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27 Feb, 2022
26 Adar I, 5782

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Dear Rabbi Regev

You ask; "What Halachic instructions do the Orthodox Rabbis of the United States Armed Forces give to fully observant Jews regarding observance of kashrut for Pesach in their semi-private living quarters? Specifically, is their observance of kashrut for Pesach impinged if roommates have and even consume non-kosher and non-kosher for Pesach foodstuffs in the same bedroom or office on military bases?"

I was the most senior Jewish Chaplain in the United States Armed forces from 2003-2007 and later served as the Director of the Jewish Welfare Board 2007-2016. In that role I represented the American Jewish community in certifying military and Federal hospital rabbis, Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. I also represented the Aguda on matters of kashrut certification in the military. On Orthodox practice, norms and Halacha I always relied on the most senior Orthodox military rabbis, musmachim of the most widely respected Orthodox or Chabad Yeshivot, and currently or previously authorized by the American Orthodox Jewish Community to set policy for Rabbis serving in the US Armed Forces and provide Halachic instruction to Jewish personnel. All attained at least the rank of Colonel and each served a minimum of thirty years. On your question I again consulted each to ensure I answer in accord with Orthodox practice and norms. Their guidance confirmed in detail my experience of forty six (46) years.

All responded that the observant service member is responsible for the total elimination of the observant service member's chametz and the elimination of chametz and bi'ur chametz from the observant service member's areas/authority (rashut) such as a private wall cabinet or footlocker. All held that the observant Jew was not responsible for the roommate's food, nor did the roommate's food (chametz and even treif) affect the kashrut of the observant Jew's food. This was true even if the roommate is Jewish and "even if the nonobservant service member's food is stored under the observant Jew's bed" and where no private storage is available, the properly wrapped kosher food secured in a common storage area. This ruling even applied to areas under Jewish control such as a Jewish Chapel dining facility where the Jewish community joins for seder. In that case, if an observant personnel join in an otherwise proper seder (proper haggada, led by knowledgeable individual etc) but believe the food was not adequately supervised, the observant Jewish personnel, can request and is provided, at military expense, separate and double wrapped Aguda certified kosher for pesach food to consume at the common table outside the observant service member's authority.

All agreed the observant service member is responsible only for the observant service member's personal food and space and has no claim on others nor does the behavior or food of others diminish the observant personal's pesach observance. All those consulted began and ended with the admonition that respectful relations amongst service member was of high concern and as military officers worked to ensure everyone's courteous deportment. All personnel were expected to respect the choices of their comrades in arms and consume the food of their choice without intrusion or slight to the other's religious feelings. In their combined more than a century of military rabbinic service there was only one instance that required intervention with a non-Jew or a non-observant Jew being disrespectful.

Sincerely Yours,

Rabbi Harold L. Robinson D.D.
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