



Around the Shabbat Table

Shabbat Tzav / Shabbat Hagadol 5762 March 2002

*This week's writer: Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan, Director of Nassau/Queens Services,
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Introduction

This Shabbat, on which the second portion of the book of Leviticus (Vayikra) is read, is also called *Shabbat Ha-gadol*, the Great Shabbat. There are several theories as to why the Shabbat immediately preceding Pesach is called *Shabbat Ha-gadol*. The most prominent thought is that in olden days, there was rarely a *d'var Torah* or sermon given on Shabbat. On the Shabbat before Pesach however, it became customary for the rabbi of a community to deliver a *d'var Torah* with instructions for Pesach preparations. As a result, this Shabbat took on a special characteristic. In addition, some communities even had the custom of reading parts of the *Hagaddah* on the afternoon of this Shabbat.

Most of us are now preparing for Pesach, in whatever way we may celebrate. As a matter of fact, research has shown that more American Jews participate in a Pesach Seder than in any other holiday observance!

At this time, we celebrate our freedom, while also committing ourselves to helping all oppressed people to reach freedom.

Questions for Your Family's Discussion

When your family sits down together this Shabbat, or at your Seder, here are some questions for you to wrestle with:

1. According to Jewish mystical traditions, *chametz*, leavened products which are not eaten on Pesach, is symbolic of *chametz*, leavening, which we have in our hearts. That is, just as the leaven in bread makes it rise up to appear much larger than its essence really is, it is the leaven in our thoughts and emotions that leads us to haughtiness and arrogance. That, in turn, leads us to wrongdoing. Ask your family members to discuss what is "*chametz-like*" in their personalities. How can each of us overcome our personal *chametz*?
2. The exodus from Egypt is viewed as the model for many oppressed peoples who have been freed in the past (for example, enslaved African-Americans wrote "spirituals," songs that often used the exodus as a model for the freedom they dreamed of before

the Civil War). What are examples of peoples who have been enslaved and then attained freedom? How were their histories similar to the story of the exodus from Egypt? How were their stories different?

3. What are some examples of liberations occurring in our time? Think, for example, of Afghan women who, until recently, were barred from education. Are there other examples? Where are there still people who are oppressed? What is our responsibility, as Jews, to them?

Some Texts to Wrestle With

- I. Some people, using the metaphor of leavened products as applying to the "leavening" in our hearts, recite this prayer when burning the *chametz* on the morning before Pesach:

May it be Your will, Lord, our God and God of our ancestors,
that just as I remove the *chametz* from my house and from my possession, so
shall You remove all the negative forces.

Remove the spirit of impurity from the earth, remove our evil
inclination from us, and grant us a heart of flesh to serve
You in truth.

Make all wickedness be consumed in smoke, and remove the dominion of evil
from the earth. Remove with a spirit of destruction and a spirit of judgment all
that distress the *Shekhina* (God's presence), just as You destroyed Egypt and its
idols in those days, at this time. Amen.

What is the "*chametz*" that makes you behave in ways that are different than who you really are? What prayer would you write to ask help in neutralizing your personal "*chametz*?"

- II. The Torah tells us that, at the exodus from Egypt, Moses led the men of Israel in singing praises to God. It then goes on to state that:

Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam responded: Sing onto the Lord, for He is highly exalted: the horse and his rider He has thrown into the sea.

(Exodus 15: 20-21)

Why do you think Miriam and the women used musical instruments and dance, as well as song, while the men only use song? One suggestion, from the *K'li Yakar*, a classical commentary on the Torah: The women knew that, in order to experience God's presence, they had to be in a state of special joy. But, the women had suffered particularly in Egypt, as the children they had carried and bore were taken from them by the Egyptians. In order to overcome their sadness and achieve the level of rejoicing through which they could experience God, they utilized instruments and dance.

What are the things that make you feel more spiritually connected? Music? Dance? Art? How can they bring us closer to God's presence?

Towards an Action Agenda

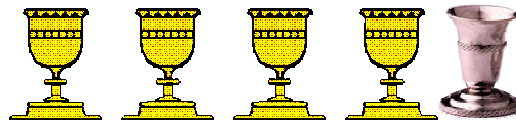
Learn about how our Jewish community helps supply Passover food to the needy through Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services. You can make a contribution, or volunteer to help in the future:

<http://www.jbfcs.org/jconn/Families/passover.htm>

Learn about how one organization is helping Israel to take care of its Passover and other needs of impoverished people. Listen to this segment on Jerusalem Post Radio:

<http://www.jpostradio.com/Archive/old/HTML/Holidays.shtml>

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Sameach!



Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: www.bjeny.org

Around the Shabbat Table is a project of the Nassau / Queens Center of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York. This project has been funded through a generous grant by the Long Island Program Services Committee of UJA-Federation of New York.