

Chumros on Pesach ^{ב"ה}

Based in part on a talk given by
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Hiddur Mitzvah

For generations, the vibrancy of minhagim has always adorned the Yom Tov of Pesach. With sensitivity and inner feeling of *yiras shomayim*, Yidden have held on to the precious minhagim they grew up with at home. Even for those who were not extra particular during the rest of the year, Pesach was different.

For chassidim in general, the details surrounding Pesach were particularly revered, as an integral part of their *avoda*. For the name chossid means one who goes '*lifnim meshuras hadin*', beyond the basic obligation.

In the words of the Rebbe, "Every Yid, and even goyim l'havdil, know that when someone is associated with chassidus, this automatically implies that he has a full beard, puts on two pairs of tefillin, wears special tzitzis and similarly is *mehader* in all mitzvos."

An Expression of Love

There are various reasons for the significance of hiddurim.

Firstly, they express the love a Yid has for Hashem. Although a mitzvah creates a bond between a Yid and Hashem, it is not necessarily an expression of personal emotion. However, a mitzvah done *b'hiddur* is a product of a Yid's love towards Hashem, for the Yid is doing more than what is minimally required. The fact that he adds on to the obligation shows that he sees the mitzvah as a privilege, a *zechus* to be able to connect to Hashem.

To illustrate: The Alter Rebbe asks why hakafof are not an obligatory mitzvah but only a minhag, if they are of such great significance. The Alter Rebbe explains that precisely because of their significance, they are a minhag. They are a result of a deep connection to Hashem, where a Yid

intuitively knows what Hashem wants, without having been told. This comes from a deeper connection than the connection of mitzvos, and as such, can only be properly expressed through a minhag.

The tzaddik Reb Yechezkel of Kosmir used extraordinary measures to avoid the remotest contact with chometz. Before Yom Tov, he would personally supervise the drawing of the water which would be used for the entire Pesach and would then watch the filled barrels being loaded onto wagons for the journey home. He would not allow any Pesach items to be placed on the floor, and when it happened once that a bottle of wine was put on the ground, he did not drink from it, even though he had, with a feather, cleaned any possible crumbs between the floor boards. One Yom Kippur, when Reb Yechezkel was offered a chair, he first inspected it for any crumbs, for he was wearing the same kittel he would wear to the seder ... in six months!

The wheat that Reb Yechezkel used for shemura matza was kept in a sack placed in a barrel. The barrel was placed in another sack which was tied with a rope and hung from the ceiling. One year, when the time came to send the wheat to be ground into flour, someone took the nearest knife, one used for chometz, and reached up to cut the rope. "Chas v'shalom!" the tzaddik cried out. "Use a knife from the Pesach set!" One of the bystanders thought that with this chumra, the tzaddik was going a little too far. Sensing this, Reb Yechezkel said, "When defining the prohibition of chometz, chazal say, **חמץ במשהו**. Simply this means that even the minutest amount of chometz is prohibited. We can also learn that the prohibition applies to each individual **במה שהוא**, according to what he is. According to the spiritual level which one attains, to that degree of stringency does the **איסור** of chometz apply to him."

Another significance of minhagim and hiddurim is the affect they may have on a person. We know that the great chossid Reb Hillel Paritcher was willing to sacrifice his life for *hiddur mitzvah*, as when the Russians attempted to cut his long *peiyos*. He explained that he was *mehader* with so many hiddurim to be able to internalize and appreciate the concepts of chassidus.

Why is a *hiddur mitzvah* necessary for this? For chassidus, in its essence, is something G-dly and is beyond a person's physical consciousness. In order to be able to relate to chassidus, have this sensitivity to something G-dly, *hiddur mitzva* is necessary. This raises a person beyond his norm and illicit a greater sensitivity to what is higher than the physical. Hiddurim highlight the preciousness and esteem which a Yid has for Yiddishkiet.

It follows that hiddurim not only express a person's love for Hashem, but create this love as well.

With regard to Pesach, the Arizal says that one who is careful with the minutest amount of chometz is guaranteed not to sin the entire year. This is why Yidden are particularly careful on Pesach, for this is an offer that one cannot resist...

Fulfilling Hiddurim Properly

Being of such prominence on Pesach, it is important to ensure that the hiddurim and chumros are done in the proper manner. Oft times, due to ignorance or unawareness, one is scrupulous in keeping a hiddur, yet careless with halacha mandated in Shulchan Aruch.

There is a saying from the Gerrer rebbe, the Beis Yisroel, concerning this issue. It is written in Shulchan Aruch that many have the custom not to eat nuts during Aseres Yimei Teshuvah, for the word אגוז (nut) has the same gematria as חטא (sin). The Beis Yisroel brings to our attention that the word חטא, also has the same gematria as אטח...

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Machlokes forbidden like Chometz

In Seforim it is written, that the same way excessive measures are taken in eliminating all chometz (each with his own chumros), so too all means of removing behaviors of anger, conflict, and opposition must be employed. Just like chometz, these are forbidden, even in the slightest form.

One should not keep *hiddurim* at the family's expense, destroying the atmosphere at home or ruining the enjoyment of Yom Tov. One such instance is making sure to eat the afikoman before *chatzos*. There are varying opinions regarding the obligation of eating the afikoman before midnight, and since the Rabbeim would do so the first night, we try to implement this as well. However, when the hour's getting late, should a family's seder be wrought with pressure and aggravation to ensure the fulfillment of this hiddur?!

It was Erev Pesach in the home of the tzaddik, the 'Oheiv Yisroel' of Apta, and the Rebbetzin was busy in the kitchen with the last minute preparations for the seder, so someone else answered the knock at the door. The two local tzeddaka collectors had come to request matzah for the township's needy families. Seeing a stack of matzos wrapped in a napkin, the person who opened the door innocently gave them away and hurried back to work. Soon after, the Rebbetzin noticed that the matzos had vanished, and she was appalled, for these were none other than the special matzos which had been baked that day with special hiddurim and devout kavonos; they were the Rebbe's own shemurah matzah!

She soon discovered what had happened, but it was too late to undo. Not wanting to tell her husband and cause him spiritual anguish, she took a bundle of plain, ordinary matzos and wrapped them in the same napkin. That year, the 'Oheiv Yisroel' conducted the seder with regular matzos.

After Yom Tov, the tzaddik, was visited by a couple seeking a 'Get'. The young man said that his wife had refused his request to cook for him during Pesach in separate utensils, without *gebrokts*. Hearing this, the Rebbe called his Rebbetzin and said, "Tell me the whole truth, please. What kind of matzos were placed before me at the seder?" At first, the Rebbetzin was too afraid to speak up, but when he assured her that she had no reason to have any fear, she told him the whole story. Turning to the young husband, the tzaddik said, "Look, on the first night of Pesach I ate plain, ordinary matzah and pretended not to know the difference, not wanting to cause hard feeling or harsh words to be expressed, and you want to divorce your wife because of *gebrokts*?!" The tzaddik restored harmony between the couple, and they left in peace.

In a similar vein, according to halacha, it is permissible to own, use, and eat something which contains Chometz so inedible that even a dog wouldn't consume it. Therefore, according to halacha, the usage of toothpaste, perfume etc. is permissible. Yet, being that it is possible to chemically extricate the chometz from the mixture, some are stringent not to use such items. [Consequently, an item that has been looked into and found not to contain any chometz components can be used (even without an official hechsher stamped on.)] Since this is only a chumra, there is no need to prevent those who are lenient, from using these products.

Not at the expense of Shalom Bayis

Regarding personal stringencies, husbands need to bear in mind that their wives' personal actions (ones that don't relate to the holiness of the home, i.e. tznius, chinuch of the children etc.) are not their responsibility. It does not pertain to him whether she abstains from eating certain foods that do not fit his standards (such as chocolate, coffee, etc.) or not. In fact, many great, chassidische women ate such foods on Pesach.

In addition, at times it is necessary for the husband to give up his own chumros for the sake of shalom bayis. For instance, if his wife wants to travel to her family where they are less machmir than he is, (and she insists on going specifically for Pesach,) he should try, inconspicuously, to only eat foods that follow his chumros. However, if this is not feasible, he should completely give up on his stringencies for the sake of *shalom bayis*.

A hungry traveler once came to the home of the tzaddik Reb Dovid of Lelov. The tzaddik had no food to give him, so he took down the shemura flour set aside for Pesach and gave it to his wife, asking her to cook something for their guest.

Later, Reb Dovid explained, "The torah instructs us, 'ושמרתם את המצות', that the matzos be guarded so that they have no possibility of becoming chometz. The last word can also be read as mitzvos, which should be guarded from chometz, meaning that if one has the opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah, he should make sure not to miss it through delay."

Reb Dovid continued, "Today the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim presented itself, and by not delaying the opportunity of fulfilling it, I have fulfilled the commandment of 'guarding the matzos'. As for what to eat on Pesach, I'm sure Hashem will bring some other shemurah flour my way."

A Chumra needs a source

It is not admirable, nor laudable, to take on Chumros that others follow. The source of a stringency must be verified, and a reliable source must be ascertained, before taking it on.

This can be deduced from the Shulchan Aruch where it is written, "Many have the custom to scrape the walls and chairs that have come in contact with chometz, and they have on what to rely on." It is easily understood that a reliable source is necessary for following a leniency; yet, here the Shulchan aruch brings to our attention that a stringency also requires a dependable source.

This can be understood by comprehending the value of a chumra:

Truthfully, with all the scrupulous cleaning put in to rid one's home of even the minutest amount of chometz, it is still possible for something to have been overlooked, or for chometz to have been brought in afterwards. True riddance of all chometz, can only be brought about with help from above. To merit such assistance, one must tread on its path, the path the chachamim have lead us on, follow their guidelines and instructions and not mix in personal reckonings, initiatives, and chumros.

When introducing new stringencies that are based on one's own feeling, essentially one is saying, that it is he alone who is protecting himself from all chometz and thus forgoes the help from above.

The tzaddik Reb Pinchas of Koritz had a chossid who was extremely scrupulous in keeping out all chometz. During Pesach, he only ate at home, not even attending his Rebbe's Yom Tov meal. Once, during the se'uda of *Shvi'i shel Pesach*, Reb Pinchas inquired about this chossid's whereabouts and was told that he was absent due to his meticulousness regarding chometz. "In the barrel of water he had prepared for Pesach, lays some chometz," the Rebbe told his students. When the chossid was thus alerted, he fretfully rushed to his Rebbe asking how such a calamity had befallen him, especially with all his intense supervision. The Rebbe explained, "Although we are careful with chometz, we are not *malochim* and require assistance from above. You, however, relied on your own efforts, not depending on Hashem; hence, you were shown from above that such cannot bear proper results..."

Two types of chumros: Halacha and Mesorah

There are two types of chumros. There are those that are sourced in halacha and are beset by logic concern. These stringencies pertain to all, and each person may take them upon himself.

The second type of chumros do not involve real, concerning issues and are purely based on *Mesorah* (tradition). On Pesach, even such stringencies are kept, as our Rabbeim have said, "*Pesach is Andersh.*" However, just as chumros based on Halacha need a dependable source, these do as well.

For example, there is an ancient custom not to eat garlic on Pesach. Some say this had been instituted in previous generations as a result of flour getting mixed into the garlic during the processing. However, Reb Sholom of Belz (the Sar Sholom) said that this custom is actually a **Torah directive** for it says "*Al titosh Toras Imecha,*" do not forsake the Torah of your ancestors. For someone who received this custom from previous generations, it is '*Toras Imecha;*' yet for others, this custom is irrelevant, for its existence is solely based on tradition.

The same applies to sugar. In years by gone, when sugar was sold, it had to be cut on the merchant's table which doubtlessly had chometz on it. Therefore, they would cook the sugar to check it before use. Nowadays, we have no such concern. Should we worry that perhaps a factory worker threw some chometz into the machines?! Moreover, there are industrial runs of sugar that are processed specifically for Pesach. Nevertheless, many cook the sugar due to *Mesorah*.

This tenet applies to all traditionally based minhagim. Even though the reasons for not eating certain foods currently do not exist, being that it

has a source, it can be adhered to. Yet those to whom this source does not apply, have no reason to follow it, for they have neither chumra qualification: it is not based on halacha and it is not their tradition.

When joining a community, one should partake in their chumros. The '*Toras Imecha*' of the community now becomes his, and he should follow them even though they are not his personal tradition. Nevertheless, there is no reason for him to take on chumros of individuals, and in the same vein, someone who has personal chumros, should not expect others to keep them, nor should they call it a '*Minhag Chabad.*'

It is necessary to recognize what is considered a minhag, what is a chumra, what is to be expected from the public and what is not.

Processed Foods

Many have the custom not to eat processed foods. This is an understandable stringency, based on what the Alter Rebbe says, that one should not eat by another on Pesach (Hayom Yom 20 Nissan). Is a factory production line more reliable than 'another?' Therefore, we try to only eat foods prepared at home, except when it is not possible, as with wine, matza and the like.

However, those that do not follow this chumra, have no reason to follow the additional stringency of not using milk and oil (Nonetheless, it is advisable to be stringent in using milk that was milked before Pesach, and to avoid using cottonseed oil, for it may be *kitniyos*).

By fulfilling our obligations, following the mandates of the Torah, we will be assisted in keeping out even the minutest amount of Chometz, and thus will be fulfilled the Arizal's guarantee that one who is scrupulous with the smallest amount of chometz is assured to be held away from sin throughout the entire year.