

# THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

27 - 28 March, 2009

3 Nisan 5769

Parashat Vayikra  
(Leviticus 1:1–5:26)

Rabbi Stan Zamek  
Song Leader Shani Ben Or

## From the Rabbi's desk

*We at the Shabbat Shalom are pleased to announce that Professor Zroa Maror of Bar-Ilan University is joining our staff as a special guest columnist for the pre-Pesach season. You can find all you need to know about Pesach in his award winning column "Ma Nishtanah?". The first installment follows below.*

Dear Dr. Maror,

I know that I am not supposed to eat chametz on Pesach, but I am a bit confused as to exactly what it is? I thought the leavening was the problem, so aren't I still OK with flat breads like pita?

Hungry in Hong Kong

Dear Hungry,

It is a bit more complicated and restrictive than this, I'm afraid. Chametz is anything made from wheat, barley, oats, spelt, and rye that has come in contact with water, including the moisture in the air. Contact with moisture is presumed to begin fermentation or leavening. So a pancake can be flat as a, well, as a pancake, and it is still chametz. Chametz, of course, may not be eaten or owned during Pesach.

Dear Dr. Maror,

Thanks for the info. But this raises another question. Isn't matzah made from wheat? It is dry as the Sinai, but at some point it must have had contact with water. So how is it that we can eat this stuff during Pesach?

Hungry and Now Confused in Hong Kong

Dear H & C,

Matzah can be made from any of the grains I mentioned in my previous note, but is traditionally made from wheat. The flour used to make matzah is carefully supervised from the time of milling to make sure it is kept dry. Then it is baked very quickly (within 18 minutes after the flour comes in contact with the water) at a very high temperature to prevent leavening. By the way, you must eat matzah at the Seder (it is one of the central Mitzvot of Pesach). For the rest of Pesach, matzah eating is up to you, but as there isn't much else to eat, I would buy a case.

Dear Dr. Maror,

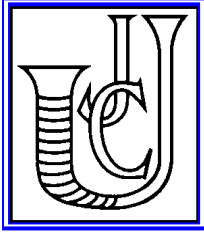
I just noticed something that I missed in your first letter. You said that chametz cannot be "owned" during Pesach. What is that about?

Hungry and Worried in Hong Kong

Dear H.W.,

Yes, I should have been clearer about that. Here is the relevant verse from the Torah: "*Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the very first day you shall remove leaven from your houses [Ex. 12:15].*" What this means is that you cannot have any chametz in your possession when Pesach begins. This requires getting rid of or using up chametzadik food prior to the festival and cleaning all areas under your control, such as your home and your car, to make sure there are no chametz particles hanging around. It is a lot of work. I would get started now.

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## From the Rabbi's desk (con't)

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Dear Dr. Maror,

Oy gevalt. I just got in a case of Old Bear's Breath single barrel, one hundred year old whiskey. I could try to use it up before Pesach, but this might kill me. The thought of giving it away is too horrible to contemplate. Dare I ask if the tradition offers me any solace?

Hungry and Maybe Heartbroken in HK

Dear Hungry,

No need to be heartbroken. It is obvious that you understand that the whiskey cannot be consumed during the festival. The tradition does offer a solution here. The whiskey, and all the rest of the chametz that you may want to retain for use after the festival, can be sold to a non-Jewish person prior to Pesach. The price paid is actually considered a down payment. If the buyer chooses he or she can pay the balance or, as is almost always the case, the seller can buy it back after Pesach ends. This sale, known as *mechirat chametz*, is easiest to do if someone is willing to act as your agent. Fortunately for you, Rabbi Zamek (I love that man) is willing to do this. Simply fill out the agency form attached to the Shabbat Shalom and return it to the UJC office by Monday, 6<sup>th</sup> April. More than likely, Nancy L. will wind up temporarily owning a heap of chametz. Let's just hope she doesn't have a taste for the good stuff.

All Blessings

Rabbi Z

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26<sup>th</sup> March, 2009