

Shabbat Hagadol 2016

Edited version:

To Be or Not To Be... Chametz– and Ego-Free

By Brenda Simmonds

Shabbat Shalom. As we will shortly be having lunch with Yad b'Yad, this is a short and somewhat left-field look at the world of chametz.

Following the destruction of the Temple, the ideas and laws pertaining to sacrifice were changed to notions of prayer and mitzvot. The rabbis commemorated Shabbat HaGadol, as today's Shabbat is known, by ordaining that a special sermon be delivered on this day expounding some of the laws associated with *kashrut l'Pesach*. This sermon would usually explain how utensils should be prepared, how to remove chametz and the rules for the baking of matzot.

So reflecting on this historical perspective, I will say a few words on what for the more practical amongst you could be entitled To Be or Not To Be Chametz-Free, or for the more spiritual and reflective, Tips for an Ego-less – not to be confused with the, quite impossible, egg-less – Pesach. By way of introduction then, a few words about the ego. It can be likened for our purposes at this particular time to the filling in a matzo sandwich. On the bottom lies your 'id', full of chaos likely to break through at any point, and on the top the superego struggling to hold the whole thing together against all pointers to the contrary. There may be some amongst you who would give the ego a bad press. However, I would urge you to reframe, as you can see that without it we would be eating in an erstwhile barren land.

While chametz is of course always with us, we must remember the dangers that lurk within. Most of us remain, despite all, attached to both our chametz and our ego. After all, the latter has been carefully nurtured by our mothers, developed and applauded almost continually since birth. Not for most Jews, despite the writings of some self-deprecating Jewish authors, a wilted or undeveloped ego, or similarly a life free from rye bread and cholla.

One can immediately therefore see the enormity of the task before us. So taking my role today seriously, as required on this auspicious Shabbat, what words of advice can I give at this time.

Firstly, you could get one of those genealogy apps, I am sure James can help, and find some Sephardi relatives and take up the 7-day option with kitniyot. There is after all no point in going for gold when silver is permissible.

Having made this decision, then, I must caution you on the pervasive nature of chametz. Simply put, it is everywhere, it is stubborn and persistent as you clean your cupboards. You will notice its tricky presence in tomato ketchup, cans of vegetables, sweets – even, so I

Commented [MBG1]: What do you mean 'Having made this decision'? To eat kitniyot, or not to eat kitniyot?

understand it, in tea and sugar. Such is the power of the unleavened to travel through unsuspecting packaging.

All of this is of course true for the ego, it bulks up and inflates when frankly uncalled for, piercing the most unlikely situations, just demanding its presence to be felt. A watchful and discerning eye is therefore required when reading the ingredients of any packets or discourse. This fear of chametz has now pervaded our political life in relation to public services. Bulk is out, and where found will be rooted out without fear or favour or turning back. Pessadik council services are now on their way to you, although unfortunately it would seem for more than the prescribed eight days. Pesach is, dare I say, a 'heaven sent' opportunity for a leaner, more productive you. Grab it now before it is too late.

This leads me to the notion of timing, which is as we know everything. Chametz itself has a shelf life of 18 min. So too is it with the ego. An overexposed ego loses its potency if it rises for too long, and too often it becomes weighty to carry, and we are all in a rush to reach the Promised Land. But here is the tension, life without ego can allow the id to surface. Chaos, the underbelly of our matzo sandwich, can render the whole thing broken and unusable. As I say this, I realise it could be that this is already resonating for you and anxiety is setting in. Are only half your cupboards cleaned? Will you do it in time? Just where is that pan in the loft? What is needed now is a steady hand, and remember that you will only temporarily sell your chametz. It will be returned in due course.

However, if all else fails bring in your old and trusted friend, Denial. In Kosher Kingdom, a Pesach paradise here on earth, there are excellent examples of this defiance, even ones to take home, at a price. There are cereals, noodles, sauces, sweets, pastry all set to seduce you. This apparent contradiction is, however, a complicated psychological process, and therefore not for the faint-hearted. These hostages to denial look like chametz and, for the desperate, can possibly taste like chametz, while simultaneously we can all relax in the knowledge that they can't possibly be chametz. So too for the psychologically adept amongst you we can, with practice, develop a look-alike ego, in company we can bemoan its presence and admit that this is after all a work in progress while we move towards a greater spiritual awareness of the inner meaning of Pesach. We can talk up the beauty of abstinence, of simplicity, of reflection, while knowing our ego is safely parked in the garage or sealed cupboard and very near to hand.

So, in conclusion, a few words of warning about the superego, of which we have said little. Jiminy Cricket was as far as I am aware not a Jewish character. Conscience, permanent change, exhortations to take on additional mitzvot, all have their place; but this is above all the festival of freedom. Remember this is a world where the individual is supreme. Should you be tempted into religiosity then you are strongly advised not to continue this beyond the statutory eight-day limit.

Finally, I do hope my words will have been of some comfort to you at this gruelling time, and that now, more secure in the laws of Pesach kashrut, you will be able to harness yourself for the journey ahead. May I wish you all a happy chametz- and ego-free pesach.

Shabbat shalom and chag sameach. 🍷

Commented [MBG2]: "Bulk is out" – unclear. Is 'bulk' a typo?

Commented [MBG3]: Not really a shelf life. A shelf life is how long something lasts after it's prepared or processed. Is there a better wording?