



## CHAMETZ: PROHIBITION OR MITZVAH?

The prohibition of *chametz* is severe to an extent beyond any other *issur*.

Some prohibited things may not be eaten but may be benefited from, while other prohibited items are completely forbidden. What is the difference? In Tanya it is explained that forbidden items belong to the three lower levels of impure *kelipos*. If a certain item belongs to this category of *kelipah*, why should it be permitted to benefit from it? And if it does not belong to *kelipah*, why may it not be eaten?

### FORM VS. ESSENCE

The answer lies in the distinction between the *form* of an object and its *essence*. There are cases where the *kelipah* is only tied to the particular *form* of the object—the way the object adopts the form of an edible item. In such a case, only consuming it as food is forbidden. Other benefits unrelated to that particular form are permitted, as the object itself is not *kelipah*. By contrast, when something is *kelipah* down to its essence, then any sort of use is prohibited.

Although many things may not be benefited from in any way, they are not quite like *chametz*. These prohibited items may remain on Jewish property, while *chametz* may not. Why is this so?

Even if benefit of every kind is forbidden, it still doesn't mean that the object itself is *kelipah*. Benefiting from an item is also a method of using it, and as such is related to its form. When we say that the

*kelipah* encompasses a deeper layer of the item, what it means is that it penetrates (not only the object's form as it relates to consumption, but also) all of its uses and functions. However, this still falls short of reaching the essence of the item and rendering it *kelipah* through-and-through.

The exception to this is *chametz*. With *chametz*, the *kelipah* penetrates its very essence, to the extent that the *chametz* is prohibited not only from any type of use, but even from being found on Jewish property.

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In this light, it is surprising that the status of *chametz* changes so drastically after Pesach. *Chametz* is so evil that it may not be eaten; it is forbidden to derive any type of pleasure from it; and even its very presence is prohibited. Yet, all this is only true on Pesach itself. As soon as Pesach is over, it may even be eaten! Not only that, but when Shavuot arrives, the *korbon* brought on that day—the two loaves of bread—*must* be *chametz*. How is this possible?!

### TOO ARROGANT TO BELIEVE

The distinction between *chametz* and *matzah* is that *chametz* rises while *matzah* does not. Both are made of flour and water, yet *matzah* remains thin and does not swell, while the same ingredients in *chametz* inflate and become an entire "*metzius*."

When we wish to be redeemed from our personal Mitzrayim, the first step is *matzah*—*bittul*. *Bittul* is related to *emunah* (as we know that *matzah* is the "bread of faith"). A person with *bittul* believes, on the basis of what he has heard from his father, who heard it from his father, with the tradition stretching back

to Sinai. By contrast, an arrogant person is convinced that he is the smartest person around, and he must understand and have proofs for everything; if not, he will disregard it.

The foundation for all evil is *chametz* and *gaavah*; this self-regard spoils everything. In addition to affecting one's *emunah*, *gaavah* can also impact a person's interactions. Such a person is self-absorbed and feels that he is smarter

and greater than everyone else. Therefore, what he owns is for him to use; giving something to another is out of the question. Someone else might be lacking the basics, while he is enjoying luxuries. However, due to his inflated sense of self and *gaavah*, he will not consider sharing; his indulgences trump the other's necessities.

We are *avadim* to Hashem. A slave knows he has a master and there is no room for deliberation; whatever his master commands, he must do. As the *posuk* states, "*Bnei Yisroel are*

slaves to Me; they are My slaves, whom I took out of the land of Mitzrayim." This *bittul* is the foundation of Yiddishkeit. The first thing we said at *matan Torah* was *naaseh v'nishma*: whether we understand or not, we will act as we are told.

In fact, thinking highly of ourselves is in itself Mitzrayim, slavery. As Chazal state, "Only someone who studies Torah is free." To believe that one is a great thinker and needs to understand everything is enslavement to *yeshus* and *gaavah*. Not to be a *baal gaavah* means to think less of ourselves, to submit ourselves to the Torah and to Hashem's authority, and to realize that we are His *avadim*.

## WHEN BITTUL MEETS METZIUS

However, to possess *bittul* alone is not the ultimate state of affairs.

Although a slave knows he must obey his master, he personally doesn't understand or agree to what he is told. His connection to his master is through *bittul*, and not with his *metzius*. Similarly, when one puts his understanding to the side and serves Hashem without questions, his connection to Hashem has not permeated his *metzius*. His actual self stands apart from Hashem.

Being *avadim* should serve as the foundation, but then *nishma* should follow on the heels of *naaseh*. Our *bittul* to Hashem should be so great that serving Him becomes the way we think and feel, until it turns into our source of enjoyment. Our connection is so strong that we don't merely act against our will, but actually enjoy it.

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"*Atah bechartanu mikal ha'amim... v'keiravtanu malkeinu la'avodasecha.*" *La'avodasecha* refers to our service of Hashem, not to our understanding of Him. Yet, we *sing* these words. We aren't complaining of our poor fate that we were born as Jews; we pronounce it with the greatest joy and pleasure. Serving Hashem becomes

our identity to such a degree that we sing "*atah bechartanu mikal ha'amim,*" and this is indeed the truth.

## POST-PESACH CHAMETZ

At the outset, when leaving Mitzrayim, *chametz* is forbidden in the most minute amount; even a strand of *chametz*, of *yeshus* and *gaavah*, of not being completely *batel* to Hashem, is the gravest prohibition. When starting out in *avodah*, not only may *chametz* not be consumed or benefited from in any form, it has no place altogether in our domain. The foundation must be utter *bittul* to Hashem.

Only after we have eaten *matzah*, the bread of faith, is it demanded from us that our own existence and understanding should conform as well. This is why *chametz* is permitted the rest of the year. What's more, when Shavuot arrives, although it is the time when we said *naaseh v'nishma*, *chametz* becomes an obligatory *korbon*. The *avodah* of an

*eved* has pervaded us to the degree that it has become our very identity.

For further study, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 16, p. 88. *Ibid.*, vol. 22, pp. 31-32.

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