

Parshat Tzav is read the Shabbos prior to Pesach in a non leap-year. There is usually a connection between the weekly Torah portion and the events of the week. What is the connection between Tzav and Pesach?

Rabbi Soloveichik ZT”L noted that Parshas Tzav mentions the laws of הכשר כלים, purifying defiled utensils and vessels. It is appropriate to study these laws before the holiday of Pesach as they apply to rendering utensils used with חמץ usable on Pesach. Anyone who has ‘kashered’ utensils before Passover is familiar with the complexities associated with this activity. It therefore fits well with the rule of studying the laws associated with a holiday before that holiday, שואלים ודורשים הלכות החג שלשים יום קודם החג, in order to ensure we do it correctly and avoid the negative issues associated with חמץ on Pesach.

I would like to explore another connection between Parshas Tzav and the holiday of Pesach. The concept of leavened products, חמץ, is mentioned in the Parsha in connection with the מנחות, the meal offerings brought for various reasons:

לֹא תֹאכְלוּ חֶמֶץ חֶלְקֶם נָתַתִּי אֹתָהּ מֵאֲשֵׁי קֹדֶשׁ קְדָשִׁים הִוא כַּחֲטָאת וְכֹאֶשֶׁם:

(Leviticus 6:10)

In fact, the concepts of חמץ ומצה are also mentioned in the previous Parsha, ויקרא:

כָּל־הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרִיבוּ לַיהוָה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה חֶמֶץ כִּי כָל־שְׂאֹר וְכָל־דָּבָשׁ לֹא־תִקְטְרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אִשָּׁה לַיהוָה:

(Leviticus 2:12)

It is interesting to note that outside the Temple, the concepts of חמץ ומצה don't really apply all year. Halachically they are both considered bread. The distinction between them comes into sharp focus beginning on the fourteenth of Nisan. Either the distinction starts the night of the fourteenth when we search for leaven, בדיקת חמץ. Or it begins with at dawn of the 14th or at midday when חמץ is forbidden in preparation for the sacrifice of the Pascal lamb, קרבן פסח. At that time the distinction between חמץ ומצה for us becomes the same as it was all year-round in the Temple.

Our Rabbis note that there is minute difference between חמץ ומצה, משהו. One must be careful not to allow the dough kneaded for מצה to tarry, for it only takes a fraction of a second to transform מצה into חמץ. Chazal emphasized this point noting that the letters of the words חמץ and מצה are virtually the same, even the letters ‘Chet’ and ‘Hay’ are often interchanged so, yet when their written forms differ in that the ‘Chet’ has an extended line on the left side. While the difference in time it takes to turn מצה into חמץ is minute, the impact can be vast and extensive.

The nullification process, ביטול, for חמץ is different than for most other prohibited substances. Where other forbidden items or combinations thereof, תערובת, are subject to the rules of majority, רוב, or nullification based on 1/60, חמץ and yeast render the mixture forbidden in the smallest of quantities. For various reasons, חמץ is much more stringent.

One may ask, is it really necessary to be so stringent regarding חמץ? Does such a minute trace amount cause so much harm? I can understand forbidding large, perceptible amounts of חמץ. But a virtually undetectable trace amount? Why not consider it nullified in when merged into the larger mixture that is dominated by permissible items?

Apparently, חמץ and שאור, yeast, are so destabilizing when they come into contact with an item that would otherwise be permitted on Pesach. One could consider them corrupting. The idea of yeast having a corrupting effect is found in the Talmud:

וְרַבִּי אֱלֶפְסֵנְדְּרִי בְּתַר דְּמַצְלִי אָמַר הָכִי: "רַבּוֹן הָעוֹלָמִים, גָּלוּי וְיָדוּעַ לְפָנֶיךָ שְׂרָצוֹנָנוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת רָצוֹנָךְ, וּמִי מַעֲכָב? — שְׂאֹר שְׂבַעֲיָסָה

after Rabbi Alexandri prayed, he would say the following: Master of the Universe, it is revealed and known before You that our will is to perform Your will, and what prevents us? On the one hand, the yeast in the dough, the evil inclination that is within every person (Brachot 17a).

Rabbi Alexandri compared the corrupting influence of the evil inclination to the impact of yeast on dough. It takes only a tiny amount of yeast to cause dough to rise. Chazal often compare dough that has risen and blown up to the evil inclination and sin. We want to perform the commandments, but all it takes is the slightest hesitation and delay that allows the evil inclination or the yeast to take hold, and we lose our way.

(Shabbat 14b-15a,b) יוֹסִי בֶן יוֹעָזָר אִישׁ צָרִידָה וְיוֹסִי בֶן יוֹחָנָן אִישׁ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם גָּזְרוּ טוּמְאָה עַל אֶרֶץ הָעַמִּים וְעַל כָּלִי זְכוּכִית

These rules were instituted to safeguard תְּרוּמָה from being rendered unclean, טמא, and unfit for consumption by contacting land outside אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל or coming into contact with the airspace of such a land. The Gemara discusses where and when these rules were enacted and concludes these rules were enacted over 3 different periods stretching some 180 years. We can derive two important lessons from this: 1) the Rabbis were concerned over the slightest possibility of תְּרוּמָה being contaminated and took steps to preclude any contact, even restricting contact with the air, lest it lead to a significant defilement; 2) this concern was shared not only by the Rabbis who lived during the Temple period, but also by the Rabbis who lived years later, after the destruction of the Temple and the laws of תְּרוּמָה purity were not as prevalent. The Rabbis were concerned over the possible impact of contagion, no matter how small or how remote the possibility.

As a modern day example of this idea, computer chips are fabricated in a carefully controlled clean room environment. The slightest perturbation of temperature or cleanliness renders the entire fabrication run unusable. Slight mistakes in algorithms and their implementations often lead to catastrophic results. The mistake or contagion cannot be simply ignored or nullified. And in our own current situation, contacting the minutest fragment of the Covid-19 Virus can be devastating. We can't simply nullify it or ignore it. We must take every measure and precaution to avoid it.

We now understand the rationale for the Torah's insistence on avoiding any leaven as part of the regular Temple service. Allowing leaven or yeast in the sacrifice, a corrupting substance, will

ultimately result in a breakdown in the future. We are admonished to ensure it never creeps in, in even the smallest amount. Meta-physical purity is no less important than the purity we require in the physical world. We must be just as vigilant in preserving and protecting it.

Personally, we see this on a regular basis in our relationship with Gd. As our prayers take the place of the daily sacrifices, we must ensure that they measure up to the standards required in the Temple. We may not bring leaven products in conjunction with those sacrifices. Praying without the proper concentration, כונה, talking during prayer and קריאת התורה, not taking advantage of the opportunities for Torah study, all these are שאור שבעיסה, the corrupting yeast in the dough. We must be vigilant to prevent it from taking root and turning our pure מצה into חמץ.

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