

Depth behind *Halachot*: Searching for *Chametz*

Following the theme of Pesach being a time to get rid of our inner *Yetzer hara* the commentaries explain the mitzva of getting rid of *chametz* on a deeper level. *Chametz* and more specifically leaven, is symbolic of the *Yetzer hara*¹ as the Gemara says:²

R. Alecsandria used to pray and say Master of the Worlds it is revealed and known before You [Hashem] that our will is to do Your will and what prevents us from doing it? It is leaven that is in the dough...

Rashi- the leaven is the Yetzer hara that is in our hearts that makes us chametz.

The difference between *chametz* and *matzah* is that *chametz* rises while *matzah* doesn't.³ The rising of *chametz* represents the yetzer hara's tactic of making a person go to extremes.⁴ At times it can convince a person to overindulge in physical desires. It starts out with overindulgence in that which is permissible but sooner than later ends up convincing one to do fulfill his darkest desires. At other times it can manifest itself in pride⁵ for spiritual accomplishments. Other than the fact that pride is a destructive character trait in and of itself, it also puts a stop to spiritual growth. How is this so? The way dough becomes *chametz* is by not kneading it for eighteen minutes.⁶ As long as one is kneading the dough however, it does not become *chametz*. Not working the dough in a spiritual sense represents laxity in working on oneself. Pride prevents a person from working on himself by making him believe that he is perfect.⁷ This is obviously one primary cause of the lack of spiritual growth.

Another way that the *Yetzer hara* prevents us from working on ourselves is through laziness.⁸ The *pasuk* says:⁹ *ushmartem al hamatzot* (you should watch over the *matzot*). On a simple level, the *pasuk* is coming to tell us to watch over the *matzot* to make sure they don't become *chametz*. However Chazal¹⁰ tell us to also read it as *ushmartem al hamitzvot* (watch over the *mitzvot*). When a *mitzva* comes to your hand do it right away! The *Yetzer hara* on the other hand makes us lazy which thereby causes us to be lax in *mitzvot*. Laziness is the *Yetzer hara*'s way of making our lives *chametz*.

Based on this idea, the commentaries explain the *mitzvah* of searching for *chametz* on a symbolic level as referring to the search for the *Yetzer hara* within.¹¹ The *halacha* says:¹² ***In the beginning of the night of the fourteenth one has to search for chametz through the light of a candle in the holes and cracks of every place into which he brought chametz.*** In light of the ideas above, let's analyze the *halacha* on a deeper level.

In the beginning of the night of the fourteenth – the night of the fourteenth refers to the fourteenth year of a person's life i.e. right after his *bar mitzvah*.¹³ The Gemara says that it is only then that the *Yetzer Tov* is put inside the person.¹⁴ It is at this time that the main battle with the Yetzer Hara begins.

¹ See Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 14:1) that says Adam Harishon was the challah of the world (see Torat Moshe of the Alshich to Bereshit 3:16 for an explanation); See Rashi to Berachot 17a dibur hamatchil "se'or sheba'isa"; Zohar Tetzaveh 183b; Kad Hakemach "Pesach 1"; Abarbanel to Shemot 12:15; Alshich, Torat Moshe to Shemot 12:18-19; Kav Hayashar 89-90; Radbaz Teshuvot, siman 977, chelek gimel teshuva 546; Sifte Cohen Bereishit 1:1; Sh'lah, Derech Chaim Tochechot Mussar to Shemot 12:21; Shlah, Pesachim, Matza Ashira, drush shlishi; Tiferet Yisrael of the Maharal 25; Simchat Haregel of the Chida 12; Moreh Betzba of the Chida, 204; Bnei Yisaschar M'amrei Chodesh Nissan 11:7; Michtav M'Eliyahu II p.19

² Berachot 17a

³ See the B'nei Yisaschar M'amrei chodesh Nissan 8:1-6, who points out that matzah is only the result of its maker while chametz rises and does actions of its own. See there for a symbolic explanation of this.

⁴ Maharasha to Berachot 17a s.v. umi me'akev se'or

⁵ See Maharsha to Berachot 17a s.v. umi me'akev se'or; see also Zohar 182a

⁶ See Orach Chaim 459:62; see Mishna Berura 18 to Orach Chaim 459:62 who says not to let the dough sit for even a second.

⁷ See Avodat Yisrael (inyanei Pesach) who says one reason behind the minhag to hide ten pieces of bread is to instill in us that we all have to check ourselves for chametz even if it seems to us as though there is nothing we need to change. This is itself the first step to getting rid of the pride of thinking we are perfect.

⁸ See Ben Ish Chayil 3:4? Sifte chaim Shemot p. 142; See also Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzva 117

⁹ Shemot 12:17

¹⁰ Rashi to Shemot 12:21 quoting the Mechilta

¹¹ Alshich, Torat Moshe to Shemot 12:18-19; Sh'lah, Derech Chaim Tochechot Mussar to Shemot 12:21; Sh'lah, Pesachim, Matza Ashira, drush shlishi; Devarim Achadim of the Chida; Bnei Yisaschar M'amrei Chodesh Nissan 11:7

¹² Pesachim 2a; Orach Chaim 431:1

¹³ Sh'lah, Derech Chaim Tochechot Mussar to Shemot 12:21; Bnei Yisaschar M'amrei Chodesh Nissan 11:7

Search for chametz- therefore immediately upon receiving his *Yetzer Tov* one should begin to search out his heart for any *chametz* (*Yetzer hara*) and get rid of it; Hence the word **beginning of the night**. One should not wait until he is older. However if he did not do so immediately he should still do it when he is older as the *halacha* says:¹⁵ *If he did not search on the night of 14th he should search in the day... if he did not search during the day then he should search on pesach, if he did not search on pesach then he should search after Pesach...* It is never too late to work on oneself.

Holes and cracks- one has to search every nook and cranny of his heart for *chametz*.¹⁶ Since any trace of *chametz* is forbidden to own or to eat no place suspected of having *chametz* can go unchecked. When it comes to *chametz*, unlike other laws of *kashrut*, there is no concept of *batel b'shishim* (when for example meat is mixed with milk and one is more than sixty times the other, the lesser food becomes nullified and thereby the food is still kosher). Furthermore there is the unique *halacha* of not even having *chametz* around. One reason for this is that we don't give the *yetzer hara* any room to exist, no matter how small it may be.¹⁷ Especially because that is the way of the *Yetzer Hara* to entice a person to commit a small sin today and then lead him to indulging in the most severe transgressions tomorrow.

Through the light of a candle- The *Chida* explains¹⁸ that the light of the candle represents Torah, as it says “*ner mitzva v'Torah ohr*”¹⁹ (the candle is the *mitzva* and *Torah* is light). One should search his ways through the light of the Torah to see whether his actions are in line with what Hashem requires of him. The *halacha* dictates that the light that is used for checking should be that of a candle as opposed to a torch.²⁰ The commentaries explain that the reason for this is that a torch doesn't allow close scrutiny of holes, while a single wick candle permits one to analyze directly every little place.²¹ This teaches us that there is no action suspected of being governed by the *yetzer hara* can be left unchecked for Pesach. In the words of the *Chazon Ish*: with every movement one needs to seek the council of the four volumes of the *Shulchan Aruch*.²²

Every place into which he brought chametz- the *Alshich* explains²³ that these places represent the areas that one struggles with most in his battle with the *Yetzer Hara*. There are many body parts a person can sin with. The eyes can see inappropriate things, the ears can listen to *lashon hara*, the mouth can eat non-kosher food, the feet can run to do bad, etc. However, not every person sins with all of his body parts. Therefore, the *halacha* tells us to search out only the body parts in which we brought in *chametz*, i.e. the body parts that we are prone to failure based on the past. The places where one is not prone to sin he does not have to search as the *Mishna* says:²⁴ Any place that one did not bring into it *chametz* one doesn't need to search. This may very well be the depth behind the *halacha* that says:²⁵ *Holes... that aren't very high and aren't very low need to be searched, high holes that the hands of a person doesn't reach or low ones...don't need to be searched.* This hints to the idea that one needs to search his heart at his level hence where a person's hand can reach. One shouldn't measure himself on a level that is too high to strive for or to low to sink to.²⁶

The *halachot* regarding the different places one must check for *chametz* also hint at the different areas in one's life that need to be cleansed of the *yetzer hara*. For example the *halacha* states:²⁷ *A hole [in a wall] that is between a Jew and his friend each one of them searches up to the place that his hand reaches and the rest he should nullify in his heart.* Just like we are required to search for *chametz* in a shared wall between our neighbors and us, we are also required to search for and get rid of

¹⁴ Nedarim 32b

¹⁵ Orach Chaim 435:1

¹⁶ Alshich, Torat Moshe to Shemot 12:18-19

¹⁷ Radbaz Teshuvot, chelek gimel teshuva 546; Simchat Haregel of the Chida 12; Michtav M'Elياهو II p.19

¹⁸ Chida, Devarim Achadim; See Alshich Torat Moshe to Shemot 12:18-19 who says the light resembles the *yetzer tov* that is now inside him; See Bnei Yisaschar M'amrei Chodesh Nissan 11:7 who says “*ohr*” is a reference to the *neshama*

¹⁹ Mishlei 6:23

²⁰ Orach Chaim 433:2

²¹ See Mishna Berura 8 to Orach Chaim 433:2

²² Chazon Ish, Igrot 133

²³ Alshich, Torat Moshe to Shemot 12:18-19

²⁴ Pesachim 2a

²⁵ Orach Chaim 433:4

²⁶ Original; See B'nei Yisaschar Tishrei 4:1 who explains the phrase “up to where his hands can reach” as referring to doing teshuva for any sin he remembers.

²⁷ Orach Chaim 433:7

any animosity or jealousy there may be between our fellow and us.²⁸ The *halacha*²⁹ also says to search one's pockets for *chametz* as well. This hints at the idea of checking one's business dealings to make sure all the money that comes to one's pockets was earned according to the *halachot* of the Torah.³⁰ The *halacha*³¹ further requires the searching of a *beit kneset* (place of prayer) and *beit midrash* (place for learning Torah) for *chametz*. This hints at the requirement to check one's commitment to the *halachot* of praying and learning.³² Finally even after one gets rid of all the *chametz* in his vicinity, it is still not enough; as the *pasuk* says:³³ *and leaven may not be seen in your possession, in all your borders*. This *halacha* hints at the idea of also helping others get rid of their *yetzer hara*. Since all Jews are responsible for the spiritual well being of one another, one should do his best to help people *within his borders* get rid of their inner *chametz* as well.³⁴

Just like the physical preparation for Pesach requires planning so too the spiritual preparation demands foresight. Through proper introspection we can go into Pesach spiritually prepared for spiritual growth. Furthermore, through keeping the above ideas in mind we can more effectively utilize the special energy of this time of the year and thereby get rid of the inner *chametz* as well. May we all merit making the most of this time.

²⁸ See Sh'lah, Derech Chaim Tochechot Mussar to Shemot 12:21; See Shlah, Pesachim, Matza Ashira, drush shlishi

²⁹ Rema to Orach Chaim 433:11

³⁰ See Shlah, Pesachim, Matza Ashira, drush shlishi

³¹ Orach Chaim 433:10

³² See Shlah, Pesachim, Matza Ashira, drush shlishi

³³ Shemot 13:7

³⁴ Alshich, Torat Moshe to Shemot 12:18-19