

# A SPECK OF CHOMETZ

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

For whoever eats chometz, that soul shall be cut off from the Jewish people. (Shemos 12:15)

IF A PIECE of treif meat becomes accidentally mixed together with two identical pieces of kosher meat, making it impossible to know which is which, the entire mixture is kosher. The rabbis tell us to not eat at least one of three, but the Torah permits it.

Likewise, if you were stirring your hot fleishig cholent on Erev Shabbos with one hand while drinking milchig coffee at the same time with the other hand, and someone bumped into you causing some of your coffee to jump into the cholent, you may not have to panic. If the milk disappears into the cholent and you know that it was only one-sixtieth or less in proportion, everything is still kosher. You can eat that cholent on Shabbos with a clear conscience.

"Bittul," the halachic nullification of a forbidden substance is a remarkable concept and rather counter-intuitive. Who cares if there is more kosher meat than treif meat? When the person eats the third piece of meat, he will DEFINITELY have eaten the treif one! So out of doubt, it makes more sense not to eat ANY of the three pieces of meat, and indeed, some have that opinion.

Not because they disagree with the Torah, God forbid, but because they know how people think. Why is the Torah telling us that in such a situation of bittul the treif becomes kosher? How? Only God knows, and maybe a few Kabbalists a well. But since the average person cannot get their head around that, they will THINK that the Torah has allowed them to eat a piece of treif meat, which is wrong, COMPLETELY wrong.

Therefore, one opinion tells us to throw away at least one piece, so the person can't know he is CERTAINLY eating what was once a treif piece of meat. Some say throw away two, and some say three. They don't want people thinking that they can go against the Torah with the Torah's permission. If any of this happens to a person, they should consult their local Orthodox rabbi for a decision.

An exception to this rule is chometz. From the time Pesach comes in to when it goes out seven days (eight in the Diaspora) later, any chometz mixture is forbidden. It could be 10 million portions of kosher l'Pesach food to one portion of chometz, and the mixture is still forbidden. There is no bittul of actual chometz during Pesach. It is in the halachic vernacular, "assur b'mashahu," forbidden even

in the tiniest of quantities.

Why is that? Why are we super-stringent about chometz as opposed to other issurim? Because chometz on Pesach is an "Issur Kares" (a person is cut off from the Jewish people)? There are other "Issurei Kares" that can be nullified in the right amount. Is there even a halachic basis for such a stringency, other than the fact that the rabbis insist on it?

If they insist on it, there is a reason. And though it may not have to do with the halachic parameters of bittul, it does have to do with the reality of chometz itself, which is something quite Kabbalistic. After all, Kabbalists describe the rectification of Creation being, the result of God breaking the letter Ches of "chometz" (spelled, Ches-Mem-Tzaddi) into the letter Heh of "matzah" (spelled, Mem-Tzaddi-Heh). That has to mean something important.

This alone tells you that chometz, as delicious and seminal a thing it is to life, represents "tohu," the null that preceded Creation. If the word was transformed into "matzah" to make Creation, then chometz, or the spiritual basis of chometz, has to be associated with the null and void that came before "Tikun Ma'aseh Bereishis," the "Rectification of the Act of Creation."

On and even simpler level, we know that chometz represents the yetzer hara, man's evil inclination. It's not only about food. It's about anything that satiates the body, be it something we take in through our mouths or through our experiences in life. If it's materialistic in any way, it is "chometzdik," at least in the conceptual sense. The only question would be, then why is it permissible the rest of the year, and even in generous quantities?

The answer of course is back in time, when the Jewish people were still in Egypt. Something happened back then that WE take for granted, but "others" do not. DANGEROUS others and, it turns out, chometz makes us vulnerable to them.

There is a rule in Creation. It says that when a person acts morally, they are protected from evil spiritual forces. The "mitzvos" they perform not only guard them against the Klipos, the Kabbalistic name for the source of evil in Creation, but the mitzvos even weaken the Klipos. Theoretically, enough mitzvos performed can even ELIMINATE them altogether, but so far that has only been wishful thinking..

Sins do the opposite. They draw the Klipos to a person, and strengthen the Klipos in the process. If a person does not do teshuvah and take care against the Klipos, then the Klipos have permission from God to spiritually attack the person, as they have done on so many occasions.

Unfortunately, such attacks aren't easy to recognize or defend against. On the contrary, the person under attack may merely feel "free" of religion. They FEEL as if they're MORE in charge of their lives, when in fact they are really more enslaved, bound to do the bidding of the Klipos. It is something that tragically only becomes clear to a person once it is too late to fix the situation, like moments before their departure from this world.

This only explains why chometz should be a problem ALL year round. Why is it only an issue during Pesach?

Because a great injustice was done against the Klipos during this time of year. The Jewish people had been holding on the 49th level of spiritual impurity until the Ten Plagues started. By all rights, they should have fallen completely into the hands of the Klipos—for good. The Jewish people should not have been saved.

Instead, because of the promise made to Avraham Avinu that the eighth generation would go free, God bent the rules. He sent Moshe Rabbeinu down to Egypt to not only free the Jewish people, but to increase their merit. He artificially sensitized them to the reality of God, by performing increasingly more spectacular miracles. With each passing plague, the Divine light only became more intense until the Jewish people had to quickly leave Egypt to save the Klipos, not themselves.

If you think the Klipos forgot about this “injustice,” think again. Quite the contrary, every year at this time they are reminded of what should have been, and what was instead. It makes them vengeful, and they look to take back now some of what they lost back then.

As long as a Jew remains COMPLETELY chometz free during Pesach, the Klipos cannot get to them. The light of Pesach once again keeps them away, allowing the person to live instead, enveloped by the liberating light of God. The Klipos can do nothing but helplessly watch from afar.

But if a person has even a speck of chometz on Pesach, it's like whistling and yelling, “Hey Klipos! I'm over here!” It's like putting a tracking device on yourself that attracts the Klipos right to you. The person becomes a “Korban Pesach” for the Klipos instead. Not a very appealing option, and certainly good incentive to make sure the house is well cleaned and properly checked in advance of the “Holiday of Freedom.”