ancient one according to him and changing it was not acceptable. In response, Rav Yosef Shaul Natanson in the *Bitul Modaah* printed in 1849 mocked them, saying that changing the shape is in no way a significant issue. Similarly, Rav Schachter argues, the hardness of the matzah is not an essential component.

Rav Sternbuch (*Tshuvot v'Hanhagot* 5:131:4) explains that we are no longer expert at recognizing *chimutz* and therefore matzah should be very thin with a thick (dry ?) batter, and that he will not give *hashgacha* to thick matzah.

The Chazon Ish several times permitted matzah in his "bakery" that was intended to be very dry and hard and yet was soft on the inside (*Haggadah shel Pesach: Chazon Ish*, 5764, page 31). While many might consider this a real issue of *chametz* he apparently held it was not *chametz*, and furthermore that there was no problem with a soft matzah.

Conclusions

Soft matzah has become more widely available in recent years due to several factors. First is the ability to mass produce them in a way that our forefathers never imagined, as well as the ability to freeze them so that they stay soft until needed. Real soft matzah quickly becomes stale and hardens and that is why those who used them in the past baked them daily. The technical innovations, coupled with a renewed sense of Sefardi pride and a desire to practice the customs of their ancestors, have resulted in the commercialization of soft matzah that is

27. On this interesting halachic-historical controversy see: Ari Y. Greenspan and Ari Z. Zivotofsky, "Hand or Machine: Two Roads to Fulfilling the Mitzvah of Matzah", *Jewish Observer*, April 2004, pages 20-31.

now widely available in Israel and the US. They are frozen until the seder, at which point they are warmed and then kept covered so that the moisture and softness remain.

In the Talmudic period matzah was thicker and softer and resembled standard bread baked by being smacked on to the side wall of an oven and removing it after it was fully baked but before it fell off to be burned in the coals below. This skill is termed by the Gemara *rediat hapat*. All of this is impossible with hard matzah. In the time of the *rishonim* (early medieval rabbis), matzah got thinner and harder, and this process continued until the modern era, when matzah is now ultra thin and very hard. The process was driven by two halachic stringencies: the desire to bake everything before Peach to take advantage of *bitul*^{28, 29} and the concern that with thick matzah it is more difficult to prevent *chimutz*. This historical process seems to have occurred in both Ashkenazi and Sephardi lands, with the single, significant exception being Yemen, where soft matzah continued to be baked daily until today. The development of the modern thin, hard matzah thus seems to have been driven by halachic concerns rather than practical issues or a "*minhag*" to have a particular type of matzah. The primary hesitation to use soft matzah today would therefore seem to be practical – do the bakers have the expertise needed to produce fully baked, non-*chametzdik* matzah? Those who today bake and supervise the commercial soft matzah, overwhelmingly Yemenites, maintain that they are indeed expert and that when done properly the soft matzah is preferable to the thin, hard matzah. Modern *poskim* have addressed this topic and reached varied conclusions – we have come only to present the issues involved.

28. There might have also been a sociologic factor due to the huge increase of population centers and immigration from the small villages and the impossibility of baking such large amounts daily to supply enough matzah.

29. Despite this concern, many people continued to bake matzah on *erev* Pesach after *chatzot*(mid-day).