

## Cleansing the Leaven (Chametz)

By Hannah Nesher

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Preparing for Passover means the ultimate in spring cleaning! All over Israel, every man, woman and child is busy cleaning, cleaning, cleaning....every nook and cranny, every closet, shelf and drawer must be emptied, sorted and wiped in order to make sure that our dwelling places are free of yeast in obedience to the eternal commandment God gave to the children of Israel.

**"Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel." (Exodus 12:15)**

Only matzah (unleavened bread), therefore, may be eaten during the entire week of Passover. Trust people, however, to take something simple and make it as complicated as possible. Rabbinical Judaism has taken this single commandment and transformed it into a system that would weary the hardest of women! All dishes, cutlery, pots and pans, even dishrags must be a special 'kosher for Passover' set. The entire kitchen must be made new.



*Boiling pots to make them 'Kosher for Passover'*

Israeli supermarkets begin to sell everything 'kosher for Passover' - even the shelving paper is marked kosher for the feast. Once, teasing the cashier a bit in good fun, we asked if she could make sure that the diapers we were buying were kosher for Pesach (Hebrew word for Passover). In all seriousness, she actually got on the phone and called customer service to ask. ☺

## B'dikat Chametz

The Jewish people have a beautiful custom called b'dikat chametz (checking for leaven). The eve before Passover, the leader of the household, usually the father, holds a candle and feather and guides his family around the house. With the lights extinguished, they search in the darkness for any remnant of chametz.

The light of the candle searches out every nook and cranny

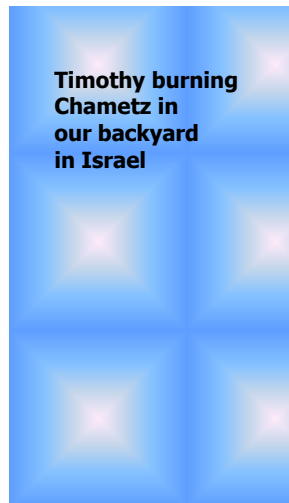


for the crumbs of bread that have been hidden there ahead of time by the mother. Each crumb of bread is found with exclamations of delight, “*Oh! There it is! I found one!*”, until the very last crumb of leaven is removed. These are swept away using a feather into a bag which will be burned the next morning.



This special ceremony demonstrates how the light of God’s word, (symbolized by the candle), searches our hearts for any pride or arrogance that may be lurking, hidden in the darkness. The feather symbolizes the work of the Holy Spirit to sweep the sin away; and the fire shows how God destroys this leaven, for God is a consuming fire!

On the morning before Passover, one can see little fires burning all over Israel, as each family burns their small pile of chametz while a special prayer is recited in case any has been missed.



**Timothy burning Chametz in our backyard in Israel**



## Yeshua the Messiah cleanses the chametz out of His Father’s house

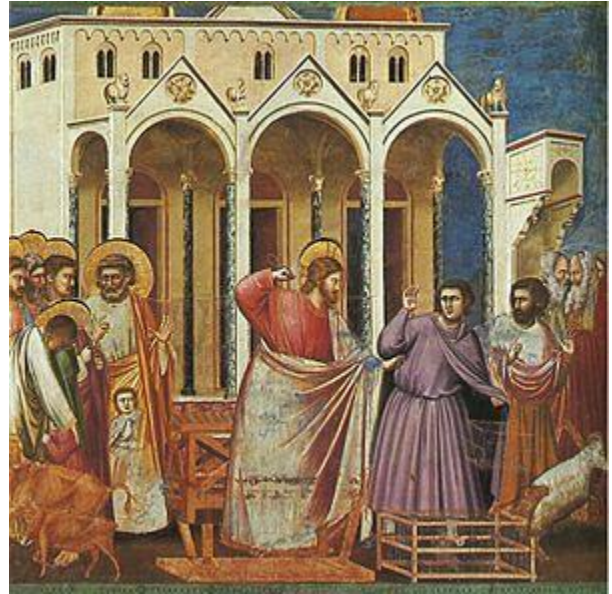
This custom of cleansing the chametz (leaven) just before Passover is so essential to the heart of God that even His son, Yeshua Hamashiach (the Messisah) carried out his own ‘b’dikat chametz’ on His Father’s house.

**“When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover,** Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.

So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.

To those who sold doves he said, **“Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!”** (John 2:13-16)

Once we understand the Jewish roots of our faith in Messiah Yeshua, these events become so much more meaningful! It is no coincidence that Yeshua chose this exact time to drive the money changers out of the Temple.



*Casting out the money changers by Giotto, 14th century*

As a Jew, Yeshua understood that the time had come in preparation for Pesach (Passover) to cleanse His Father’s house from all the chametz – all the sin, wickedness and uncleanness that was represented by people using the Temple to make a profit.

### **Why such a Fuss?**

Why such a fuss over a little leaven? The Hebrew word for leaven, chametz, is as interesting as it is revealing. It is closely related to the word **chamutz, which means ‘sour’**. For example, a cucumber in Hebrew is a ‘melafafon’; a pickle (soured cucumber) is a ‘melafafon chamutz’.

We can see from the hidden meanings in the Hebrew language itself that chametz may be anything that makes us ‘sour’: bitterness, resentment, unforgiveness, and hatred. I’m sure we all know of someone whom we would consider ‘sour’ (or maybe we ourselves have gone through times of being an old ‘sour-face’.)

When we cleanse ourselves of this hidden chametz – all those negative attitudes that are ‘souring’ our outlook on life, then joy may return once again to our heart and a smile to our face.



**Yeast (leaven) symbolizes sin** especially that of arrogance, boasting, conceit, and pride. Just as a little yeast affects the whole dough, causing it to become puffed up, so does even a bit of the sin of pride and arrogance cause one to think more highly of himself than he ought.

**“Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?”** (1 Corinthians 5:6)



A baker prepares yeasted dinner rolls.

We must deal with the leaven in our own hearts, knowing that arrogance is not pleasing to the Lord and often pride goes before a fall:

**“Pride goes before a fall. The Lord hates a haughty spirit.”** (Proverbs 16:18)

The sin of arrogance is deadly – even the mighty Titanic cruise ship sunk due to man's arrogance. All the experts believed that the Titanic was unsinkable, but God snapped the ship like a toothpick and many lives were lost.

An overgrowth of yeast in the body may become a systemic infection that must be dealt with lest it cause serious physical problems. So too must we deal with the ‘chametz’ within the institution of the Church.

Paul uses this imagery of cleansing the chametz and Passover to exhort a mostly Gentile Corinthian Church to get rid of the sin of malice and wickedness in their midst and then to keep the Festival of Passover:

**“Get rid of the old yeast (leaven), so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Messiah, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.**

**Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”** (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)



Hand made *shmura matzah*

**Chametz can also represent false teachings.** Yeshua warned people **to beware of the chametz (leaven) of the Pharisees.** By this Yeshua was not referring to bread, but to their teachings that did not align with the Word of God and that was leading people astray. (Matthew 16:12)

**“How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”** (Matthew 16:11)

The Apostle Paul also warned the Gentile Church to beware the sin of pride and arrogance particularly in their relationship with the Jewish people.

In the Book of Romans, Paul reminded those who have been supernaturally grafted into the natural olive tree, by the mercy and grace of God, not to boast over the branches:

**“If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.”** (Romans 11:17 & 18)

We must be on our guard against the **false teaching of replacement theology** in the Church which has led many astray. This ‘leaven’ in some churches teaches that God has rejected the Jewish people and that now the Church is the ‘New Israel’, when in fact Scriptures is clear that God will never forsake His people Israel and will always keep covenant with them.

**“For the LORD will not reject his people; he will never forsake his inheritance.”** (Psalm 94:14)

Arrogance and pride can prevent us from understanding God’s plans and purposes for the Jewish people, Israel, and the role of the Church.

Paul wrote, **“Do not be conceited (arrogant), Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in and so all Israel will be saved.”** (Romans 11:25-28)

Israel has not stumbled and fallen beyond recovery. In truth, it is God who placed a temporary blindness upon the Jewish people, but it was only in order that salvation would come to the Gentiles, to make Israel jealous.

**“Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.”** (Romans 11:11)

God can and will lift the veil from the Jewish people’s eyes to see their Messiah Yeshua, that they may also be grafted back into the olive tree.

**“...for God is able to graft them in again.”** (Romans 11:23)

And when the Jewish people accept Yeshua as their Messiah, it will mean resurrection life for the entire world!

**“For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”** (Romans 11:15)

As we celebrate the Festival of Passover, may our hearts be cleansed of all chametz (leaven), that we may walk in humility, with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Amen v’amen.

### About the Author:

Hannah Nesher grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior.

She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, writing and teaching about the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

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