

## A Teaching from Rabbi Weintraub:

### Passover: External and internal observance

Nisan 5769 | April 2009

Passover is a time of many rituals. We initiate changes in prayer and Torah readings a month before the holiday. We give special monetary donations and study dedicated sections of Talmud. We strictly separate food and kitchen items, and we scrub, search, burn, fast and immerse.

As all rituals, those of Passover have two aspects, *halacha* and *aggada*. *Halacha* refers to the practice and observance, the normative, legal, external character of the ritual. *Aggada* (literally, story) refers to the intention and spirit surrounding the ritual, to its religious meaning in the life of the observant individual and community.

#### *Halacha*

There are three Biblical *Mitzvot*, or commandments, about Passover: 1) eat *Matzah* 2) refrain from eating or owning *Chametz*; and 3) tell the story.

*Matzah* is unleavened bread, traditionally made of flour and water that are baked in eighteen minutes or less from the admixture of water.

*Chametz* refers to leavening or souring agents, or foods containing such agents. Thus, *Chametz* includes bread, cereal and grains, and for Ashkenazic Jews even foods such as rice, millets and beans which are not chametz intrinsically, but are made into flours that can be confused with “chometzdik” flours.

Further, fermented foods such as vinegars, or virtually all liquors (minus approved wine and fruit brandies), and many canned, bottled and processed foods contain leavening agents (cornstarch, corn syrup, etc.) are not Kosher for Passover. For more details, consult the Rabbinical assembly Passover Guide at [www.rabbinicalassembly.org](http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org)

In the weeks before Passover, we sell all *Chametz* foods and utensils. On the day before, we search for, burn, or verbally nullify our ownership of any *Chametz* still remaining in our possession. This year, this should be completed by Wednesday morning, April 8, 10:45 A.M.

Also, this year, because the Holiday immediately precedes Shabbat, some special arrangements should be made to prepare food for Shabbat. It is permitted to cook on the Holiday (Thursday and Friday) only for that particular day. It is also completely forbidden to cook on Shabbat. However, in order not to diminish the oneg/pleasure of Shabbat, the Rabbis created a legal device to allow cooking done on the Festival to be used for Shabbat. This ritual is called Eruv Tavshilin, “the mixing of dishes”.

One person in each household should follow this ritual, which takes place on Wednesday afternoon, April 8, before candle lighting. Two foods are prepared and set aside, usually a matzah and a hard-boiled egg or piece of chicken or fish. The food is reserved for Shabbat and this allows us to continue cooking and baking for Shabbat over the Festival.

The following Blessing is said in Hebrew (and English also if you choose):

*Baruch Atta Adon' Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam Asher Kidshanu B'Mitz'votav V'tzivanu Al*

*Mitzvat Eruv.*

Blessed are you, Adon' our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, who made us holy through Mitzvot and commanded us to observe the Mitzvah of Eruv.

The following declaration may be said in any language one understands (the Aramaic and Hebrew are in our Shabbat Siddur Sim Shalom on page 306):

"By means of his mixture we are permitted to bake, cook, warm, kindle lights (from a pilot or flame lit before the Holiday), and make all the necessary preparation during the Festival for Shabbat, we and all who live in this place."

### ***Aggada***

What is the "story", the meaning of all of this?

Above all Passover is a celebration of *Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim*, the wondrous liberation from Egypt. *Mitzrayim* comes from the root, *Tzar*, meaning narrow or constricted. Passover, (which the Talmud calls another Rosh Hoshana, another New Year with possibilities for *teshuva* repentance) can liberate us from suffocating habits. Our calendar recognizes that the expansiveness we felt on Rosh Hoshana and Yom Kippur has weakened, and the confining habits of winter have strengthened.

How do we liberate ourselves as Spring approaches?

The spiritual challenge in life is not so much getting ahead or moving on, as of reaching up, of seeing the Heavenly in earthly affairs. The Kabbalists imagined human life as partaking of *arba olamot*, four worlds. These are the world of *assiyah*, or action, of practicality; *yetzirah*, formation, the world of feeling and language; *bri'ah*, creation, the world of initiative and intellect; and *atzilut*, nearness, the world of pure will and spirit.

It is important not to dismiss this view as silly or to take it in a simple, literal fashion. As many religious and psychological paradigms, *aaba olamot* is a schema to help people understand the challenge of being alive and improving the world.

In this fashion, we may see our work of leaving *Mitzrayim*, the narrow place:

*Assiyah*: Action/materiality. How am I treating my body? Has it worsened over the winter? What are the *Chametz*, the fermentation, the addictions, which are constricting my physical freedom and from which the dietary changes of Passover may free me?

*Y'tzirah*: Formation/feeling. Since the soul searching and forgiveness of Rosh Hoshana, what dependencies have I taken on with my spouse, partner, friends, children, parents, colleagues? Where am I locked into passive roles? Where do I suppress my anger or joy? Why?

*Bri'ah*: Creativity/Intellect. Are we satisfied with our Jewish knowledge? Have we in general stimulated our minds? If we had "thoughts" about writing, or playing the piano again, or going on a retreat with a son or daughter, did we act on them?

*Atzilut*: Intimacy/Spirit. Where is my relationship with G-d? Is my life more integrated than it was last year? Am I less despairing? Do I have a vision for which I am working?

These are the questions that should accompany buying horseradish and cleaning the cupboards. I look forward to joining you in fulfilling the *Halacha* and exploring the *Aggada* of this extraordinary Holiday.