



Spring A TIME OF INTROSPECTION

Family, food, wine and *matzah*. While these are some of the most common associations of Pesach, it is also a time for personal introspection. We also have many philosophical questions – why are we so careful to get rid of every last *chametz* crumb in our homes? What’s the true meaning and symbolism of *chametz*? Is there more to this holiday than just an intensive spring cleaning?

The process of preparing bread (the quintessential *chametz*), mixing seeds of grain with water and yeast is a highly creative one. According to Rabbi David Fohrman,¹ the bread-maker himself becomes G-d-like, through ruling over the ingredients and molding them to suit his or her creative needs. However, Pesach is a unique time when the Jewish people are commanded to embody a different spirit – namely, to stop baking bread in a normal manner, to stop wielding that awesome G-d-like power for seven days, and to step back from the creative mindset that, when unchecked, often leads one to a sense of misplaced arrogance. Therefore, when we limit our bread making to *unleavened* bread, without the yeast rising, we are pulling back from this creative process. The holiday of Pesach, our annual disposal of *chametz*, serves as a stark reminder that only G-d is truly in charge of the world and all that occurs in it.

The Maharsha points out that yeast rising within the dough is symbolic of an inflation of our ego and the temptation to pursue all of our physical desires.² Some behavioral scientists posit that arrogance is often a front for internal fears. Hence, if *chametz* symbolizes arrogance, which

sometimes masks our fears, this will impact our existing relationships and our ability to develop new relationships. Only once we rid ourselves of our emotional *chametz* – arrogance and fears – will we succeed in our relationships and gain internal freedom.

This is the time we pay attention to our ego. We take a long hard look in the mirror and focus on our lives and for some, the way we date. According to Ted Leonhardt, feelings of pride and arrogance often serve as defense mechanisms.³ They are a method for hiding and/or compensating for our insecurities. We may reject others before being rejected by others. Some people are always looking at a potential relationship and searching for reasons why it just won’t work for them, instead of why it may work. Perhaps the other person went to the wrong school or is too tall or too short.

In her book “Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway,” Susan Jeffers states that to succeed in a relationship you must face your fears. A person must acknowledge the roots of their fears. This is never easy, as most people do not naturally possess this level of self-awareness. Most people cannot realize they are sabotaging their own relationships vis-a-vis their own arrogance and insecurities. Furthermore, we must recognize that we are often trying to avoid rejection or a negative emotional outcome. We need to take a long hard look and acknowledge that we can handle rejection or failure, and still stand tall. Fear can be managed best when it is recognized and confronted.

Most people will say they are not afraid. But are we truly being honest

with ourselves? Everyone who is human experiences fear at some point in their lives. Fear has a unique hold on us. Many of us are stuck in our ways and afraid to admit we do not want to change.

However, fear also leads to growth.

When one realizes that growth means facing fears, challenging comfort zones, one will own any areas requiring self-reflection and change and move forward. This is achieving real freedom; freedom from assumptions about the very specific type of person we need to be with, freedom from worrying we cannot handle the pain of rejection, freedom from fear and insecurities. We need to erase expectations of rejection and be more open to prospective matches and relationships. We need to broaden our horizons and date more wisely, with a greater level of self-awareness and self-esteem. This flexibility allows us to foster relationships and see if potential exists for a deep emotional connection.

Let us take the time to thoroughly self-introspect and remove the *chametz* in our lives. And, in doing so, we will overcome any arrogance and fears. May this freedom in examining our relationships bring personal happiness and fulfillment. *Dayeinu!*

1 Rabbi David Fohrman, Alephbeta.org, Parashat Emor.

2 Maharsha, Berachot 17a.

3 Ted Leonhardt, “How To Be a Success At Everything.”

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