



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES

PASSOVER: LIFE IS A BAKERY WINDOW SOURCE AND DISCUSSION SHEET



The Rabbis call Passover zman cherusanu or the “time of our freedom”. Certainly, as we prepare for the holiday, nature is breaking free all around us from the bondage of winter. So too, this time of year is auspicious and affords us an opportunity to fight for the freedom of our souls.

Two opposing concepts, foods and ideas dominate the Passover landscape – matzah and chometz or bread. We are crazy about driving chometz- and the leaven which is its engine of creation - from our houses and from our lives. We replace it with the singularly Jewish cracker known as matzah. Matzah is the food of faith, poverty and freedom, while chometz – bread- contains within it the possibility of enslavement. Let's take a deep dive in to understanding Chometz and Matzah.

Our first source describes the mitzvah of Matzah/Chometz which G-d gave the Jewish People before leaving Egypt. It followed the command for us to sacrifice and eat the Pascal lamb at the very first Seder in history.

SOURCE 1: Exodus Parshas Bo (12:17-19) Source for Matzah and Removal of Chometz

17. You shall safeguard the matzos, for on this very day I will take your legions out of the land of Egypt; you shall observe this day for your generations as an eternal decree. 18. In the first month, on the fourteenth day in the evening, you shall eat matzos, until the twenty-first day. 19. For seven days (14th-21st) **leaven (chometz) may not be found in your houses....**

וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַמַּצּוֹת כִּי בַעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הוֹצֵאתִי
אֶת־צְבָאוֹתֵיכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם:
בְּרֹאשׁוֹן בְּאַרְבַּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעָרֵב תֹּאכְלוּ מִצַּת עַד
יוֹם הָאֶחָד וְעֹשְׂרִים לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעָרֵב:
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים שָׂאֵר לֹא יִמָּצֵא בְּבֵיתֵיכֶם כִּי כָל־אֶכֶל
מִחֻמֶּצֶת וּנְכֹרֶתָה הִנָּפֵשׁ הֵוא מֵעַדֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגֵר
וּבְאֶזְרַח הָאָרֶץ:

Q. From this source is there a relationship being set up between chometz and matza? Do we know anything about that relationship?

Q: Also, is there a reason given in the Torah about why G-d is commanding us to eat matzah and to avoid chometz?

Seems like Chometz and Matzah are indeed linked together and directly relate to our being redeemed from slavery in Egypt, yet we don't know much more about that relationship.

SOURCE 2: Passover Haggadah on Reason for Matzah based upon Exodus 12:39

This Matzah, why do we eat it? – Because the **dough of our fathers did not have time to become leavened (rise)** before (G-d) revealed Himself to them and redeemed them as it is written (Exodus 12:39) They baked the dough which they brought out of Egypt into matzos... **because they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay...**

מַצָּה זוֹ שֶׁאֲנִי אוֹכְלִים, עַל שׁוּם מָה? עַל שׁוּם שֶׁלֹּא הִסְפִּיק בְּצִקָּם שֶׁל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ לְהַחְמִיץ עַד שֶׁנִּגְלָה עֲלֵיהֶם מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים, הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, וּגְאֹלָם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיֹּאפּוּ אֶת־הַבֶּצֶק אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם עֲגֹת מִצּוֹת, כִּי לֹא חָמץ, כִּי גִרְשׁוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְהִתְמַהֵמָה, וְגַם צִדָּה לֹא עָשׂוּ לָהֶם.

Q: In Source 1 we quote the verse commanding us eat matzah on seder night. (before leaving Egypt) However, the author of the Haggadah explains that the reason we eat matzah on seder night is because we left Egypt in a hurry. How are we supposed to understand this?

If we were already given the mitzvah of matzah and chometz before the Exodus, how could the reason be that we eat it be because of the manner in which we went out of Egypt?

Perhaps we can suggest that although we were given the commandment earlier the reason wasn't revealed to us until we actually left Egypt. Since the Rabbis rarely commemorate purely historical events, we must assume the circumstances surrounding baking matzos wasn't coincidental. **In other words, we don't eat matzah because we left Egypt in a hurry, we left Egypt in a hurry because that's the essence of the mitzvah of Matzah.**

The Nature of Matzah and of Chometz

Matzah and Chometz are very similar. The difference between them is merely time; matzah is flour and water prepared and put into the oven in less than 18 minutes. Chometz is the same flour and water left for more than 18 minutes. (even without adding leaven to the dough). Matzah is made in haste, while chometz is not.

Q: What about being made in haste in a race against time makes matzah a symbol of freedom linked to redemption from Egypt?

Consider the following source:

SOURCE 3: Exodus Parshas Bo (12:17) and Commentary of Rashi

You shall safeguard the **matzos**, for on this very day I will take your legions out of the land of Egypt
Rashi: Don't read it as **matzos**, but **mitzvos**. Just as you are not to let matzos become fermented, don't let mitzvos become fermented (ruined). **If a mitzvah comes to your hand, do it immediately.**

וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַמִּצּוֹת כִּי בַעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הוֹצֵאתִי אֶת־עַבְדְּאוֹתֵיכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
רש"י
וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת הַמִּצּוֹת. שֶׁלֹּא יָבֹאוּ לִיְדֵי חֲמוּץ; מִכָּאֵן אֲ, רַבִּי יֵאֱשִׁיָּה אוֹמֵר אֵל תְּהִי קוֹרָא אֶת הַמִּצּוֹת, אֲלֵא אֶת הַמִּצּוֹת - כְּדֶרֶךְ שֶׁאֵין מִחְמִיצִין אֶת הַמִּצָּה, כֹּךְ אֵין מִחְמִיצִין אֶת הַמִּצּוֹה, אֲלֵא אִם בָּאָה לְיָדְךָ, עֲשֵׂה אוֹתָהּ מִיָּד (שם)

Q: What does the way we make matzah teach us about a key element of being free?

We all want the freedom to achieve our goals in life, yet laziness, procrastination and “life” often gets in the way.

Our Rabbis seem to place matzah and chometz in the crosshairs of our spirituality. Consider the following source:

SOURCE 4: *Talmud Bavli, Berachot 17a with Rashi – Chametz represents the yetzer hara, the drive to do evil, which stands in the way of spirituality.*

Rabbi Alexander, after he prayed, would say the following: “Master of the Universe, it is known and revealed before You that it is our will to do Your Will. Who prevents us? **The yeast in the dough [which symbolizes the yetzer hara, the drive to do evil – Rashi]**

ור' אלכסנדר בתר דמצלי אמר הכי רבון
העולמים גלוי וידוע לפניך שרצוננו לעשות
רצונך ומי מעכב שאור שבעיסה
רש"י
שאור שבעיסה - יצר הרע שבלבבנו,
המחמיצנו

The source talks of our yetzer hara, or negative inclination, which constantly tries to get us to favor the physical over the spiritual, to distract us from G-d and meaning, and to sell us some illusion which we are led to believe has true value.

Q: What are all the possible connections that you can make from the process of leavening/fermenting and baking dough that can give us a view into the dynamics of the yetzer hara and its impact upon our personality traits? (Hint: focus on process of leavening and the finished product of bread – it's composition, taste and look.)

- Matzah teaches us to strike while the iron is hot, before our inspiration cools down. Chometz thrives on laziness, seeking the path of least resistance, and just letting the natural process of life run its course.
- Although bread improves upon baking to a highpoint of freshness and taste, the nature of bread is to decay over time. It's much like immersion in the physical world; it tastes good for a while but sooner or later it turns sour.
- You may have noticed that as bread leavens it puffs up. Classically this rise is likened to our tendency for arrogance, while matzah - “poor man's bread” symbolizes humility.

While laziness and procrastination block us from all sorts of worthwhile achievement in life, arrogance actually distorts our perception and prompts us to buy into illusions about ourselves and others.

Arrogance is an inflation of our self-importance or significance that blocks out what is really significant in life, like G-d, meaning, truth. In other words, it has the power to distort our true sense of reality.

Matzah, on the other hand represents humility. At first glance this trait appears quaint, a bit old fashioned, but hardly a game changer. In actuality, humility allows us to see clearly who we are and more importantly what we are not. Humility points us towards reality, keeping us squarely in the game of life, without detours after so many self-styled illusions.

There is another aspect of chometz that helps skew our sense of reality described in the following source:

SOURCE 5: *The Bakery Window of Life* Talk by Rabbi Simcha Barnett

Life is a lot like a bakery window. Everything in the bakery window looks really good and appetizing and we invest a lot of time, money and emotion to acquire the cakes, pastries and breads of life. Yet how often does the taste of the cake live up to the hype that we associated with and it and the resources invested in it? So too in our material world; We invest time, money, emotion- our hearts and souls- in achieving goals and acquiring goods, services and experiences. Why? Well, we are all looking for the same thing- value, things that will stand the test of time and provide a great return on investment; What life is really about! Yet our resources are limited, so how do we make sure we are allocating them properly? We need the mindset of matzah. Matzah is all bread, no puff nor illusion and represents real value. Passover is all about pulling back from the "bakery window of life" to reconnect to things of true value – G-d, Torah, meaning and spirituality - that have gone missing from our lives.

Q: Do you relate to this "bakery window analogy"? Can you remember times in your own life where you gave more than you got back while pursuing something you wanted?

Passover is a week designed by G-d , to realign our values and help us break free of illusion and desires that keep tripping us up and send us chasing after things that will not give us what we are looking for. Hopefully, after a week of detox from the allure of bakery window, and absorbing the purifying lessons of matzah, we can reenter the world of chametz, to appreciate what it has to offer, but not to be overwhelmed by its promises.