



A Personal Reflection on Passover Preparation

By Rabbi Yamin Levy

Preparing for Passover in my parents' home was always special. The night before Pesach was especially exciting. After an entire month of cleaning every nook and cranny in the house (though my siblings and parents remind me that I had a way of disappearing whenever the cleaning was taking place), a sense of freshness and newness permeated our entire apartment. The year-round utensils were stored away, and the Passover things, many of them heirlooms with their own history and tales, were brought out.

It was a long day for us, waiting for nightfall and with it one of my favorite rituals, *Bedikat Hametz*, searching for the *Hametz*. The Bible states: "Seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses" and "There shall not be seen with you any leaven in your borders seven days." We know these two prohibitions, *Bal Yera'eh* and *Bal Yimatze*, well. Leaven is not to be seen or found in your possession during the Passover Holiday. Not only must the Jew remove all visible leaven, but he or she must verbally renounce ownership of all *Hametz* that might unknowingly exist in the house-hold. So even though Passover was still hours away, we knew *Hametz*, the leaven products, were off limits. If we were going to eat something leaven between now and the next day, it was to be eaten on the balcony of our third floor apartment or outside the home, lest crumbs drop on the immaculate floors.

The magical evening began with my mother wrapping 10 pieces of bread in paper and hiding them around the house. She did this because there was no way my father would ever find *Hametz* in our home the night before Pesach. And unless *Hametz* was planted, the blessing he would recite for this ritual may be considered to be in vain. I would watch her carefully wrap each piece of bread, making sure that it was tightly sealed so that no crumbs would escape and be left behind after the bread was collected.

Now, there were rules as to where my mother was permitted to hide the *Hametz*. There was an unstated understanding that she would be reasonable. Everyone was tired, and the last thing my father wanted was to spend all night searching for a "runaway" piece of bread (though I do recall one year my father could only find nine pieces of bread and my mother forgot where she hid the tenth one!). While I was always tempted to follow my mother around the house and see where she would hide them, I can't remember ever doing so. I do remember the long wait, which meant it was dark enough, and my father was prepared. He would gather the entire family around him, and with a plate in one hand and a candle in the other, he would recite the blessing: "*Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam Asher Kideshanu Bemizvatov Vetzivanu Al Biur Hametz.*"

“Blessed art Thou Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us by his commandments and commanded us concerning the removal of *Hametz*.”

All the lights in the house would be turned off. This final search could only be done by candlelight, not by sunlight or electricity (a flashlight is permitted). We were not allowed to speak while my father searched, though we certainly giggled and laughed plenty as we trailed behind him.

My father would go from room to room, looking into every corner, under beds and dressers. Occasionally he would look under one of his son's *kippah* or hold up a shoe while looking at us as if wondering whether he should include it with the rest of the *Hametz*. As a gleaming piece of *Hametz* was found, my father would make a guttural sound that expressed both excitement and urgency, and one of us would rush to pick it up and place it on the plate.

The mystery and awe of the moment would be overwhelming. I often wished the evening would never end. After my father would successfully complete his task (not without some frustration) he declared the house to be *Hametz*-free indeed. Then he would recite the declaration renouncing ownership of any *Hametz* he may have missed or might be in his possession without his knowledge: “May any type of *Hametz* in my possession, which I have neither seen nor removed, be annulled and considered (as ownerless) as the dust of the earth.”

As he read these words my mother, tired from the preparations of the holiday, would look on with pride and with love. I often wonder what she thought about during those special moments. The matriarch of a family that proudly observes the traditions transmitted to her by her parents might very-well wonder if her children will prepare the festival when they are parents. Will they too afford their children the wealth and beauty of this tradition? There was no way she could know that her children (all seven of them) would cherish those moments and make every attempt to replicate them for her grandchildren.

How would my parents have guessed that their tired bodies but joyful expressions would instill a love for God, Israel, and a commitment to a tradition that no number of books or hours of study could.

In just a few days, my wife will carefully wrap pieces of bread with paper. And I, with my boys and daughter trailing behind, will search for the *Hametz* in a way similar to how it was done in my parents' home. I can only pray that the example my wife and I set for our children will develop into a love and passion for our tradition, and one day they too will pass it on to their children.

