

## SHABBAT HACHODESH 5769

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A couple weeks ago, our bread maker gave up the ghost. It happened quite dramatically, like something out of an opera by Puccini.

For some weeks, Breadman -- that's the brand -- Breadman had been making unusual noises as it mixed and kneaded. But we could usually settle it down with a little extra water, or by latching things together a bit more snugly in the compartment. One night, the Breadman was much noisier even than usual. I turned to look, and it was quivering, trembling on the counter. I tried my usual tricks, and moved it a bit closer to the wall. I went back to what I was doing, but a few seconds later there was a loud noise and then a crash. The Breadman had hurled itself off the counter -- I'm not kidding -- yanking the power cord right out of the socket.

Our relationship with the Breadman had always been a partnership. When we first got it, as a holiday gift from the company where Laurie worked, we didn't like the bread it made. It was too spongy, the crust too hard -- and after the baking, the pan was caked with dough and difficult to clean. But eventually we discovered a way to work with the Breadman. It mixed and kneaded, then Laurie or I would interrupt when the time had counted down to two hours remaining, to shape and then bake the bread in the regular oven. In retrospect, I wonder if the Breadman had seen handwriting on the wall. Not far away, in a box in the garage, sits our Kitchenaid mixer with its dough hook attachments, not yet unpacked. Perhaps it was a case of you-can't-fire-me-I-quit, though with a little too much "Romeo and Juliet" there at the end.

In any case, the Breadman is gone. We've been making almost all our own bread for a couple of years, so for the time being we're patching our way through, sometimes substituting Trade Joe's tortillas and Hannaford whole wheat bread (it's kosher dairy, if you're wondering).

And some nights I try to fill in for the Breadman myself, and I do its job of starting, mixing and kneading, and keeping each phase in the right temperature range. It's those nights that have gotten me thinking about **צמח**, about leavened bread. With my fingers sticky, my thumbs and fingers sore, and the dough still intransigent, I'm trying to make sense of the traditional teaching that **צמח** represents **גאווה** *gaava*, haughtiness.

Pesadik food has arrived in our groceries, and we're hopefully all starting to look at our boxes and bags of cereal, flour, and pasta, calculating if we can precisely eat our way through them without buying more before Pesach arrives. But what is this business about **צמח** really all about?

The first Lubavitcher Rebbe, Reb Shneur Zalman of Liady, taught that fluffy bread represents גאווה -- pride, understood as an inflated sense of self-importance. Matzah represents humility, a sense of proportion. If you put flour and water together without yeast or a leavening agent, the resulting bread will take up about as much space as the ingredients did. So the broad lesson of putting aside חמץ is to notice when we seem to be taking up too much space. This happens when we monopolize conversation, when we grandstand in front of relatives or coworkers, when we make ourselves the center of attention without even noticing that we're doing it. We need to stand watch on ourselves, just as matzah flour is watched to make sure it doesn't leaven when we're not paying attention. We have to see when we are prone to puffing out too much -- what kind of situations draw that kind of behavior out of us. Is it certain colleagues, certain family gatherings, certain social groups?

Inflating ourselves in these ways should be easy to spot. But גאווה, excessive self-importance, isn't always as obvious. We can learn more about this from bread. Here's what my rebbe, Rose Levy Beranbaum, explains in *The Bread Bible*:

Yeast is a living, single-cell plant...Flour is a carbohydrate. Like all carbohydrates, the starch molecules are made up of hundreds of sugar molecules. When the yeast, water, and flour are combined, enzymes in the flour break down the carbohydrates into sugar. The yeast...eats this sugar, grows and multiplies, and gives off carbon dioxide and alcohol. As it is produced, the carbon dioxide is held in by a network of gluten strands, or protein, formed by kneading together the flour and the water, and it leavens or causes the bread to rise...Both the carbon dioxide and the alcohol evaporate into the air during baking.

A lot is going on while the bread is rising, and whenever I'm in charge as opposed to the Breadman, עליו השלום, I have to say I'm amazed when it works. No matter what, the dough always rises -- but not always enough. From my vantage point, the difference between success and failure is all in what I do. If I dissolve the yeast in water that's exactly the right temperature, and if I measure the flour and water right, and if I'm diligent and careful about my kneading -- then I have made dough rise!

But as Reb Rose explains, things look quite different on the molecular level. The yeast and enzymes are powerful pieces of life. Yeast is about as simple as a life-form can get, but it's doing much more complex work than I am -- I can even watch TV while I knead, but the yeast never takes its eye off the ball.

Haughtiness isn't just symbolized by the contrast between rising dough and flat matzah. The whole process of making bread dough is a metaphor for how insidious our egos can be. When we accomplish something, we often don't take notice of all the elements that went into it beyond our own drive, skill, or effort. There are always small elements are easy to overlook -- the yeast and the enzymes that catalyze our accomplishments. I wrote this Dvar Torah by myself after a creative spark hit me the other day. But I was prepared years ago by the memory of some sourdough starter I saw ten years ago on the kitchen windowsill of a colleague, and a conversation we had about it. We plan a great event or a successful meeting, draw up the agenda and conduct a good discussion, but forget that the atmosphere depended on the custodians who cleaned and set up, the support staff who made sure the pads and pens were set out just so.

It's a lot easier to control our egos in the presence of someone who is obviously a partner, or obviously as skilled or more, or wiser or more. For two or more partners in an enterprise or a department, or two people in a relationship -- it's not so hard to overcome self-importance. It's not so threatening to our self-image.

It's harder when the partner is more hidden. Even though I'm a lot bigger than the yeast, I can't make a loaf of bread without it.

Reb Yehuda Leib, the *Sfat Emet*, points out that the letters of  $\text{מח}$  and  $\text{מצה}$  are almost identical. They share the  $\text{מ}$  and the  $\text{צ}$ . There is only the difference between the  $\text{ח}$  of  $\text{מח}$  and the  $\text{ה}$  of  $\text{מצה}$ . What makes the word  $\text{מצה}$  different is a small space in one letter. It says: I am not complete on my own. There is room in my awareness even for the smallest partner, the hidden partner. On the glorious night of Purim we celebrated together the other week, we didn't give thanks for the plows and plowers, without whom we could not have gathered in joy or experienced community.

The  $\text{מח}$  process reminds us is that we tend to give ourselves credit in the wrong proportions. And I should say here that Torah is not like Buddhism in this regard. The self and even the ego are not things we have to overcome or eliminate.

But to see our own special souls most clearly, we have to discriminate between what we do and the role others play. Otherwise, we end up all sticky, thanks to too much of the carbon dioxide and alcohol which puff out the bread. They are supposed to bake out in the process, so Reb Rose Levy Barenbaum teaches. But it's tricky. As we seek credit, recognition, honor for what we do, we can end up with toxic levels of the byproducts of the rising process. When we puff too much, we may stop listening. When we enlarge, we may inadvertently make others small. We forget that more than one person in a family or a workplace can shine together the same way at the same time.

My personal discipline when it comes to **האג**, to an excessive focus on myself, is to change the way I measure my role and my contribution to the things I really care about. It's not always about what I do -- what I'm seen to do -- but often about how I can be the catalyst. When all is said and done, it doesn't matter who did what, but whether the bread tastes good. Sometimes I knead. Sometimes I am more like the yeast, or the enzymes. From God's point of view it doesn't matter who does what.

So clean out your **צמח** wherever you can find it. Anywhere the crumbs may fall, we're supposed to search and investigate. And as I taught here last year, one way to do it is to go around to all the places we eat our meals and our snacks. And go over in our minds the interactions, the conversations that are unique to each place -- the kitchen, the car where we talk on the phone, the bedroom where we snack, the office. Who do I talk to there? What am I like? Am I puffed out, or just right?

After Pesach, we're probably going to replace the Breadman, because the partnership was not only effective but fulfilling too. Laurie and I did our parts very well -- we played around with the recipe, added some things to make it healthier and tastier, and we can shape and bake a great loaf of bread. The Breadman looked so simple, but it did its jobs of kneading and temperature control for rising so much better than we do. We can take credit for making great bread, if I say so myself -- but we are not so haughty to think we do it alone.