

What! Pesach Already?

According to the Talmud (Pesachim 6a) one should start preparing for Pesach, including learning the laws of Pesach, thirty days before the chag. The thirtieth day before Pesach is Purim!

Just as our houses fill with the assorted Hamentaschen, wafers and chametz products in our Mishloach Manot, we need to start thinking about cleaning for Pesach. Of course, eating the aforementioned goodies and washing them down with a Scotch on our Purim Seuda addresses the Mitzvot of Purim and Pesach in one fell swoop!

The origin of the 30 days is attributed to Moshe, himself, who began to prepare the people for Pesach Sheini on Pesach itself (ie 30 days earlier). Pesach Sheini was the opportunity for those who were ritually unfit to eat the Paschal sacrifice on Pesach, to celebrate a month later.

The Rashba (d1310) and Ran (d1380) two Catalonian Rishonim held that this halacha of preparation applied particularly to scholars so that they would be able to answer the many questions which they might asked in advance of the Chag. They also suggest that it is Pesach-specific. However, many understand it as having universal application. As a general principle, it is considered meritorious (but not necessarily a halachic requirement) to prepare oneself for 30 days ahead of each of the Regalim.

Amongst the observances commencing in this thirty day lead up to Pesach is *Maot (Maos) Chittin* (also known as *Kimcha dePischa*), a communal charity appeal to help the needy buy their matza.

Even in Talmudic times there were questions about non-dom status. The Talmud establishes that one has to be resident in town for 12 months in order to either benefit or to be required to contribute towards *Maot Chittin*. This emphasis on required contribution implies that the *Maot Chittin* is to be considered a tax, rather than a voluntary contribution.

Poskim refer to an edict in ancient Constantinople requiring Torah Scholars to contribute. Implicitly, they were exempt from normal taxes and communal levies, however the special charitable purpose of *Maot Chittin* and enabling every Jew to have matzah with which to celebrate freedom, distinguished this levy from others and no exceptions were made.

From thirty days before Pesach, we are required to be more careful about the chametz in our homes and



avoiding falling foul of the prohibitions upon us. We are no less enjoined to begin thinking of those less fortunate than us and our responsibilities to enable their affirmative celebration and positive participation in the Chag.

There are many different traditions regarding when we stop eating Matzah in advance of Pesach. The Matzah we eat at Seder should be new to us and warrant the *Shehechianu* blessing we say on the mitzvah of eating it.

The minimalist approach is to refrain on the day itself. The Possuk cited by the Talmud (Pesachim 4b) is "However, on the first day you shall remove all Se'or (ie Chametz) from your houses." (Shemot 15:12). Given that this could not refer to Yom Tov when all Chametz must necessarily have been destroyed, it must be a reference to the day prior to the Seder evening.

The Mishna Brura (443:1) cites historic sources for stopping on Rosh Chodesh Nissan. Others refrain from a full month before Pesach.

Matzah Ashira (Rich or Egg Matzah) is considered Chametz by most poskim and accordingly can be eaten during this period. Of course, one can't rely on those poskim to eat egg matzah in the run up to Pesach and then ignore those poskim and eat it over the Chag!

Please do join us on Monday evenings after Maariv (7:30pm) in the Bet Midrash. With Rabbi Laitner and Rabbi Andrews we'll be spending the next month getting ready for Pesach. Rabbi Andrews gives shiur at 7:45pm, Rabbi Laitner at 8:30pm and my halacha shiur is at 9:15pm till 10:00.

Thanks to Rabbi Andrews, Chazan Eli and R' Yoel Lax for the wonderful tribute to the niggunim of Benzion Shenker last Motzaei Shabbat.

Thanks to Michael Kamlisch for arranging the informative Sunday afternoon event on the Jewish servicemen and women of WW1.

Shabbat Shalom and Mazal Tov to our wonderful Bar Mitzvah Families.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, likely belonging to the author of the text.