

Rabbi Weiner's Passover Message 2020 - 5780

As we prepare for Passover, one of our most important religious responsibilities is to remove *chametz* (unleavened products) from our homes and places of business. It is one of the best known observances in all of Judaism. We are so strict about this obligation to rid ourselves of forbidden products that we even sell any *chametz* that we might have forgotten was in our possession or were otherwise unable to remove so that even in the most technical, legal sense we no longer own it.

Yet our Rabbis have added much to our understanding of the obligation to rid ourselves of *chametz* before Passover. They remind us that the difference between *chametz* and matzah is quite small. Imagine mixing flour and water together. What would happen? If the mixture is allowed to sit for up to 18 minutes and then baked, it is matzah. If it is allowed to sit for more than 18 minutes, even without adding yeast or another type of leavening agent, it is considered *chametz*. The difference between the two is small. So, in order to make sure that what is matzah, or unleavened does not become *chametz*, or leavened products, we must always strive to ensure that the outcome of our efforts is consistent with the means by which we achieve them.

Our Rabbis teach that *chametz* and leavening agents can be compared to pride and conceit. If controlled and channeled in a socially acceptable direction, these natural human emotions can often lead in a positive and uplifting direction. But if left unchecked *chametz* becomes a symbol of the evil inclination. Certainly, the Bible is talking about the physical removal of those products that are forbidden on Passover. Yet our Rabbis have added to our understanding of what it means to actually prepare for Passover. The removal of *chametz*, even the most minute and insignificant amount is necessary to observe Passover properly. Similarly, to enjoy the experience of freedom which is at the heart of the Passover observance, the preparation for the holiday must include an understanding of the constant battle each of us must constantly wage against pride and arrogance, and evil behavior in all of its guises and forms.

This battle was always on the mind of our Rabbis. In a world of extremes our Rabbis taught the value of balance and moderation. In a world of excess our Rabbis taught the virtue of self-restraint. And in a world of mediocre human behavior (or worse) our Rabbis taught us the value of holiness, and how each human being is capable of achieving it.

Let these ideas be on our mind as we work to prepare our homes and our hearts for the great festival of freedom which is but days away. *Chag Kasher V'Sameach*