

What's wrong with Chametz? What's right with Matzah?

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Those of you who are about to make Pesach are surely familiar with:

שמות יג

7. Unleavened cakes shall be eaten during the seven days, and no leaven shall be seen of yours [in your possession], and no leavening shall be seen of yours throughout all of your borders.

ז. מצות יאכל את שבֵּעַת
הַיָּמִים וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה לְךָ חֶמֶץ
וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה לְךָ שְׂאֵר בְּכָל גְּבֻלְךָ :

But since we have not had a Beis Hamikdash for a while,
may not be aware of:

ויקרא ב

11. No meal offering that you sacrifice to the Lord shall be made [out of anything] leavened. For you shall not cause to [go up in] smoke any leavening or any honey, [as] a fire offering to the Lord;

יא. כָּל הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרִיבוּ
לַיהוָה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה חֶמֶץ כִּי כָל
שְׂאֵר וְכָל דָּבֵשׁ לֹא תִקְטְרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ
אֲשֶׁה לַיהוָה :

WHY?

Approach #1

Rambam, The Guide to the Perplexed (3:46)

ומפני ש'עובדי עבודה זרה' לא היו מקריבים לחם, אלא שאור, והיו בוחרים להקריב הענינים המתוקים ומלחלים קרבניהם בדבש ... מפני זה הזהיר האלוה מהקריב "כל שאור וכל דבש"

"Due to the fact that the idolaters would sacrifice only leavened bread, and they would offer up all manner of sweet food and would smear their animal sacrifices with honey, ... therefore God warned us not to offer to Him any of these things, leaven or honey."

Sefer HaZohar 2:182

מאן דאכיל חמץ בפסח כמאן דפלח לע"ז איהו

Whoever eats chametz on Pesach is as if he prayed to an idol.

Rashi, Shmos 12:6

Moreover, they [the Israelites] were passionately fond of idolatry. [Moses] said to them, "Withdraw and take for yourselves" (Exod. 12:21). [He meant:] withdraw from idolatry and take for yourselves sheep for the mitzvah. —

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag on Korban Pesach

.... why specifically lamb? **Let's explain why eating lamb would be considered 'anti-Egyptian':**

Recall when Yaakov and his sons first went down to Egypt, Yosef was embarrassed by their profession, that they were shepherds, **for anyone who raised sheep was a 'to'eva' [an 'abomination'] to Egyptians.** (See Breishit 43:32.) ...when the Plagues began, Pharaoh first agreed that Bnei Yisrael could offer their korbanot in Egypt, but not in the desert. **To this offer Moshe replied, should Am Yisrael offer 'to'evas Mitzrayim' [an abomination to the Egyptians] in Egypt, would they not be stoned? (See Shmot 8:22.)**

....it becomes quite clear that offering a 'lamb' would be antithetical to Egyptian culture. Rashi's commentary on this pasuk seems to imply that a 'lamb' was considered a type of a god to the Egyptians, and hence offering a 'lamb' in Egypt would be a desecration in their eyes. [Sort of like burning someone's national flag. See Ramban 12:3!]

R. Menachem Kasher – Parallels between Chametz and Avoda Zara:

1. The prohibition of even seeing it.
2. The requirement to burn it, to eradicate its existence.
3. The prohibition not only of eating but of any manner of benefit from it.
4. The prohibition of even the most minuscule particle.

Approach #2
Gemara Berachos, 17a

רבי אלכסנדר, בתר צלותיה, אמר הכי, רבון העולמים
גלוי וידוע לפניך, שרצוננו לעשות רצונך, ומי מעכב? שאור
שבעסה!

Rabbi Alexandri would end his daily prayers with the following supplication: 'Master of the Universe, You know full well that it is our desire to act according to Your will; but what prevents us from doing so? - the yeast in the dough...'

Q: What is the symbolism here? Does it help explain both the prohibition of Chametz on Pesach and its inappropriateness for the *mizbeach/altar*?

Approach #3:

Rav Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv) in his commentary Ha'amek Davar

Commentary on Vayikra Ch. 2

כי כל שאר וכל דבש. קרא הכתוב כל דבר הממתיק ומטעים את המאכל דבש ע"ש
שהוא ראש הממתיקים. ובאשר ששאור הוא אמצעי הנעשה בידי אדם להוסיף על
הבריא מהבורא ית' ע"י תחבולות בני אדם מש"ה הזהיר הכתוב בבהמ"ק ללמדנו
דכל המתקרב יותר לה' ראוי למעט יותר בתחבולות אנוש.

...leaven is man-made, to add to that which Hashem made naturally – using human ingenuity. This is why the Torah forbade it in the Beis Hamikdash – because the closer we approach Hashem, the more fitting it is to limit expressions of human ingenuity...

But doesn't the Torah approve of Human ingenuity?

ולא יאכל חמץ. כדי להשריש הזכירה בלב ע"י איזה פעולה המראה ומזכיר זה הענין צויתי שלא יאכל חמץ. דמצה אין בה יתרון ע"י התחבולות ידי האדם להעלות העיסה יותר מהקמח והמים שנבראים ממנו ית'. משא"כ חמץ שולט במ תחבולות האדם להעלות העיסה ע"י שאור מש"ה הוא אות שקיום ישראל הוא רק ברוח ה'. ואפילו בעת שהיינו בא"י ומנהיגים מלוכה ומלחמת תנופה כדרך תחבולות האדם. כל התחבולות לא היו אלא כדי שיהא נראה כמעשה טבע לפי שאין הדור ראוי לנס נגלה אבל העיקר היה תלוי אם ה' היה יוצא בצבאותינו בהשגחה פרטית. וכש"כ בעת שישראל מפוזרים בעמים ידוע אשר אך השגחת ה' ורוח היהודית שבהם מאחדם ומקיימם בעולם:

....This is why matzah is the symbol that the Jewish people's continued existence is only made possible through Hashem's spirit. Even when we were in Eretz Yisrael and had a monarchy, fought wars, etc as do other societies, this was only to ensure that life appeared to be running natural, since the generation was not fit for open miracles. But our fate was the extent to which Hashem would engage Himself with us through Divine Providence. How much moreso at a time when Israel is dispersed amongst the nations, it's known that Hashem's Providence and our Jewish spirit, unite us and permit us to survive in the world...

- **How does the first commentary explain why Chametz is forbidden in the Beis Hamikdash?**
- **How does the second explain its prohibition during Pesach?**

שמות יד

(יג) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָעָם אֵל תִּירָאוּ הַתִּיַצְבוּ וַיֵּרֶאוּ אֶת יְשׁוּעַת ה' אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֲשֶׁר רְאִיתֶם אֶת מִצְרַיִם הַיּוֹם לֹא תִסְפוּ לְרְאֹתָם עוֹד עַד עוֹלָם:

(יד) ה' יִלָּחֶם לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם תַּחַרְשׁוּן .:

Stand by and witness the deliverance which the Lord will work for you this day; for the Egyptians that you see today you will never see again. **The Lord will battle for you**; you hold your peace."

Approach #4 – Rav Yoel Bin Nun

ויקרא כג

16. You shall count until the day after the seventh week, [namely,] the fiftieth day, [on which] you shall bring a new meal offering to the Lord.

טז. עד ממחרת השבת השביעית
תספרו חמשים יום והקרבתם
מנחה חדשה ליהוה:

17. From your dwelling places, you shall bring bread, set aside, two [loaves] [made from] two tenths [of an ephah]; they shall be of fine flour, [and] they shall be baked leavened, the first offering to the Lord.

יז. ממושבתיכם תביאו לחם
תנופה שתיים שני עשרנים סלת
תהיינה חמץ תאפינה בכורים
ליהוה:

Which חם is referred to here?

In the thanksgiving offering - three types of loaves are brought to the Temple: unleavened wafers - like our matzot; unleavened loaves like pita; and leavened loaves - like our bread.

Rav Bin-Nun:

Leaven represents fulfillment, a process which has gone its due course. The ultimate and supreme form of flour and water is a leavened loaf. Unleavened products, on the other hand, are "not yet" what they aspire to be...

The altar of God is not a place for leaven. Before God, we are all rough around the edges. We all have a way to go in reaching our own personal destiny. We have faults, room for improvement. We cannot express ourselves before God represented by the symbol of leaven, for we are at the beginning of a journey. We are the unleavened, still traveling on the tortuous road that is human and religious betterment.

So when do we bring leaven to the Temple? What is Shavuot?

Likewise, in the thanksgiving sacrifice where I express my release from a life-threatening situation, when saved from a serious illness or the like, we bring three loaves. The totally flat matza wafer, the unleavened pita loaf, and the fully risen loaf of bread. The offering describes the journey from the depths of desperation to the heights of health and life. The symbolism of this offering tells of the role that God played in breathing life into a seemingly hopeless, flat situation, granting hope and salvation.