

Details for Leaving Egypt Some Pesach and Pre-Pesach Information

Ma'ot Chitin and the Selling of Chametz

The very first law of Pesach as recorded in the sixteenth century code of Jewish law, the *Shulchan Aruch*, is that all should contribute *ma'ot chitin*, literally “wheat money” to help provide for the Pesach needs of Jews who are in need of assistance. This is an extremely important mitzvah, for which there is always need. These funds are often contributed in conjunction with the selling of *chametz*, which is addressed below. Any *ma'ot chitin* funds raised through *Nehar Shalom* will be donated to a wonderful local *tzedakah* organization called *Yad Chesed*. If you wish to make a *ma'ot chitin* donation, you can do so online (www.neharshalom.org), or make out a check to *Nehar Shalom Ma'ot Chitin Fund*, and send to 43 Lochstead Avenue, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130. I will forward donations to *Yad Chesed*.

Another important aspect of Pesach is the removal of *chametz* from the home. *Chametz* means leaven and refers generally to foods prohibited during Pesach. The basic category of *chametz* is anything made from any of the five grains: wheat, oats, barley, rye and spelt. *Ashkenazi* Jews also include rice, corn, peas, beans, and peanuts. In addition to non-kosher l'Pesach products, anything that has been in contact with *chametz*, either directly or via year-round utensils, is considered *chametz*. This applies to both foods and liquids.

Because of the hardship of ridding one's home completely of all *chametz*, a “legal fiction” is traditionally engaged in for selling one's *chametz*. All *chametz* which would present a great loss to get rid of, should be put into one place, such as a cabinet or closet or small room. That place is then closed off for the duration of Pesach. A list should be made of the *chametz* that one has put aside, at least by category, and attached to the “Sale of *Chametz* Form.” I will then sell the designated *chametz* to someone who is not Jewish. As long as the *chametz* does not belong to Jews and is not seen by them during Pesach, it can remain where it is. It is preferable to make the sale of *chametz* in person if that is possible. **I will be happy to make an appointment for that purpose if you call me at 617-522-3618.** If it is not possible to sell your *chametz* in person, you may send the “Sale of *Chametz* Form” attached to this email to me either by email or regular mail. **All *chametz* should be sold by 11:35 on Friday morning, April 19th.** The last time to sell *chametz* through me will be immediately following the morning service that day. Please remember that it is customary to think of others by making a *tzedakah* contribution in the form of *ma'ot chitin* when selling *chametz* (see above).

Further Tzedakah Opportunities

In addition to the selling of *chametz*, some amount of food that cannot be used during Pesach should be given to non-Jews who are in need. Just as *ma'ot chitin* is a way of aiding needy Jews at Pesach, the giving away of *chametz* to non-Jews gives concrete expression to the universal themes of Pesach. It is truly a dual mitzvah, aiding those in need on the one hand, and on the other, ridding oneself of *chametz* in a creative way. **To facilitate the giving away of *chametz*, non-perishable goods can be left on the enclosed front porch of *Nehar Shalom*, 43 Lochstead Ave. If the front porch is locked, please leave food on the back porch. Food will be donated to the food pantry of the First Unitarian Church of JP.**

Bedikat Chametz

This final “search for *chametz*” is done on the night preceding the first Seder. ***Bedikat chametz*, therefore, takes place on the night of Thursday, April 18th after dark.** This is a wonderful

endeavor to engage in, both for its drama and its educational and spiritual possibilities. Small amounts of *chametz* should be placed carefully around the house and then 'searched' for by the light of a candle and swept onto a wooden spoon with a feather. The symbolic nature of this search also represents the inner search for *chametz* as qualities and deeds that we wish to cleanse our selves of and change. On the following morning, *erev Pesach*, Friday, April 19th, a symbolic amount of *chametz*, whatever has not been sold or given away, should be burned. This is called *biur chametz* and represents the starting point of a new beginning. Much in the way that *tashlich* helps us to enter a new year cleansed, so we are now unburdened, at least to the degree that inner hope can rise, and we are ready to join our people in the journey to freedom. **Biur chametz should take place by 11:35 on Friday morning, April 19th, while the eating of chametz would cease by 10:27.**

Tzom Bachur/Fast of the First Born and Siyum

Tzom Bachur, the *fast of the first born*, is traditionally incumbent on first born males as an expression of gratitude for being spared from the fearsome tenth plague and horror at the destruction of the first born sons of Egypt. It takes place on *erev Pesach*, the day leading up to the first *Seder*. Participation in a *siyum* exempts one from fasting. A *siyum* is a celebratory completion of a holy book, in this case usually of a tractate of Talmud or Mishna, followed by a symbolic *seudat mitzvah*, a meal following the fulfillment of a religious duty. I suggest that first-born women should also participate, recognizing the heroic role of women in facilitating survival throughout the dark night of slavery, and to create a time when all first-born can consider what it has meant to them to be a first-born child. There is some traditional teaching that even suggests that it is also incumbent on first-born daughters to participate. **There will be a weekday morning service at *Nehar Shalom* on Friday morning, April 19th at 7:00 A.M. followed by the *siyum* and *seudah*. Whether or not it is incumbent upon you, anyone, of course, is most welcome and warmly invited to attend.**

May children everywhere be spared from suffering. May each of us see the glimmer of light that will ease the burdens upon our souls and be touched by the springtime dew of renewal that will kiss away sorrows. May our hearts open to the pain of others and respond to the universal cry that began with us, "Let My people go." May each of us find our own way to help bring the world one step closer to the ultimate redemption of peace. I wish all of you a kosher, joyful and liberating Pesach.

Sincerely,
Rabbi Victor