

# CHAPTER 8: SEASONAL MITZVOT □ PARAGRAPH 1

*by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman*

Matzah is a fairly flavorless flat-bread, yet it draws the attention of millions during Passover and also helps to explain the human condition. But we'd have to explicate its spiritual core to understand how that's so, so let's start off by delving back into antiquity with Ramchal's insights.

The world was a spiritually dark and opaque place in the days before the Jewish Nation were enslaved, freed, and granted the Torah. And we ourselves were just another more or less nondescript brew of families and tribes among many others, with some words and ideas of our own yet hardly distinct. But that all changed with the Exodus.

For that's when our people were honed into a nation with a particular responsibility -- to rectify the world's opacity. And we were to begin by eliminating all forms of leavening ("chametz") from our diet and replacing it with matzah during Passover.

Why of all things were we warned against chametz, though? It's based on the fact that bread is mankind's most basic foodstuff and the substance from which we draw the resources to do what we need to, and that leavening is a necessary element of it.

After all, leavening is what gives bread its heft, tang, and touch. Since it's such a fundamental element of our most basic food, it stands to reason that it also contributes in large measure to what we're made of, including our yetzer harah (our pull toward more doughy earthiness over Divinity). So when we do without leavened bread on Passover and are nourished by matzah instead (with all its own mystical overtones and suggestions), we help diminish the yetzer harah's pull upon us.

But it's important to realize that despite the problems it presents to us in our worship and spiritual growth, the yetzer harah also plays a vital and fundamental role in the workings of the universe.

Now, this touches upon some very complex concepts in Jewish Thought that would take us far afield from our discussion. But it comes to this, in short: without a pull toward earthiness we'd be subsumed in G-dliness and be utterly unable to elect to do right over wrong on our own (after all, how could one ever opt for wrong when he's in the clear presence of G-d?). While it would seem to be in our own best interests to be "coerced" that way to choose right, that's actually not true. For we were created to freely and purposefully choose to do what's right of our own volition.

So it would run counter to G-d's plans for the universe if we were to always be without a yetzer harah, as we are when we ingest matzah (in the right spirit, that is -- in one of full faith and utter

surrender to the Divine Will). And that's why we're only charged to subsist on matzah for the week of Passover.

Knowing what we do about it now, we see why eating matzah is the primary accomplishment of Passover (which is also known as the Festival of Matzahs), and how all the other rituals of the seder night are necessarily connected to it.

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