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פרשת צו (שבת הגדול)
י"ד ניסן תשפ"הFeedback? contact@essenceofjudaism.comFrom the Chabura (chazara)
By: Adam Friedmann

Where *Chametz* Ends and *Matza* Begins

"You must be vigilant regarding the *matzot*, for on this very day I brought out your multitudes from the land of Egypt. You must preserve this day for your generations, it is an eternal statute." (*Shemot* 12:17, Metsudah translation)

The Torah commands us to carefully guard the *matzot*. What does this commandment entail and what does it mean?

The halachic side of this mitzvah plays out in an enigmatic passage in *Pesachim* (40a-b). In Talmudic times, the practice was to soak grains before grinding them into flour, in order to remove parts of the husk. This practice is liable to lead to some kernels becoming *chametz*. As a result, the Gemara considers whether this practice is allowed for grain that will be used for Pesach. The Gemara presents several statements of Rava, whose position on this question changed over time. In the final statement, Rava declares that we are *obligated* to soak the grains for Pesach, specifically the wheat used to make *matzah* for the Seder. The reasoning is that since the Torah commands us to guard the *matzot*, we must artificially create a situation where the grains may become *chametz*, in order to then guard them from becoming *chametz*.

Rava proves that guarding the *matzot* from becoming *chametz* at a later stage in the production is invalid from the following statement:

Rav Huna said: In the case of **dough prepared by gentiles**, if one knows that it has not become leavened, **a person may fill his stomach with them** on Passover night, **provided that he eats an olive-bulk of matza in the end**, to fulfill the obligation to eat *matza*. (Koren translation)

In the case of dough prepared by gentiles, one is able to visually confirm that the dough has not yet become *chametz* before baking it. Thus, one is able to "guard" the resulting *matza* from becoming *chametz*. Nevertheless, Rav Huna says that such *matzot* don't qualify to fulfill the mitzvah. Evidently, reasons Rava, guarding the *matzot* in the stage between kneading the dough and baking isn't sufficient. Therefore, the required "guarding" must occur earlier in the processing of the grain. This is what leads to the conclusion that soaking the grains is obligatory. Rava's argument is refuted, but he holds fast to

his principle. The Gemara records how he would tell the workers who cut and tied the stalks of wheat in the field to do so “for the sake of the mitzvah” (or possibly “for the sake of *matza*”, see Rif, *Pesachim* 12a).

The Rishonim debate the exact goal of the “guarding” that Rava describes. According to Rashi (*Gittin* 10a s.v., *ve’adam yotze*, see also *She’iltot*, 76) the goal is to actively produce the *matza* for sake of fulfilling the mitzva (lishma). According to the Rif (*ibid.*) and Rambam (*Hilchot Chametz Umatza* 5:9) the mandate is to guard all the grain that one eats on Pesach extra carefully so that it doesn’t become chametz. However, even by this view grains which haven’t been guarded in this way can still be eaten on Pesach. They just can’t be used to fulfill the mitzvah of eating *matza* at the Seder (see *Hilchot Chametz Umatza* 8:13).

In any case, everyone accepts the following distinction: a piece of baked dough which is not chametz is kosher for Pesach. But in order to use that baked dough for the mitzvah of eating *matza*, a process of special guarding is required to turn it into “mitzvah *matza*”. By commanding us to guard the *matzot*, the Torah is telling us that for the mitzvah of eating *matza*, the absence of *chametz* is insufficient. To get *matza*, we need to take positive action to create it.

How can we understand this distinction philosophically? The symbolism of *chametz* and *matza* may be the key. According to the *Zohar* (2:40:2) *chametz* symbolizes the yetzer hara, specifically our tendency for pride or arrogance. Some amount of pride is healthy. Humanity is charged with the mandate of making the world better. Part of taking that seriously includes a sense of satisfaction and pride in our achievements. There are also more dangerous kinds of pride (see further *Peninei Halachah*, *Pesach* 1:5-6). Accordingly, there is some amount of *chametz* allowed in our service in the Mikdash as well, though it is limited (see this week’s parsha). On Pesach, however, we bring ourselves face to face with the limits of human capabilities. The world is vast and complex. Ultimately, our ability to influence it is severely limited. Even a civilization as powerful as the ancient Egyptians can be brought to its knees in short order. On Pesach, we embrace this reality. This is what it means to remove any trace of *chametz* from our homes.

This total absence of pride can lead to dangerous conclusions. It can lead to nihilism, to a sense that the world is fundamentally meaningless, that we stand powerless in the face of indifferent natural forces. To this, Hashem responds “guard the *matzot*, for on this very day I brought out your multitudes from the land of Egypt.” Our experience in Egypt was not only about the sheer limits of human capabilities, but of the presence of Hashem’s creative power and providential hand at the root of reality. This recognition is what should the psychological space created by the absence of pride. The *matza* symbolizes and inculcates this faith (*Zohar* 2:183:2). It’s therefore not enough to make sure our bread is devoid of *chametz*. We must take the further step of ensuring that the lack of *chametz* transforms positively into the faith symbolized by *matza*.

Perhaps this explains the halachic distinction at the root of “guarding” *matzot*. The act of guarding transforms bread which is devoid of *chametz* into the symbol of our faith.

Mishnah: A Philosophy of Life By: Dovid Campbell

Pesachim 1:2 — Our Neverending Search for *Chametz*

Pesachim 1:2 adds a fascinating qualification to our strenuous search for *chametz*: One need not be concerned that a weasel or similar creature has dragged *chametz* into a location he has already checked. The mishnah's reasoning is straightforward. If we were to entertain such concerns, the logical consequences would ultimately be absurd. We would have to worry that a vermin might have brought *chametz* from a neighboring home, courtyard, or even town!

Tosafot raises an interesting challenge to this mishnah. The previous mishnah has already taught us that “any location that one does not bring *chametz* into does not require checking.” From this law it is clear that we are only concerned for places where *humans* bring *chametz*. Why should we ever have considered weasels in the first place?

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Ginsberg, in his *Mussar HaMishnah*, offers an illuminating suggestion with a profound moral takeaway. True, for areas where we do not bring *chametz*, there is no need to perform a *bedika*. But regarding an area that was known to have *chametz* and now carries an obligation of *bedika*, one must perform a truly thorough search. *Pesachim* 1:2 therefore comes to inform us that this thorough search need not extend all the way to a concern for weasel activity.

Rabbi Ginsberg believes this law expresses a deep spiritual truth about the process of *teshuva*. No individual is free from the “dust” of various transgressions—the unintended, often imperceptible errors that are entailed in being human. This low level of culpability is generally not liable to punishment. However, if one has already stumbled in a particular transgression—a particular “room” within the spiritual edifice of his soul—then he is obligated to perform a full *bedika* in that domain, even including its “dust.”

If we extend Rabbi Ginsberg's allegorical insight into the mishnah, I believe we can find a lesson for the case of the weasel as well. Sometimes, we decide to thoroughly repair some aspect of our personalities, totally sweeping away even the dust of past transgressions. We remain vigilant, performing regular self-assessments, and resolve to never return to our old ways. And then, suddenly, inexplicably, we find that we have stumbled once again. In such cases, it may be appropriate to recall the weasel of our mishnah. Much like our physical homes, the contents of our inner spiritual homes are sometimes beyond our control (see *Berachot* 31b-32a; *Tzidkat HaTzaddik* 40).

Sforno on the Parsha

By: Nochum Spiegel

Thanksgiving and Pesach

The *parshiot* of *Korbanot* contain a range of laws with very specific details. Sforno explains many of them as providing the offerer with the opportunity to contribute to the overall spiritual growth of *Am Yisrael*.

To correct a situation where one sinned in action, using their physical body to defy G-d's word, parts of a *korban* are given to the *Kobanim*. This portion will serve to sustain the body's of those whose primary involvement is *avodat Hashem* (Sforno *Vayikra* 1:2). The skins and hides of animals which are not burned on the *mizbeach* are given to the *Kobanim* as well. They are the ones enjoined with teaching and instructing *Bnei Yisrael* in the ways of Hashem. The skins will be used to create parchment upon which *Sifre Torah* will be written, a primary tool necessary to further educate the people (Sforno, *Kavanot HaTorah*). Our *parsha* introduces *Korban Todah* (thanks), where man has an opportunity to proclaim the praise of Hashem directly to the people.

In the category of *Korban Shelamim* (peace, wholeness), where one acknowledges the constant good which G-d blesses us with, there is included the *Korban Todah*. It is brought on account of a specific act of G-d's kindness where a person was saved from a dangerous situation. The *Todah* has unique features among the *Shelamim* in that it has a shorter time frame for eating (that day and the following night) and is brought with forty different types of loaves. Additionally ten of those loaves are made from *chametz*, something not common in the *korban* ritual. Sforno explains (*Vayikra* 7:11, *Amar HaGaon*) that the purpose of this *korban* is to praise Hashem and proclaim the Divine intervention which saved him. "With the abundance of loaves more people are invited to partake and the publicization of G-d's miracle will be greater". The limited time frame also forces the offerer to invite more guests in order to finish the food before the deadline (see Abarbanel). They will inquire of the cause of this special occasion and as the benefactor shares his story he will be a catalyst to both praise and raise the consciousness of Hashem amongst the people.

Sforno explains that the *chametz* component of the *korban* symbolizes the *yetzerhara*/physicality of our being which often hampers our ability to advance in our service of Hashem (see *Talmud Berachot* 17a). This person had sinned in the past leading to the situation where his life was put in danger as a consequence. Nevertheless, Hashem had saved him and it is in this context that his salvation should be viewed.

Many of the themes of the *Todah* are found in *Korban Pesach* and on *Seder* night. A limited time frame and a large amount of food requires groups of people to gather together with a focus on publicizing the miracles in Egypt. We must speak of our disgrace as the first stage on our road to redemption, with the ultimate goal of thanking and praising Hashem for the kindness He has shown us throughout the generations.