

ELIMINATE ALL THE BUGS IN THE PESACH PROGRAM!

by Rabbi Label Lam

For seven days you shall eat unleavened cakes, but on the preceding day you shall clear away all leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leaven from the first day until the seventh day that soul shall be cut off from Israel. (Shemos 12:15)

These words strike fear in the heart Jewish Mothers and entire families for the last 3327 years. It propels the entire household into a frenetic search for that stuff called Chametz whether it's liquid or solid, whether visible or even microscopic. It's a good thing! We are looking to arrest and destroy that which represents negativity in our lives so we can be free.

However, this is no mere morality play with symbolic figures playing metaphoric roles. It's as real as real can be. The Torah warns those who dare to violate the prohibition of eating Chametz on Pesach with a "punishment" of "Kores" - being cut off. It sounds to the untutored ear too serious for such a seemingly slight misstep. Why would the Merciful One throttle His people with fearful warnings? Why are we so responsive?

A group of students this week were involved in a special pre-Pesach project that involved checking lettuce (that qualifies for Marror at the Pesach Seder) for bugs. Besides my offering a bounty of ten cents for every bug discovered, I was asked by the Rebbe to give a brief pre-activity introduction. It was a gruesome experience and in the end it cost me megabucks. In the beginning, I shared the following scenario:

Imagine, please, there is a father who owns a gas station but not just a regular gas station. It's one of those places that serves coffee and donuts too. One day the son joins his father at work. The father entrusts his son with the task of pumping gas while the father manages the coffee sales. When people enter the store for their coffee the father asks, "How do you like it? (the coffee) One lump or two?" The father dutifully makes the coffee with milk or not according to the customer's specifications and with one or two or more cubes of sugar.

The son wants to emulate his father's style of customer service and so every customer who wants gas is asked, "One lump or two?" It usually gains a smile from the customer and afterward they drive away. By the end of the day, though, the phone is ringing off the hook with complaints and eventually police cars are crowding the otherwise sleepy gas station. What has happened?

Every car that left the station that day broke down. The boy was not just joking when he inquired

about the lumps of sugar. He wrongly reasoned that that if sugar sweetens coffee it can sweeten an engine. Just the opposite is true. The quickest and easiest way to destroy a car is to put sugar into the tank of a car. That's what happened. Imagine now the horror of the father and fright of the son who realizes he just brought grief and financial ruin upon his dear father.

The gas tank does not care if the boy had sweet intentions. I recently saw a cartoon. A man is staring curiously at a sign, "Law of gravity strictly enforced!" Neither the physical nor the spiritual laws of the universe need our enforcement. They work continuously and are reliably indiscriminant.

The Torah, therefore, in its abundant mercy forewarns us of the gravity of eating Chametz on Pesach or bugs in Romaine lettuce. It clogs the spiritual arteries of the consumer like sugar ruins the engine of the car. It desensitizes and blocks the Jewish soul from perceiving the panoramic sweep of history from the origin of this species, the Jewish People, to the end of times, a scene that's available at the Pesach Seder. He thereby by default "opts out" of the picture- an aspect of being cut off!

We are warned, not as a cruel dictatorial threat but as a benevolent doctor warns a diabetic patient to curb their consumption of sweets. "I am HASHEM your doctor!" You know what the results, the cause and effect will likely be! I'm looking out for your good! I want you to be healthy and successful. Therefore rid yourself of Chametz like a poison and **eliminate all the bugs in the Pesach program!**

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