

Vayikra 5777 **Spiritual Hametz**

Shabbat shalom.

You will have seen this on Danielle's desk recently. It is a form of agency that, when signed, entitles me to sell all of your hametz – in your homes, in your cars, anywhere you specify -to Shantee for the duration of Passover.

The selling of hametz – *mechirat hametz* – is a legal avoidance of the Torah and Rabbinic prohibition against keeping, selling or benefit from hametz – any food that contains even the smallest amount of oats, barley, wheat, spelt or rye – for the duration of Pesah. It means that if we have been unable to use or donate our hametz before Pesah, we don't have to destroy usable food and fall foul of another Torah prohibition against wasting food – *bal taschit*.

And I hope that the forms are going to come pouring into the office over the course of next week.

But on this week when we read in the Torah the first chapter of *Vayikra*, referred to in the Rabbinic tradition as dealing with 'pure things,' it might benefit us, as we steer our minds towards Pesah, to think a little more deeply about *hametz*. By doing so, we might reveal some additional dimensions of the festival that is coming, and give ourselves the opportunity to do a little spiritual, as well as physical, cleaning.

I want to begin with a verse from the book of Proverbs, the first half of which I cited at the Kaddish minyan for Ben Horwitz's father this week:

ner adonai nishmat adam/hofes kol hadrei baten

The human soul is God's candle/investigating all inward chambers

[2nd part – literally, all the chambers of the belly – the meaning is that the light of the spirit, G's candle, goes deeply inside to look into all the hidden corners]

It is our tradition to use a candle to search for *hametz* on the night before Pesah. The Kabbalah, our mystical tradition, and the Hasidic tradition that grew out of it, understand this verse as applying to that search. We use God's candle, our soul, to look into all the nooks and crannies, all the cornices and corners of our inmost being. The search for *hametz* becomes a spiritual journey, part of our preparation to celebrate what it means to be truly free.

What is this *hametz* that we are looking for?

According to our teachers, it isn't breadcrumbs or crackers. They understand that the nature of *hametz* is to swell or fester. And so the spiritual *hametz* that we are trying to clear away before Pesah is the parts of ourselves that have grown awry, multiplying like yeast in dough. Maybe it's little bad habits that have become big bad habits. Maybe it's little snarky thoughts that have become fullblown *lashon hara*, evil speech. Maybe it's little slips that have become big nasty behaviors. Or maybe it's little moments of idleness that have become five-hour Netflix binges. We can all identify our spiritual *hametz*. It can be little things – last year I posted a picture of my overflowing letter rack with the caption, *Cleaning out the hametz*. This is the time of year – almost at six months' distance from Yom Kippur – when we can take a little time to tackle what we would prefer to get rid of, what we would be lighter without.

I love how the verse puts the human soul together with the idea of God's candle. In addressing our spiritual obstacles sometimes just our soul and our will is enough. But sometimes we need an extra boost to dislodge those deepseated things that are so unwilling to come free. And for that we need an energy that's more than human – God's candle, illuminating the places we would not ordinarily see.

This week, many of us will be Pesah cleaning in earnest. Let's hope for a spiritual cleansing as well as a physical one.

And please – don't forget to get those forms into the office.

Shabbat shalom.