

Have a Great Shabbat!

This Shabbat, the Shabbat before Pesach, is known as **Shabbat HaGadol**, or the Great Shabbat. One might ask, “*Mah Nishtana...*” why is this Shabbat greater than any other Shabbat? Our commentators suggest a variety of reasons for this particular designation of greatness.

There is a suggestion that the name goes back to the original Shabbat before the Exodus. In Egypt, the children of Israel had already taken a lamb for themselves ready for sacrifice a few days later. It was a great Shabbat because of the anticipation and excitement. All the Children of Israel acting together... all of them awaiting the greatest journey of their lives.

Others say that is called Shabbat HaGadol because it looks forward. The Haftarah, from the book of Malachi, concludes with a reference to Elijah the Prophet coming to herald the great and awesome day of Hashem’s redemption.

On a different tack, there is a halachic requirement to spend the day studying the laws of Pesach; how to kasher the house and make things ready for Seder. The day is named after the greatness of this study and significance of the work.

Historically, Rabbis were only expected to give a *drasha* on two Shabbatot during the course of the year. The first is the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, which is known as Shabbat Shuva, (the Sabbath of Return or repentance) and the second is Shabbat HaGadol. It’s true! For 50 Shabbatot in the year the Rabbi really had the discretion not to speak! But on this Shabbat, he must. And it is called Shabbat HaGadol because it is traditional that he delivers a great and lengthy sermon.

In many communities that lengthy *drasha* is given on Shabbat Afternoon at Mincha, after we read through the early part of the Haggadah. **Join me for “Go Forth and Learn” at 5:50pm**

In some communities, Shabbat HaGadol was marked by extending the day and making Havdalla later. Of course, here, this year, the clocks go forwards on Saturday night. However long our Shabbat, Sunday will be an hour short!

One of the key mitzvot that is highlighted over Shabbat HaGadol is the requirement to clear one’s house of Chametz – where to look and how to clean – and how certain implements may even be koshered through immersing in boiling water or against a hot flame. **We’ll be koshering vessels at Kinloss on Monday evening from 8pm.** To encourage diligence, a rabbinic edict bans all

chametz that isn’t cleared away from being used after Pesach – as if it were treif.

To circumvent wastage, Chametz that might be too expensive to jettison, such as a cellar of good whisky or packets of pasta can be set aside and sold. The rabbi is appointed as an agent for the sale and then draws up a contract with a designated non-Jew who pays a down payment on the total. In the event that he doesn’t stump up the full purchase price by the end of Pesach, the sold chametz reverts to its original owners. While it is preferable to appoint the rabbi to sell one’s chametz in person, it is also possible to do it online. <http://www.kinloss.org.uk/pesach-2018>

On the night before Seder, this year next Thursday night, we search our houses for chametz by candlelight. One might think that a bright torch would be better – and one is certainly less likely to set fire to the armchair... Nonetheless, the sages require that we use a small flame as it compels us to get close into the nooks and crevices where a cracker may have fallen, or crumbs might accumulate.

While physical chametz is flour and water that has leavened, many commentators explain our search and destroy mission as a metaphor for introspection and getting rid of our own puffed up senses of self-importance or arrogant mien. We shouldn’t be grand and haughty like Pharaoh; we should model the modesty of Moses and the dignity of servants of the King of Kings.

So, this Thursday night, as soon as possible after nightfall, take a candle and a feather and a wooden spoon, turn off the lights; go through your kitchen cupboards and your drawers, your sideboard, all those places where you store food and drink, all the places where the kids store them for you - go through your car and your pockets and your briefcase, the picnic hamper, under the sofa cushions and look really carefully. Is there chametz there?

If it seems a fruitless exercise - just reflect that you never think about Hashem or being Jewish when you access those places normally. Just think how much room there is to be Jewish in all those areas that we let our chametz in - but that Hashem never gets to touch.

Wishing you and all your families a *chag Kasher ve-sameach*.

