

# SEARCH PARTY

*by Rabbi Shlomo Freundlich*

As the holiday of Passover approaches we become ever so careful to halachically (according to Jewish law) sensitize our homes and rid them of every trace and vestige of chometz (leaven, that food which is forbidden to own or derive benefit from on Passover). This is the season when normally docile housewives (and husbands) assume a more aggressive posture with their families in laying down tough rules about what foods can be eaten in which rooms. We all get caught up on some level with Passover fever. After all, the Torah proscribes a Jew's relationship to chometz on three different levels: (1) eating (2) owning (3) and deriving benefit and pleasure from it. It stands to reason that some of the Passover "madness" in preparing one's home is to be expected and perhaps even justified.

The Zohar, the basic work of Kabbalah compiled by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, however, teaches us that the yetzer harah (evil inclination) within us is compared to chometz, and just as we assiduously seek out and destroy all of our physical chometz, we must similarly eliminate from within ourselves all attitudes and characteristics that distance us from Torah.

Do we carefully measure the words we utter to our friends and loved ones with the same care and attention that we give to the scouring of our ovens? Do we allow the illuminating lessons of Torah to direct our lives in the same way as we direct our lit candles towards the dark cracks and crevices in our homes during the Bedikat Chometz (the ritualistic ceremony on the eve of Passover in which we search our homes for chometz by candlelight)?

The Shulchan Aruch, the code of Jewish law, teaches us that the search for chometz must extend even to our pockets. Do we check our pockets to determine that the dollars that fill them have been earned with honesty and full adherence to Jewish law? The evil inclination is a tough adversary. To be equal to his challenge one must be constantly vigilant. This can be accomplished through diligent and regular Torah study.

The halacha (Jewish law) tells us that dough can be kneaded for hours without chometz setting in. As long as the dough is being worked, the chometz process is impeded. But the moment our efforts with the dough are relaxed, the chometz process begins. Likewise, the Jew attempting to purge the chometz from within himself knows that there's no accommodation with the evil inclination. The moment that we relax our efforts in the service of Hashem, we have lost a strategic battle with the yetzer harah. Let's hope that as we celebrate Passover this year, we, as well as our food, will be kosher for Passover.

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