



CHICAGO RABBINICAL CURRENTS

May 2025

Volume II Issue 4

אייר תשפ"ה

DOES Maple Syrup NEED HASHGACHA?

By Rabbi Yochanan Schnall

Rabbi Yochanan Schnall is a Rabbinic Coordinator specializing in the Spice, Condiment, and Transportation Industries.

One of the many *Niflaos Haborei* occurs inside of trees every year in the late winter. When nighttime temperatures stay below freezing but thaw during the day, it causes the liquid energy in trees known as sap to be vacuumed up from tree roots into its branches and stems. In many northern regions of North America, this is a particular reason for celebration as it means that it is time to begin harvesting sap from sugar maple trees and making the cherished maple syrup. One might wonder: does such a natural product with minimal processing require kosher certification? Let's explore the step-by-step process of making maple syrup from a kashrus perspective.

STEP 1: Tapping and Collecting Sap

During the winter, a small hole or two is drilled into each maple tree trunk and slender tubes known as taps are inserted. An elaborate network of tubing, hoses, and pipes is then set up to connect the taps to centrally located collection tanks. When spring arrives and sap begins to flow, it is intercepted by the taps and funneled into these tanks.¹

STEP 2: Concentration and Boiling

Sap consists of mostly water, with only about 2-3% sugar content and needs a lot of concentrating to be transformed into a finished product. In fact, approximately 40 gallons of sap produce just one gallon of syrup!

To eliminate large amounts of excess water and speed up the process, many advanced operators use a filtering system known as "reverse osmosis" as soon as the sap is collected. But in order to reach the target concentration and especially to give it its unique taste, the sap must be heated. This is done in a specialized machine called an evaporator where all excess water evaporates as steam, and sugars and amino acids react in what's called the Maillard reaction. (This is the same browning process that gives grilled meat, toast, and roasted coffee their rich flavor.)

One challenge during syrup production is the foam that develops on the surface as the water evaporates. This foam could cause the syrup to burn and develop undesirable flavors, as well as overflow and become a safety hazard. To prevent this from happening, an extremely small amount of an oil-based liquid called "defoamer" is added to the sap.

(continued on page 2)

1. On a side note, the taps will be removed before the summer in order to prevent permanent scarring that reduces sap production. While smaller hobbyists have anywhere from a dozen to several hundred trees, larger farms can easily collect from hundreds of thousands of them. This means that potentially millions of taps need to be installed and removed every single year. Now you have a glimpse into why maple syrup is so expensive!

PERSONAL BELIEFS and the CONVERSION PROCESS



by Rabbi Aaron Kraft

Rabbi Aaron Kraft is a cRc Dayan Kavua and serves as Rosh Bais Midrash at Bais Chaim Dovid.

A recent article in *Israel Hayom* reported that many rabbis throughout the United States grapple with the matter of converting individuals who display intense anti-Israel sentiment and still pursue joining our faith. Some of these individuals have even participated in anti-Israel demonstrations. Our *beis din* has also encountered this phenomenon on a limited scale. For some, especially those introduced to Judaism on college campuses through *kiruv* organizations or Chabad, these sentiments likely stem from exposure to liberal campus culture and pressure to view Gazans as victims and oppressed. However, in some cases these beliefs may reflect deeper ideologies and orientations. Can *batei din* accept such individuals for conversion? What halakhic considerations should play a role in assessing this question?

The technical requirements for *gerus* listed in the Gemara¹ include circumcision (for males), immersion in a *mikvah* and acceptance of all *mitzvos*. Does the Torah mandate beliefs or perspectives as they relate to the Jewish people as a nation that potential converts must understand and share?

The Gemara (*Yevamos* 47a) describes how the *beis din* responds to an individual seeking conversion to Judaism:

"When a potential convert comes to convert, say to him: What did you see that motivated you to come to convert? Don't you know that the Jewish people at the present time are anguished, suppressed, despised, and harassed, and hardships are frequently visited upon them?"²

Most simply, this passage instructs the *beis din* to make a disclaimer of sorts – warn the potential convert

(continued on page 3)

1. *Krisus* 9a and *Bechoros* 30b, *Shulchan Aruch* (YD 268) 2. Translation adapted from Sefaria.com

DOES Maple Syrup NEED HASHGACHA?

(continued from cover)

Step 3: Filtration and Finishing

After boiling, the syrup is filtered to remove impurities such as “sugar sand,” which can affect its texture and appearance. Filtration methods include using diatomaceous earth or specialized filters made from synthetic materials. The syrup is then graded based on its color and flavor and packed in industrial-sized 55-gallon stainless steel drums.

Step 4: Bottling and Packaging

It is worthwhile to note that up until this stage, production typically takes place at co-op and manufacturing facilities that are dedicated solely to maple syrup. At this point however, a huge segment of the market simply purchases drums of syrup to repack them into consumer sized containers with their company logo and branding.

Repacking the syrup is done at a bottling facility where it is pumped out of the drums and filled into small jars or bottles. Syrup thickens up when it's cold (especially if it's been stored for a while), and it is usually heated to around 180–190°F to flow smoothly and more efficiently. As we will see, it is important to note that this process, also known as “hot-filling,” is actually pretty standard in the food industry. It is primarily used to sterilize liquid foods which in turn, sterilize the packaging while it is being filled. Sterilization prevents any potential mold or bacteria from developing while the food remains on the shelf in the unopened container.

Kashrus Concerns

Now that we have a good understanding of how maple syrup is made, let's analyze its status from a kosher perspective. As a rule, the three areas of kashrus concern are: **Process**, **Raw Materials**, and **Equipment**. Does the food processing require any additional *halachos* such as *Bishul Yisroel* or *Pas Yisroel*? Do any of the raw ingredients² require extra scrutiny to ensure

that they are kosher? What about the equipment used for processing, is there concern that it has become non-kosher due to shared production with other foods? Let us see which, if any, of these present an issue with maple syrup.

Process

As a cooked item, maple syrup could theoretically be required to be *Bishul Yisroel*. The halacha is however, that *Bishul Yisroel* is only required for foods that meet both of the following two conditions: 1. It is only commonly eaten after it is cooked, but not in its raw state. 2. It is *oleh al shulchan melachim* – served at “a king's table.” A more contemporary reference to this second condition would be if it is served at a wedding, or a state dinner.

In both of these regards, maple syrup does not require *Bishul Yisroel*. It is actually marketed for consumption in its raw maple sap form. In addition, while it may be found *al shulchan melachim* as a condiment to flavor other foods, it is never served as a stand-alone dish.

Raw Materials

The only components in maple syrup are maple sap, which naturally doesn't need a *hashgacha*, and defoamer. While in the past, defoamer was whatever animal fat was on-hands, today, all commercial farms use defoamers that are kosher. (Diatomaceous earth which is used for filtering is not a kosher sensitive ingredient either.)

Equipment

As a very general rule, equipment presents a kashrus concern only when it involves heat and can potentially be shared with non-kosher production. Let us see which of the maple syrup steps involve heat, and whether there is concern that the equipment could potentially be used with non-kosher.

Sap collection doesn't involve heat. Reverse osmosis is simply pressurizing and forcing sap

through microfilters so that the excess water passes and is removed, leaving behind the thicker liquid sugars. This process does not utilize heat either.

The only steps that involve heat are the evaporation and bottling. Commercial evaporators used for maple syrup are specialized pieces of equipment and would not be useful in any other type of food manufacturing. This leaves us with one last remaining step: bottling.

As mentioned above, the process of hot-filling into bottles is not unique to maple syrup. As a result, even if the maple syrup is bottled at the actual maple syrup factory, the factory could easily accept a side job to bottle another product. In fact, a few years ago our *mashgiach* visited a dedicated maple syrup company. He deliberately scheduled this visit for the end of February, which is the slowest time of year for bottling maple syrup (as supplies dwindle and the focus is turned to the next year's harvest). Sure enough, the facility was bottling “apple pie syrup” as a favor for the owner's friend. The syrup had been concocted and cooked in the neighbor's *treif* restaurant and was obviously not kosher!

But the truth is that the vast majority of food production today takes place at facilities that are not dedicated to any specific company or product. These facilities, known as “co-packers,” often have an array of versatile equipment that is used to process and package whatever their commercial clients want. Liquid co-packers can easily go from sauces to gravies to soups in a single day! It is facilities like these where a *hashgacha* must be especially vigilant to ensure that equipment used for kosher production is either first *kashered*, or simply dedicated for exclusive kosher use.

Indeed, while maple syrup contains only kosher ingredients and is clearly a very simple product, it still requires certification. This is due to concerns that it was produced on shared equipment with hot, non-kosher foods.

2. In the food manufacturing industry, the term “Ingredients” can often just refer to the items declared on the product label. In contrast, the term “Raw Materials” includes all materials that are used to make the product.



◀ A tap in a maple tree



◀ Plastic tubing system used to collect maple sap



◀ A bottling facility

PERSONAL BELIEFS *and the* CONVERSION PROCESS

(continued from cover)

that the Jewish people are targeted, persecuted, oppressed and afflicted. If the candidate still expresses interest despite the challenges that can accompany conversion, then the *beis din* begins the process of teaching the *mitzvos* and preparing the individual for conversion.

Rav Aaron Lichtenstein *zt"l*³ observed that the Rambam understood this Gemara differently. When the Rambam⁴ codifies this teaching, he adds an introductory line not found in the Gemara. Before instructing the *beis din* to inform the candidate that the Jewish people face persecution he says, **"When one of the gentiles comes to convert, after inspecting his background if an ulterior motive for conversion is not found, we ask him: "Why did you choose to convert? Don't you know that in the present era, the Jews are afflicted, crushed, subjugated, strained, and suffering comes upon them?"**⁵

Why does the Rambam add to the Talmudic passage and state that the *beis din* first investigates the potential convert and only then informs him that the Jewish people are targeted and endure suffering? If the point of informing the candidate of anti-Semitic persecution was simply a disclaimer, that should be the first thing mentioned before the *dayanim* exert any effort to investigate the legitimacy of the candidate. Rav Lichtenstein therefore submits that the Rambam did not understand this line of questioning as a mere disclaimer. Instead, the Rambam viewed this question as the first question posed to the potential convert *as part of the process* of conversion itself. In other words, if a person is not prepared or is unable to identify with the plight and suffering of the Jewish people, they lack in their qualification for conversion. Even if someone is fully committed to punctilious observance of all the *mitzvos* and excels in his Torah study, if he does not connect to the Jewish people, share in the pain and the joy of our nation, then he is deficient in his candidacy. Rav Lichtenstein connects this to the Rambam's ruling in *Hilkhos Teshuvah* (3:11),

"A person who separates himself from the congregation of Israel and does not fulfill *mitzvot* together with them, **does not take part in their hardships, or join in their [communal] fasts, but rather goes on his own individual path as if he is from another nation, does not have a portion in the World to Come."**

This *halakha* highlights that an integral aspect of Jewish existence and identity emanates from identifying with *Am Yisrael*.

Rabbi Elchanan Poupko, in a forthcoming *Techumin* article, quotes an idea developed by Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik that I believe provides context to and further elucidates Rav Lichtenstein's assertion. Rav Soloveitchik identifies two covenants between Hashem and the Jewish people – in Hebrew, the *Bris Goral* and the *Bris Yi'ud* or in English, the Covenant of Fate and the Covenant of Destiny. The Covenant of Destiny, established at Har Sinai, binds the Jewish people to Hashem, charging us to live meaningful lives "replete with

movement, ascent, striving and attaining" (*Fate and Destiny*, 54).

The Covenant of Fate expresses an element of Jewish existence characterized by duress and being an object acted upon where: "The individual, against his will, is subjected and subjugated to the national, fate-laden reality. He cannot evade this reality and become assimilated into some other, different reality" (*Fate and Destiny*, 43). This *bris* represents the separateness of the Jewish nation and the oppression we have endured throughout history simply because we are Jewish, beginning with slavery in Egypt where this covenant was forged, through the Holocaust and October 7th. It demands that we feel part of a shared experience and impacted by the events that influence and affect our brothers and sisters. Rav Soloveitchik expresses this concept eloquently in his aforementioned work,

"The feeling of sympathy is a fundamental feature of the consciousness of the unifying fate of the Jewish people. The suffering of one part of the people affects the people as a whole... When a person has a sick relative, he cannot pray for him alone, but has to pray for all the sick of Israel. If one enters into a mourner's home to comfort him and to wipe away a tear from his grieving face, one directs one's words of comfort to all who mourn for Zion and Jerusalem. The slightest disturbance in the condition of a single individual or group ought to grieve all of the various segments of the people in all of their dispersions. It is both forbidden and impossible for the "I" to isolate himself from his fellow and not share in his suffering. If the premise of shared historical circumstances is correct, then the experience of shared suffering is the direct conclusion of that premise" (*Fate and Destiny*, 47).

Having seen the importance of identifying with the Jewish people specifically as part of the *gerus* process, an individual who participates in anti-Israel protests as result of Operation Iron Swords or who champions causes sympathizing with the population in Gaza as opposed to supporting the massacred Jewish victims and suffering Jewish hostages, cannot be accepted as a *gerus* candidate. Of course, the exact assessment and application of these values, unlike the more objective criteria surrounding mitzvah observance, may differ depending on the *beis din* administering the *gerus* process. Ultimately, however, the *beis din* has the right to decide how heavily to weigh any given value and whether a candidate has adequately satisfied the requisite standard (see *Shach*, YD 268:23). It certainly stands to reason that a candidate who remains callous to the suffering of our people and sympathetic to the plight of our enemies has not satisfied this standard.

But on what authority can the *beis din* make such determinations given the degree of ambiguity involved (particularly with respect to this issue in light of the fact

(continued on page 4)

PERSONAL BELIEFS and the CONVERSION PROCESS

(continued from page 3)

that different segments of the Orthodox Jewish population relate to these values differently especially when it comes to Operation Iron Swords)? This hinges on the broader *halakhic* question – how expansive of a role does *beis din* play in the *gerus* process? In general, the *beis din* analyzes facts on the ground and then renders a *halakhic* determination on the issue at hand based on their conclusions. Is this also their role in the *gerus* process? Do they merely oversee the process, make sure all criteria are met, all steps completed, and, so to speak, *pasken* that the *gerus* is complete, but essentially the *gerus* happens automatically? Or does the *beis din* play a more active role, perhaps even representing the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence (according to some formulations),⁶ and create or effectuate the *gerus*?

In addressing this point, Rav Hershel Schachter⁷ notes two puzzling observations. First, the Gemara⁸ learns the *halakhos* of *gerus* from *ma'amad Har Sinai* where the entire nation accepted the Torah and “converted” to Judaism. There was no *beis din* present at *ma'amad Har Sinai*. Why then do we require a *beis din* for *gerus*? Second, the defining characteristic of *ma'amad Har Sinai* was the covenant forged between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*. As such, the presence of the *Shechinah* itself played a crucial role in the national conversion that transpired at *Har Sinai*. How then can all future conversions take effect without the presence of the *Shechinah*? Rav Schachter posits that the questions essentially answer each other. A covenant requires two present and participating parties to commit to one another. At *ma'amad Har Sinai*, the Jewish nation forged a *bris* with Hashem who was *shoreh* His *Shechinah* (rested the Divine Presence) in order to participate. There was therefore no need for a *beis din*, because Hashem Himself was present. However, in all future generations when an individual converts, the *beis din* must represent the *Shechinah*⁹ as the second party in that covenant construction. In this sense, the *beis din* does not merely oversee the *gerus* or declare that all boxes were checked. They produce and create the

gerus.

The ramifications of this perspective are numerous and far-reaching.¹⁰ As one salient illustration, consider the following comment by Rav Yechezkel Landau in his *Dagul Mervavah* (YD 268:6). The Gemara (*Yevamos* 78a) indicates that if a gentile woman immerses in the *mikvah* to convert while pregnant, the immersion is also effective for the fetus in her womb.¹¹ Rav Landau considers limiting this ruling to a case where the *beis din* judges *know* that the female gentile who is converting is pregnant. After all, how can the active participants representing one of the parties in the agreement (i.e. the *Shechinah*) not know with whom they are transacting?¹²

The more *beis din* plays an active role representing the *Shechinah* in creating and effectuating the *gerus*, the greater their license and authority to require candidates to adhere to values and standards that may be more subjective in nature. As such, it is critical that *gerus* candidates understand what it means to be a part of the Jewish nation – to be acutely attuned to and personally concerned about the hardship experienced by our fellow brothers and sisters throughout history as well as currently. This does not necessarily require a candidate to adopt specific positions on related issues such as the religious value of the State of Israel or army service. However, to inculcate a sense of “*imo anochi bitzarah*,” “I am with him in his distress” (*Tehilim* 91:15), comprises a basic element of what it means to be or to become Jewish.

As we find ourselves between *Pesach*, which corresponds to the Covenant of Fate, and *Shavuot*, which celebrates the Covenant of Destiny, we recall the words of the esteemed convert, *Ruth* (1:16): “*Ameich ami v'Elokayich Elokai*,” “Your people are my people and your G-d is my G-d.” We have dual covenants with the *Ribbono Shel Olam* that bind us together as a people and that destine us to achieve G-dliness. Both elements are critical parts of our shared history and both are integral to the fulfillment of our destiny.

6. See Rav Hershel Schachter in *Ginas Egoz* (35:5) citing the *Yeshuos Yisrael* (CM 3). 7. Ibid. 8. *Krisus* ibid. 9. See Rav Soloveitchik in *Al Hateshuva*, (pg. 137) where he suggests that the need for the *beis din* in *gerus* is to represent the *Shechinah* in the forging of a covenant between Hashem and the convert based on the comment in *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 7a) that the *beis din* brings the *Shechinah* into the world based on the *pasuk* “*Elokim nitzav b'adas Kel bikerev Elokim yishpot*,” (*Tehilim* 82:1) Also see the formulation of the *Beis Haleivi* (*Parshas Lech Lecha d.h. B'medrash Rabah*) and *Chavos Binyamin* (*siman* 67). 10. See *Ginas Egoz* (35:4 footnote 7 and 35:5) and *Shut Minchas Asher* (1:49) for additional ramifications of this principle. 11. If the fetus is male, the *poskim* debate whether his *bris milah* post-partum is a regular *bris* or a *bris* for the sake of *gerus*. See *Ramban* (*Yevamos* 47b), *Ra'ah* (quoted by the *Nemukei Yosef*, *Yevamos* 16a *bidapei haRif*), *Rama* (YD 268:1, *Shach* (YD 268:2) and *Shut Binyan Tzion* (22). 12. See *Ginas Egoz* ibid. and Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky's *Reishis Koach* (pgs. 33-36) for further discussion of this issue.

Chicago Rabbinical Currents is a monthly community newsletter of the Chicago Rabbinical Council (cRc), featuring articles by the staff of the cRc Beth Din and of cRc Kosher.

We value proactive community engagement, education and partnership, and Chicago Rabbinical Currents articles address aspects of practical halacha that are applicable to all.

Rabbi Joel Gutstein, President

CHICAGO RABBINICAL CURRENTS EDITORIAL COMMITTEE Rabbi Joel Gutstein | Rabbi Meir Moscowitz | Rabbi Eliyahu Rapoport | Mrs. Gavriella Bachrach

Rabbi Yona Reiss, Av Beth Din

Rabbi Avrohom Mordechai Abramson, Menahel

DAYANIM KEVUIM Rabbi Daniel Raccach | Rabbi Aaron Kraft | Rabbi Yisroel Langer

Rabbi Sholem Fishbane,

Kashruth Administrator

RABBINIC COORDINATORS

Rabbi Dovid Cohen | Rabbi Yaakov Eisenbach | Rabbi Shmuel Katz | Rabbi Yosef Landa | Rabbi Moshe Moscowitz | Rabbi Akiva Niehaus | Rabbi Yochanan Schnall | Rabbi Elozor Willner

Rabbi Levi Mostofsky,

Executive Director



2701 W. Howard Street
Chicago, IL 60645

Questions? Comments? Feedback?

773.250.5499

office@crcweb.org

www.crcweb.org

© 2025 Copyright. All rights reserved.

Chicago Rabbinical Council