

Bedikat Chametz - Removing Leaven from Our Lives

By David S. Taylor

Each year, with the anticipation of Pesach (Passover), observant Jewish families spend a long time cleaning their houses before the Festival arrives. Customarily, on the night before Pesach, one last check is made of the whole house to see that no place was forgotten. This final check in every single room and in every nook and cranny is known as “Bedikat Chametz”, which means a “checking for chametz (leaven)”.

The term ‘chametz’ comes from the Hebrew “l'chimutz”, meaning “to sour” or “to ferment”. And it's forbidden during Passover. The prohibition comes from two Torah verses: Exodus 12:19 (“For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses”) and Deuteronomy 16:4 (“No leaven shall be seen within all your borders for seven days.”)

In B’rit HaChadasha (the New Covenant), Rav Sha’ul (Paul) tells us in 1Corinthians 5:7 - “Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Messiah our Passover also has been sacrificed.” Sha’ul uses the physical example of ‘Bedikat Chametz’ in order to emphasize a deeper, spiritual aspect in which chametz, symbolized as sin throughout Scripture, must be cleansed from our lives.

So, just **how do** we clean out the old leaven in our lives? I believe the process is similar to the ancient ritual of ‘Bedikat Chametz’, which observant Jewish families have observed for thousands of years.

First, there is a search for chametz and, once found, it is completely removed from the home. ‘Old leaven’ is leaven that has been left under cushions, pockets, under furniture, etc. These are areas that are hidden in throughout the home and are traditionally searched for in the dark with a candle. In searching for leaven in the home, we not only search for ‘obvious’ leaven in ‘obvious’ places, such as bread, cookies, cakes, crumbs that can be easily found - in the refrigerator, cupboards, under the sofa cushions, etc.- BUT- in order to clean the home completely of chametz (see Exodus 12:19), you have to look at the very ingredients of your foods to find any ingredients that may be chametz.

Similarly, there is ‘old chametz’ lingering around in our lives that requires us to look deeper into our very souls in order to recognize it. However, how many of us want to really take the time to look deeper into our souls for ‘hidden chametz’? In addition, Scripture says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I, the L-rd search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.” (Jeremiah 17:9, 10)

Not only do we have to search for the leaven, but we must be able to identify what we are searching for. Many times it is difficult to determine whether or not a food or ingredient is chametz, most Jewish people rely on the ‘hechsher’, (הכשר) or Rabbinical seal that is on the product which assures you that it is truly chametz-free and kosher for Pesach. - **A second set of eyes, if you will.**

In the same way, we each need a ‘second set of eyes’ to remove chametz from our lives that we might be unaware of or unwilling to ‘clean out’. Our hearts can be deceitful. We must rely on each other as brothers in Messiah, to be willing to love each other in a way that will encourage each other in the ways of G-d, even if it becomes uncomfortable for us to point out sin in another’s life. - **“Better is open rebuke than hidden love.”** (Proverbs 27:5)

Part of the process of removing leaven from our homes also involves **substituting and replacing** foods that contain chametz, with foods that are kosher for Pesach and chametz-free, such as cakes, cookies, etc. In the same way, when we remove leaven from our own lives, we need to replace it with the righteousness of Messiah.

Once we have identified all chametz in our homes, the next step requires the removal and renouncing of all leaven. This process is called, “Biur Chametz”, - “clearing out/burning the chametz”. Similarly, in our lives, this process is known in Hebrew as ‘viddui’ – confession. We must confess our sins to HaShem. Next, we must repent (t’shuvah), which, different from confession, requires us to turn from our sins – and stop doing the wrong things we were doing. When confess our sins and repent from them to HaShem, it’s as if our sins were as the chametz, which gets burned up. They no longer exist. (Psalms 103:12). At this point, it’s time to “Celebrate the Feast” (I Corinthians 5:8).

Every year after Pesach has completed, my family has a ‘tradition’. We get pizza. I have noticed that the kids can’t wait for Pesach to end towards the 6th & 7th days of the Festival, so they can begin eating chametz again. I won’t try to read anything into this behavior; however I believe there is a spiritual significance here that is common to us all, in one way or another.

Rav Sha’ul (Paul) says “So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in G-d's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to G-d--through Messiah Yeshua our L-rd!” (Romans 7:21-25)

Our ‘natural man’ doesn’t like remaining ‘chametz-free’. It wars with our spirit daily and we have to make daily decisions to put the ‘old man’ to death and walk in the newness of the Spirit. Have you ever heard the term ‘**coffin-kicking**’? Our ‘old man’ is always ‘**coffin-kicking**’ and trying to come back to life in order to rule over our lives.

In Ya’acov (James) 4:7-10, Ya’acov says, “Submit yourselves, then, to G-d. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to G-d and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the L-rd, and he will lift you up.”

How many of you have ‘old leaven’ that keeps making its way back into your lives? You confess it, repent, and it comes back again-and you continue to go through the whole cycle over & over.

Well, during this Pesach & Festival of Matzot, we couldn’t pick a better time than to remove the chametz from our lives and burn it up once and for all. Let’s pray for each other and with each other that we may “keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.” “For Messiah, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”

Chag Pesach Sameach! (Happy Passover)
-David