

Dear Rabbi,

We are becoming more observant and considering becoming kosher. If we decide to do so, what process, if any, is available to make our dishes kosher, or must we get all new dishes?

Sharon and Douglas W.

Dear Sharon and Douglas,

Utensils, especially pots and pans, absorb the taste or flavor of food which is cooked in them. Since the biblical laws of *kashrus* regard the taste or flavor of food as the food itself, utensils that have been used for non-kosher foods must be "reconditioned" before they may be used in a Jewish household. The popular term for this reconditioning process is *kashering*. Its Hebrew equivalent is *hag'alath kelim*, or *hekhsher kelim*. (The word *hag'alah* derives from a root which means "to expel", referring to the forbidden food substance which has been absorbed into the walls of the vessel.)

The Biblical source for the laws of kashering is found in Bamidbar/Numbers (31:21-23):

"Elazar the Priest said to the soldiers returning from the war campaign, "This is the rule that God commanded Moses: As far as the gold, silver, copper, iron, tin and lead are concerned, whatever was used over fire must be made to go through fire and purged, and then purified with *mey niddah*. That, however, which was not used over fire need only be made to go through the water."

Among the spoils of war the soldiers brought back from the campaign against Midian were utensils which had been used for prohibited foods; these utensils now required kashering. The principle underlying the methodology of kashering is found in the phrase, 'whatever was used over fire must be made to go through fire...'; that is to say, the manner in which a utensil was being used when the forbidden food entered it determines how it will be kashered: Utensils which came into direct contact with fire are kashered by direct contact with fire; utensils which were placed on the fire with liquids in them are kashered by boiling liquid.

The words, "and purged," describe a second phase in the reconditioning process--immersion in water--but they do not inform us as to what volume of water the utensil must be immersed in. This information is derived from the phrase "and then purified with *mey niddah*." The latter is the volume of water Jewish law requires for a woman to immerse herself in, following her menstrual cycle--the volume of a mikvah. The Torah informs us that the second phase of reconditioning is immersion of a utensil in a mikvah.

The specifics of these laws are the subject of many intricate chapters in the *Code of Jewish Law*, and could not be covered in a column such as this. You are, however, in luck to be living in Dallas, and have a wonderful service at your disposal. You can call "Dallas Kosher" at 214-739-6535, and leave a message for Rabbi Klein or Rabbi Shawel, and either would be delighted to come to your home and walk you through the entire process, as they have done with many others. Best of luck in your journey, and mazal tov on your decision to reconnect to your rich, beautiful heritage!