

The Importance of Small Things in Space and Time

Small Physical Things: *Assur B'masbehu*

תלמוד בבלי, מסכת פסחים ל.

אמר רבא הלכתא חמץ בזמנו בין במינו בין שלא במינו אסור במשהו

Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Psachim 30a

Rava teaches that the law is that *chametz* at the time of Pesach, whether it is mixed with other *chametz* or with different substances, even a trace of *chametz* prohibits the entire mixture

Background: Rava teaches something unique about *chametz* in the world of prohibited foods. Most other prohibited foods can become nullified when it is a small fraction (1/60th) of the food mixture. This means that effectively, one tiny grain of *chametz* can render an entire pot of stew prohibited. *Why might this be the case? What is so "dangerous" about chametz that we must obliterate every trace of it to an extent far beyond the standard with prohibited foods?*

More Background: The Torah further prohibits even having possession of *chametz*, as well as a much harsher 'punishment' for its consumption than other prohibited foods. *How might this affect the stringency? What does this teach us about chametz?*

Even More Background: The prohibition of *chametz* is time-bound. In other words, throughout the year, *chametz* could be glatt-kosher, but for only the week of Pesach, its prohibition is the strongest in the entire world of prohibited foods. *How do you think the time aspect influences the strength of the prohibition, if at all? What does this teach us about how we relate to things in time?*

A 'Flash' of Inspiration and Pesach

ר' צדוק הכהן (פולין), צדקת הצדיק א

ראשית כניסת האדם לעבודת ה' צריך להיות בחפזון כמו שמצינו בפסח מצרים שהיה נאכל בחפזון ולא פסח דורות. מפני שהתחלה לנתק עצמו מכל תאות עולם הזה שהוא מקושר בהם צריך לשמור הרגע שמתעורר בו רצון ה' ולחפז על אותו רגע למהר לצאת מהם אולי יוכל. ואחר כך שוב ילך במתינות ולאט כדן פסח דורות.

Rav Tzadok HaKohen (19th c. Poland), Tzidkat ha-Tzadik 1

A person's entry into the service of Gd must be with haste, as we find that the Paschal offering brought in Egypt was eaten in haste, which was not the case with the Paschal offering brought in later generations. Because when a person begins to sever himself from all the physical desires of this world to which he is attached, **he must guard the moment in which the will of Gd stirs up within him, and make haste in that moment to leave them, perhaps he will succeed.** Afterwards, he can once again proceed with moderation and slowness as is the law regarding the Paschal offering brought in later generations.

What is Rav Tzadok teaching here? He is referencing the difference in the Torah of how the Israelites participated in the first Pesach, as they left Egypt, in contradistinction to the subsequent celebrations of Pesach in the desert. The primary difference that Rav Tzadok is highlighting is that when leaving Egypt, the Israelites performed the mitzvah with haste and alacrity, and that component was not involved in the later years. Rav Tzadok is teaching that this is connected to the moment that one has a flash of inspiration.

What do you think? How do you respond to flashes of inspiration? Of creativity? How do you capture them and make them meaningful? Can we live lives of constant inspiration?



A Nesiya Teaching for Pesach

We want to suggest that all three of these aspects are deeply connected. The incredible stringency of the prohibition of *chametz* may be connected to the unique nature of the time-bound prohibition of something that is familiar and permitted at all other times. Since we are accustomed to eating *chametz* throughout the year, it requires extra caution and awareness during this one week. The things that I am most likely to take for granted since they are present in my daily life throughout the year, are the things that I may forget to pay attention to. The prohibition of *chametz* even at the level of one tiny grain is calling to us to pay attention to the details in our daily lives. To pay attention to those things that are precious, yet we may take for granted. Each item, each moment of our daily routines could become great moments of potential, when I focus my awareness on them. (This is not to suggest that *chametz* itself is so precious to us, rather it is training us to have consciousness in our daily routines of how unique and precious each moment could be.)

This brings us to Rav Tzadok's teaching with which he opens his entire treatise about spiritual growth. He is speaking to the very human experience of a tiny flash of inspiration and how to capture it. That flash is a precious gift which may not come again, and we should not delay when it comes. If we spoke above about the routine and familiar and the potential that exists there, Rav Tzadok is drawing our awareness to that which is outside of our familiar routine. "Seize the day!" says Rav Tzadok and start building—don't let this moment pass you by!

Our lives are full of many precious things, people and moments that we may take for granted. There are those that are familiar to us as we meet them regularly. There are also the ideas and people that we only encounter in rare flashes of opportunity. Both of these categories offer incredible opportunity for growth and building inclusive and diverse communities and lives. The focus on the details of Pesach challenges us to re-evaluate how we think about each small detail and opportunity.

Pesach teaches us to pay close attention to the small things. Through the prohibition of *chametz*, I am sensitized to the small things in my life that are precious, and through the suggestion of seizing and capturing the small flashes of inspiration, I am able to build a life of meaning and growth when a moment of opportunity arrives, inviting me to take a step (or a leap!) in my growth and development.;

May this Pesach help us to seize opportunities and develop awareness of all the goodness that surrounds us!