

Bedikat Chametz / Searching for Leaven

In one Hasidic understanding, chametz -- food which is leavened (from the Hebrew l'chimutz, to ferment) -- means not only literal leaven, but that within our hearts and souls which puffs us up. The practice of searching for hidden leaven by candle-light becomes a metaphor for inner work and soul-searching.

On the next page, there's a poem by Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb about this practice, which you might choose to read before or after your search.

Before beginning the search, recite the blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל בְּעוּר חָמֵץ.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam,
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tsivanu al bi'ur chametz.*

A fountain of blessings are You, Adonai our God, sovereign of all being:
You make us holy in connecting command, and command us to remove *chametz*.

After the search is complete, say:

If there is any *chametz* I do not know about, that I have not seen or removed, I disown it. I declare it to be nothing—as ownerless as the dust of the earth.

Spring Cleaning Ritual on the Eve of the Full Moon Nisan

Removing the Hametz
In the month of nisan
with the death of winter
and the coming of spring
our ancient mothers
cleaned out their houses.

They gathered brooms, mops, brushes,
rags, stones, and lime
they washed down walls
swept floors
beat rugs
scoured pots
changed over all the dishes in the house.
They opened windows to the sun
hung lines for the airing out of blankets and covers
using fire
air
and water
in the cleaning.

In the month of nisan
before the parting seas
called them out of the old life
our ancient mothers
went down to the river
they went down to the river
to prepare their garments for the spring.

Hands pounded rock
voices drummed out song
there is new life inside us
Shekhinah
prepares for Her birth.

So we labor all women
cleaning and washing
now with our brothers
now with our sons
cleaning the inner house
through the moon of nisan.

On the eve of the full moon
we search our houses
by the light of a candle

for the last trace of winter
for the last crumbs grown stale inside us
for the last darkness still in our hearts.

Washing our hands
we say a blessing
over water...
We light a candle
and search in the listening silence
search the high places
and the low places
inside you
search the attic and the basement
the crevices and crannies
the corners of unused rooms.
Look in your pockets
and the pockets of those around you
for the traces of Mitzrayim.

Some use a feather
some use a knife
to enter the hard places.

Some destroy Hametz with fire
others throw it to the wind
others toss it to the sea.
Look deep for the Hametz
which still gives you pleasure
and cast it to the burning.

When the looking is done
we say:

All that rises up bitter
All that rises up prideful
All that rises up in old ways no longer fruitful
All Hametz still in my possession
but unknown to me
which I have not seen
nor disposed of
may it find common grave
with the dust of the earth
amen amen
selah . . .

(—Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb)