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Symbolism of Chametz

The prohibition against eating *chametz* on *Pesach* is different from all other prohibitions in the *Torah*. The most noticeable difference is the fact that the prohibition lasts only seven days each year. The simple question is: If *chametz* is "bad" it should be prohibited all year; and if not, why is forbidden on *Pesach*?

Chametz is different in other respects as well. All other food prohibitions fall into two possible categories: either eating, or all benefit, is forbidden. Indeed, *chametz* falls into the latter category. However, in addition, there is a prohibition called "*lo yeira'eh lekha*" - *chametz* may not be in your possession all the days of *Pesach*. There is no other prohibition like this.

The "war" against *chametz* on *Pesach* takes on other forms as well. Normally, most prohibitions are subject to a process called "*bittul*" - a small amount of forbidden material that is mixed in with a much larger amount of permitted food is considered to be "nullified" (the ratio needed is usually 1:60). *Chametz*, however, is forbidden in any amount and is not subject to *bittul*.

The result of these complex laws is that on *Pesach*, we are enjoined to strike out the very existence of *chametz* from our lives. *Chametz* is not to be found anywhere "in your borders." According to the *Ramban*, the aim is that *chametz* not be found "in your mind;" it should be like dust in your eyes. What is so bad about *chametz* that we are set to destroy it, and why does our attitude change so completely seven days later?

Pesach is intimately bound up with the festival that follows it seven weeks later - *Shavuot*. In fact, in the *Torah*, the date of *Shavuot* is not a calendar one (the sixth day in the month of *Sivan*) but a relative one - seven weeks after the second day of *Pesach*. The *mitzva* of "*sefirat ha-omer*," counting the days from *Pesach* for seven weeks (after which comes *Shavuot*), clearly indicates that *Pesach* starts a process which culminates in *Shavuot*. The usual (and quite correct) understanding is that *Pesach*, the holiday of freedom, is directed towards the goal of *Shavuot*, the day of the giving of the *Torah*. Freedom is the necessary prerequisite for responsibility and obligation, and, conversely, is meaningless without a goal to which one is committed.

Halachically, there is another connection between *Pesach* and *Shavuot*, one which unfortunately we have lost sight of. *Pesach* is the festival of *matza* (that is the official name in the *Torah*, not my own appellation). *Shavuot*, in the *Torah*, aside from not having a date, is also distinguished by

another anomaly. Every other holiday is first introduced, on a given day, and then we are told what to do on that day, what are the special rituals. *Shavuot* is an exception. The *Torah* (*Vayikra* 23:15) says to count seven weeks, and on the fiftieth day to bring a special sacrifice. This offering consists of two loaves of BREAD, "baked with leaven, the first-fruits unto G-d." Only afterwards does the *Torah* add that this day, when this offering is brought, shall be a festival day. In other words, it is not that we sacrifice a holiday offering on *Shavuot*; rather, we celebrate *Shavuot* on the day of the special offering, two loaves of bread. So, the seven weeks between *Pesach* and *Shavuot* is a time when we move from *matza* to *chametz*. *Chametz* is not something which is basically undesirable, permitted perhaps only because it would be too difficult to live without it the whole year. *Chametz* is specifically brought to G-d, as an offering of first-fruits, as the culmination of a process that began with *Pesach*. How are we to understand this?

Without being overly symbolic, I think it is clear that the process of leavening represents the development of powers inherent in something. *Matza* is simply flour and water, baked. Bread is made of the same ingredients, but when you leave it around, unwatched and unbothered, it magically rises and grows, realising a hidden potential and expressing it. Is this bad? Not at all! Indeed, it would not be exaggerated to say that this is the goal of *Torah* life in general. But the *Torah* is warning us about something on *Pesach*. This process of growth and development, when left to unfold of itself, wildly, can be catastrophic. The raw powers of the human spirit, unguided and unchannelled, are anarchic precisely because they are powerful, precisely because they represent real growth and vitality. The first step, when granted freedom, is not to run and let all the repressed inclinations and urges fly out. Even then - ESPECIALLY THEN - one should eat *matza* and beware the hidden powers bursting to be free. Seven weeks must pass, counting each day, waiting for the giving of the *Torah*, with its direction and goal, learning what the infinite possibility before us consists of in the positive sense, and then one bakes two loaves and brings them before G-d. The first fruits are the first products of man's creativity. Rather than making them in a burst of activity on the first day of freedom, we must first find the direction to "the mountain of the L-rd," first learn the purpose of freedom, and then and only then take advantage of the wild unchecked powers within.

Extract from "Symbolism of Chametz" by R' Ezra Bick
For the complete article see <http://www.vbm-torah.org/pesach/pes61-eb.htm>

Revision Questions

פסחים ב' ג' – ד' ג'

- Can the various vegetables listed in the *Mishnah* as suitable for *marror* combine together to make the obligatory *kezayit*? (ב' רי) (ב' רי)
- Can one soak *mursan* in water as food for roosters during *Pesach*? (ב' רז) (ב' רז)
- Can one chew wheat and then place it on a wound during *Pesach*? (ב' רז) (ב' רז)
- What should one do if they mixed wheat into their *charoset*? (Include both opinions) (ב' רח) (ב' רח)
- Is one allowed to cook the meat of the *korban pesach* in fruit juice? (ב' רח) (ב' רח)
- Which of the following must one remove from their house before *Pesach*? (ג' א) (ג' א)
 - Beer?
 - Wheat-based (scribe) glue?
- What is the general rule regarding the previous question? (ג' א) (ג' א)
- What is the law regarding the removal of *chametz* from the cracks in pots? (ג' ב) (ג' ב)
- For what other law does the answer to the previous question also apply? (ג' ב) (ג' ב)
- How does one separate *challah* from *tameh* dough during *Pesach*? (Include all three opinions). (ג' ג) (ג' ג)
- Explain the debate regarding whether many women can knead and bake at the same time sharing the same oven. (ג' ד) (ג' ד)
- What is dough that is *siyur*? (ג' ה) (ג' ה)
- What is dough that is *siduk*? (ג' ה) (ג' ה)
- What is the punishment if one eats from dough that is *siyur* or dough that is *siduk*? (ג' ה) (ג' ה)
- Explain the debate regarding when *biur chametz* must be performed if *erev Pesach* fall on *Shabbat*. (ג' ו) (ג' ו)
- Give one example provided by the *Mishnah* for when one goes to do a particular activity on *erev Pesach* and has not yet perform *biur chametz* and the *halacha* is that he: (ג' ו) (ג' ו)
 - Must return if he has time to come back and complete the activity, otherwise can he can simply perform *bitul chametz*.
 - Must only perform *bitul chametz*.
 - Must return home.
- If someone leaves *Yerushalaim* with *kodshim* in his hand, after which point is he not required to return to the *beit ha'mikdash* and can simply burn it where he is? (ג' ז) (ג' ז)
- Regarding the previous two questions, list the opinions regarding the minimum measure of the *chametz* or *kodshim* for which one must return? (ג' ז) (ג' ז)
- Whether one performs *melacha* in the morning of *erev Pesach* depends on the custom of the place. What if a person, coming from a place the does not do *melacha* travels on the morning of *erev Pesach* to a place that does do *melacha*? (ד' א) (ד' א)
- What law regarding *Shmittah* shares a similar ruling to that of the previous question? (ד' ב) (ד' ב)
- What law regarding animal trade shares a similar ruling to that of the previous question? (ד' ג) (ד' ג)

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
8 th January ח' טבת	9 th January ט' טבת	10 th January י' טבת	11 th January יא' טבת	12 th January י"ב טבת	13 th January י"ג טבת	14 th January י"ד טבת
Pesachim 4:4-5	Pesachim 4:6-7	Pesachim 4:8-9	Pesachim 5:1-2	Pesachim 5:3-4	Pesachim 5:5-6	Pesachim 5:7-8

