

Passover All Year Long

When was chametz prohibited all year round, and what does it have to do with thanksgiving?

We Are On A Break

This week in Israel, Netanyahu announced that the government will take a break from passing the judicial reform, to allow for more dialogue between all parts of society.

A day later, Elon Musk and over a thousand artificial intelligence experts issued an open letter stating that we need to take at least a six-month break from the continued development of artificial intelligence, until we create a protocol and regulations for its proper use. Otherwise, it poses a danger to society and humanity.

The Jewish people are also taking a break — from chametz. On Wednesday, every Jew around the world will take an eight-day break from bread and anything leavened; this is not a recommendation but a commandment of the Torah itself.

What is so bad about chametz? Why do we go through such lengths to clean and clear our homes?

Chametz and matzah are made from the same ingredients — flour and water. The only difference is that the dough for chametz is allowed to rise, while the dough for matzah is baked immediately. Chassidism teaches that the rising of the dough symbolizes the puffiness of our ego — chametz represents our

negative traits like arrogance and anger, which can grow to frightening proportions if left unchecked.

Passover is a time of thanksgiving, when we show gratitude for G-d's redeeming us from Egypt. But before doing so, it is imperative that we make every effort to redeem ourselves from the shackles of our ego. That's why we need to rid ourselves of all the chametz.

In the Temple

There's an interesting fact about chametz that many people may not know. It was actually prohibited all year round on the altar of the Holy Temple, and it wasn't even allowed to be brought into the Temple altogether.

Last week's Torah portion reminded us that offerings should not contain chametz (Vayikra 4:11), and this week's portion mentions that the parts eaten by the priests should also not become chametz (Tzav 6:10). Even the showbread, the famous bread that was placed in the sanctuary every week, was kosher for Passover.

It was for the same reason:

In the Holy Temple, where the divine presence rests, there was no room for ego, arrogance, or anger. These negative traits stem from a sense of self-entitlement, the feeling of "I didn't get what I want." That's not the mindset with which one should enter the Temple; Ecclesiastes says, "G-d hates the arrogant" (16:4). Therefore, chametz was strictly prohibited all year round. To enter the Holy Temple, one must approach with

humility and an open heart, ready to connect with the divine presence.

Now, while chametz was generally prohibited in the Holy Temple, there was an exception to the rule. Once a year, on the holiday of Shavuot, the Jewish people would offer a chametz offering in the Temple. It wasn't offered on the actual altar, but it was brought into the space of the Holy Temple.

Why was chametz suddenly allowed on Shavuot and even considered a mitzvah? The answer lies in the fact that between Passover and Shavuot, we count the omer, spending 49 days in spiritual preparation to receive the Torah. It's not just a countdown; it's a time of reflection and personal growth.

The entire process from Passover to Shavuot is a journey of spiritual growth. It begins with an intense search for chametz before Passover, followed by a week of avoiding it entirely. After the holiday, we continue refining ourselves by focusing on one trait each week. And finally, after seven weeks, working on the seven Middos, dedicated self-improvement, we reach a point where we can bring chametz to the Holy Temple.

At this stage, chametz no longer represents selfishness or ego. Rather, it symbolizes healthy spiritual confidence and Jewish pride; like the type that gives us the self-confidence to wear a kippa in public or put on tefillin in the airport. This pride comes from a place of humility and a deep connection with G-d, rather than arrogance or entitlement.

The Thanksgiving Exception

In this week's Torah portion, we learn about another exception to the chametz rule: the thanksgiving offering (Tzav 7:12-13).

This type of sacrifice was offered when an individual wanted to express gratitude for a personal miracle, and included forty loaves of bread, some of which were chametz. Again, unlike chametz that symbolizes personal ego, this chametz represented the individual's recognition that everything comes from G-d, and their gratitude towards Him. Therefore, it was not considered a contradiction to the Holy Temple's prohibition.

When, specifically, would someone bring this offering to the Temple? There were four categories of people: those who crossed a sea, those who crossed a desert, those who were released from prison, and those who recovered from an illness. (We still observe this tradition today by reciting the hagomel blessing after the Torah reading. If someone is released from prison, recovers from an illness, or even travels on an airplane overseas, they come up to the bimah and recite a special blessing of thanksgiving.)

The Rebbe once made an interesting observation about the order in which Rashi (on this week's Torah portion) lists these four categories. Unlike the order stated in the Talmud or in Psalms, Rashi begins with those who cross the sea, followed by those who cross the desert, those who experience imprisonment, and finally, those who recover from illness.

The Rebbe explained that Rashi chose this order because it reflects the experience of the Jewish people during the exodus

from Egypt.

First, they crossed the sea. Then, they journeyed through the desert. After the sin of the spies, the Jewish people were decreed to wander in the desert for 40 years, essentially becoming prisoners in an open-air prison. Therefore, Rashi mentions the category of those who experienced imprisonment third. Finally, the people in the desert never became ill, so the option of offering thanks for recovery from illness was mentioned last.

The Seder Eve

As Passover approaches, we have a unique opportunity to cultivate a feeling of gratitude within ourselves. This feeling should not only stem from the historical fact that G-d redeemed us from Egypt, but also from the present reality — that we have the freedom to practice our faith and live as proud Jews wherever we may be.

As we gather around the seder table, let's shift our focus towards positivity. Rather than dwelling on negative topics like anti-Semitism or intra-communal conflicts, let's take a moment to appreciate how fortunate we are. We should take pride in the fact that Jewish life is thriving, not only in our own community, but also in communities all over the world. This reality is something that was unheard of in the past, and it's important to recognize and cherish it.

Moreover, it's important to recognize that the young people at the seder are listening attentively, perhaps more than we are willing to admit. Let's make sure that they walk away filled to

the brim with a sense of pride and joy in their Judaism (and lots of matzah and wine).

Good Shabbos.