**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**A River Flows from Eden:**

**The Garden of Eden**

**as the Inner Source of the Jewish Holidays**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

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Sponsored by Adam and Nurit Lerer

In loving memory of Adam’s grandfather,   
Murray Lerer / Moshe Yitzchak ben Avraham Aryeh *z”l*

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**Shiur #26:**

**From Pesach to Shavuot, From Matza to *Chametz* (1)**

**The Holiday of Shavuot:**

**A Revelation of the Root Hidden in Chametz**

**I**

**Grain on Shavuot and on Pesach**

**Shavuot and Grain**

Grain stands at the center of the holiday of Shavuot as it is presented in the Torah. The agricultural name of the holiday of Shavuot, when it is mentioned for the first time in the Book of *Shemot*, is "the feast of the harvest (*chag ha-katzir*), the first-fruits of your work which you sow in the field" (23:16). After the barley has already ripened in the spring at the time of Pesach, now the time has arrived for the wheat’s ripening. At this stage, the wheat may be harvested. The Torah commands that we celebrate the ripening of the wheat on the holiday of Shavuot: "And you shall observe a feast of weeks (*chag shavuot*), even of the first-fruits of the wheat harvest" (*Shemot* 34:22).

So too the main commandment associated with Shavuot as it is described in the Book of *Vayikra* deals with grain, and involves the bringing of the two-loaves offering to the Sanctuary: “And you shall present a new meal-offering to the Lord. You shall bring out of your dwellings two wave-loaves of two tenth parts of an *eifa*” (*Vayikra* 23:16-17).

Apart from these two main components, the harvest and the two-loaves offering, there are also other elements that connect Shavuot to grain, such as the Book of *Ruth* which revolves around grain and the harvest.

**The Unique Aspect of Grain on Shavuot:**

**“They Shall be Baked with Leaven”**

We mentioned the two-loaves offering that is brought on Shavuot. The Torah emphasizes that this meal-offering must be *chametz*. Let us consider the two verses from *Vayikra* in their entirety:

To the morrow after the seventh week shall you number fifty days; and you shall present a new meal-offering to the Lord. You shall bring out of your dwellings two wave-loaves of two tenths parts of an eifa; they shall be of fine flour, they shall be baked with leaven, for the first-fruits to the Lord.

We are dealing here with an exceptional phenomenon. In general, the meal-offerings that are offered in the Sanctuary are not prepared as *chametz*, and there is even a prohibition to burn leaven on the altar: "No meal-offering which you shall bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven; for you shall make no leaven nor any honey smoke as an offering made by fire to the Lord" (*Vayikra* 2:11). So too the Showbreads, which have a permanent place in the Sanctuary, are not prepared as *chametz.* It is true that the two-loaves offering is not actually burned on the altar, but only waved before God, but we are still dealing with an exceptional meal-offering, by virtue of the very bringing of *chametz* into the Sanctuary.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It may, therefore, be said that Shavuot is distinguished by this mitzva, the essence of which involves bringing *chametz*-bread into the Sanctuary and waving it there before God. Bread stands at the center of the Sanctuary service on that day, and in exceptional manner it is brought to the Sanctuary specifically as *chametz.*

When we consider the mitzva of the two-loaves offering against the background of the holiday of Pesach, the question regarding the uniqueness of the *chametz* offering on Shavuot becomes all the stronger. On Pesach, the Jewish people relate to *chametz* as an extremely negative phenomenon; they do everything in their power not to leave a trace of it in their world. Not only are Jews careful not to eat *chametz* or to derive any benefit from it; they do not allow it to be anywhere around them, and they take practical steps to remove it from the world. How then does *chametz* on Shavuot become a mitzva, so that it is even brought into the Sanctuary? How does the main "enemy" of Pesach become desirable and sought-after on Shavuot? How does evil transform into good?

The truth is that this question may already be raised at the conclusion of Pesach, when leavened bread is reintroduced to the Jewish home. When Pesach is over, *chametz* is no longer forbidden, it is integrated into ordinary life, and it even serves as man's primary food. The expiration of the ban on *chametz* at the end of Pesach does not usually draw our attention, but nevertheless it is fitting to ask the following question: if *chametz* is perceived as such a terrible thing, to the point of various severe prohibitions and penalties placed on eating it or even possessing it during Pesach, why does it not continue to be forbidden throughout the year?

**The Meaning of *Chametz* in Light of the Story of the Garden of Eden**

We have already clarified the roots of the significance of grain on Pesach in earlier *shiurim.* Since Pesach and Shavuot are so closely connected, and because grain stands at the center of both of them, we will clarify the matter of grain after Pesach and on Shavuot in light of what we have seen about Pesach. We will first begin with the essentials concerning the foundations of Pesach in the story of Adam and Chava, the sin and the punishment.

Adam and Chava's sin is primarily a sin of eating. Though there are other aspects of the sin, this is its simplest and most manifest dimension. What is the meaning of the fact that this "formative" sin, the first in human history, is connected specifically to eating? In fact, eating stands at the heart not only of the sin, but of the entire story of the Garden of Eden. The Torah describes at length the variety of fruit trees growing in the garden, the garden is described as a place where food is found in abundance, and, above all, the only two *mitzvot* that are given to Adam concern eating: the positive precept of "Of every tree in the garden you shall freely eat" (*Bereishit* 2:16), and the negative commandment of "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat of it" (*Bereishit* 2:17). How does a lowly physical activity become the means to fulfill all of man's spiritual service in the Garden of Eden?

Eating is first and foremost an activity through which a person nourishes himself or herself. Upon this basic level are built the additional floors of taste and experience in the act of eating. In the basic sense of eating, as sustaining man's life, the abundance found in the garden provides Adam and Chava with their necessary food, bestowing upon them a safe and stable life. The primary abundance bestowed by God is the most basic abundance — life itself. God is the source of life, and in a certain sense life is that which belongs to God more than anything else, and for this reason He is called (in *Devarim* 5:23 et al.) "the living God." Receiving life from God is a deep expression of cleaving to God. This is the main channel of connection to God, just as an infant's connection to its mother is built first and foremost on nursing, which provides nutrition and bestows life. In fact, according to many sources in the words of *Chazal*, man in the Garden of Eden is supposed to eat mainly from the Tree of Life.

In contrast to pure and healthy eating which is essentially the receiving of life, there is also eating that stems from desire, from the inclination toward the externals that accompany the food. The desire for eating is liable to bring a person to turn a secondary matter into something essential and the essential matter into something secondary, to follow after some sensory illusion, instead of choosing the real truth. Choosing desire is connected in the story of the Garden of Eden to death: "In the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die" (*Bereishit* 2:17). In the simple and familiar sense, even in our world, the subjugation to desire is liable to bring a person to eat food that is harmful to one’s health, to the point of putting one’s life in danger. In the deepest and most spiritual sense, desirous eating severs man from God, because one is focused not on receiving the abundance of life but on one’s momentary material pleasure. Just as life and cleaving to God are intertwined, so too death and disconnection from God, the Source of Life, are interconnected to the point of identity.

Among the variety of foods that are found in man's world, bread stands out as a staple. During the festival of Pesach, we encounter a distinction between two kinds of bread: *chametz* and matza. The difference between *chametz* and matza is exceedingly fine, as flour and water are the primary ingredients of both of them. They are distinguished solely by the process of *chimutz* (fermentation), which causes two manifest external changes — the dough rises, causing a change in appearance, and the risen loaf has a new taste. Matzais bread that offers nothing but life; *chametz* distinguishes itself with additions that are expressed in appearance and taste.

The thread that ties the grain that stands at the center of Pesach and Shavuot to the sin of Adam is found in the words of Rabbi Yehuda:

The tree from which Adam ate… was wheat. (*Berakhot* 40a)

According to Rabbi Yehuda, wheat originally grew on a tree, and its ripe fruit was bread. In light of this connection, we can compare the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life, on the one hand, to *chametz* and matza, on the other: the eating of matza parallels eating which is directed solely at receiving life, whereas the eating of *chametz* parallels eating with the motives of good taste in the mouth and desire of the eyes, which take control of man's consciousness and have the power to kill. The *mitzvot* of Pesach return us to the choice that stood before Adam and Chava, and directs humanity to choose this time the Tree of Life, and not the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

**II**

**The Allowance of Chametz after Pesach**

**The Allowance of *Chametz* after Pesach as a Result of Adam’s Sin**

We can now return to our matter, and understand the attitude toward *chametz* after Pesach.

To do this, let us examine the consequence of Adam's sin. Adam's punishment consists of several components, the most important of which for the purpose of our discussion deals with bread, establishing man's new condition: "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread" (*Bereishit* 3:19). Whereas the eating of bread in the Garden of Eden is limited to the Tree of Life which is like matza*,* excluding the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which is like *chametz*, in the context of man's new situation after having been lowered in standing and banished from the Garden of Eden, man is no longer bound by this limitation, and *chametz-*bread becomes man's primary food. Later, when the people of Israel appear on the stage of history, they too are permitted to eat *chametz*, except of course on Pesach.

However, this itself requires explanation, as it is not for nothing that the Torah forbids Adam to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil which embodies eating to satisfy one’s palate and sight, commanding him before he sins to eat from the Tree of Life, which signifies pure eating for receiving life. The Torah is interested in Adam's life and therefore directs him to choose life, that is, matza, whose entire essence is giving life, and not the external motivations that characterize leavened bread and lead man to death. Why would the Torah forsake this guidance, withhold from man the Tree of Life, and permit man now to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil?

The answer to this question lies in the fact that Adam's banishment from the Garden of Eden brings about a change in all the conditions of human life. The point of choice where humanity finds itself from now on is in a place different from where it is before the sin. What is unique about the point of choice before the sin, at which man is commanded to eat from the Tree of Life and not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? How is it different from the point of choice after the sin?

In the Garden of Eden, life in its fullness stands before humanity if Adam and Chava are to choose the Tree of Life; on the other hand, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is known from the outset as something the eating of which brings about death. Adam and Chava must then choose between two diametrically opposed options. Appearance and taste are all that the Tree of Knowledge has to add to the Tree of Life, which bestows immortality.

Let us elaborate a bit on this, by considering the living conditions in the Garden of Eden as opposed to life in this world. In the Garden of Eden, life is found in infinite abundance and there is no concern or fear for its continued existence. In this life-teeming reality, Adam is commanded to eat from the Tree of Life and acquire eternal life. Man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden is certainly not only a change of address, but also a change in the conditions of man’s life. Not only does the decree of "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread" (*Bereishit* 3:19) impact on the effort required of Adam to obtain his primary food, but it also brings him to a world in which his food is not always available to him, but rather is conditioned on his toil, and even then there is often a shortage of this food.

*Chazal* express this idea in their statement that in the wake of the curse pronounced upon Adam, the phenomenon of famine enters the world: "Ten years of famine came into the world: one in the days of Adam, as it is stated: 'Cursed is the ground for your sake' (*Bereishit* 3:17)" (*Bereishit Rabba* 25, 3).

From now on, Adam lives not only in a world that requires toil on his part, but also in a state in which, even if he is prepared to toil, his life necessities are not guaranteed. His life is accompanied by the feeling that his very existence requires struggle, and that his fundamental experience is existence over which hovers the uncertainty whether he will always have the food and sustenance that his life requires.

Adam's banishment from the Garden of Eden also redefines his point of choice. The curse pronounced upon the ground, which transforms grain from a tree to a grass, and from a fruit into kernel, also diminishes the power of its produce. From now on, even when a person eats matza, which in the Garden of Eden parallels eating from the Tree of Life, one does not acquire eternal life. On the other hand, when one eats *chametz,* one finds oneself struggling with worry about life itself. Eating *chametz* no longer reflects exclusive addiction to desire and taste; it is mixed with worry about life and existence. This situation, in which even the eating of *chametz* includes the intention of receiving life, turns the eating of *chametz* into permitted eating. Now, in the wake of Adam's sin and expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the eating of *chametz*, which is like eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil,is permitted to humanity, and it is precisely eating from the Tree of Life that is prohibited to humanity:

And the Lord God said: Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.

Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from where he was taken.

So he drove out the man, and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way to the tree of life. (*Bereishit* 3:22-24)

In addition, *chametz* bread, in which good and evil are intermingled, accords with man's new situation. This mixture parallels the new condition of humanity, which is nourished from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and establishes for itself a new lifestyle: one in which good and evil are mixed, one which is characterized by life and death. The prohibition to be nourished by *chametz* in a world in which man is supposed to enjoy eternal life is replaced by the allowance of *chametz* in a world in which man is meant to enjoy partial life which ends in death. Since in humanity itself there are now good parts and evil parts, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil can and may nourish it, without its losing its present rank.

Furthermore, it seems that in humanity's new situation, in which good and evil, the desire for life and the inclination toward passion and feeling, are intermingled, withholding *chametz* from the human race would not be right. The prohibition of *chametz* directs a person to pure eating, free of concerns of taste and appearance, pleasure and desire; but after Adam and Chava's sin of eating from the forbidden tree, passion became an inseparable part of their character. If all eating in which passion is intermingled were forbidden to man, and *chametz* were withheld from human beings, the fear is that the good side of them — that desires life only because God has granted it to them — would not suffice to drive them on in life, and they would lack the strength to live such a life.

When humanity is no longer at a level where its cleaving to good is complete, its partial identification with goodness cannot be a sufficiently powerful motive for it to worry about its existence. Without the taste and appearance that arouse man's desire and appetite, there is no guarantee that one will regularly take care of one’s nutrition and survival. From now on, impulse and taste have a positive role, serving to guarantee that a person in a reduced situation will worry about his or her continued existence.

At man’s elevated level, the spiritual significance suffices for a person to enlist all of one’s powers and ensure one’s continued existence. At man’s low level, the deep desire for survival flows from Adam and Chava, from the level of the Tree of Life — that is to say, from the understanding of the deep meaning of life that comes from God and from the profound connection with it. This flows now not from this spiritual consciousness and identification, but from the low impulse implanted in man and independent of man’s choice. Overtly a person chooses the Tree of Knowledge and lives a poorer life, but in secret this serves as an instrument for the continuity of the Tree of Life, even if the person is not aware of this.

**The Allowance of *Chametz* as Part of the Process of Repair**

We have explained the allowance of *chametz* as stemming from man's decline into sin, and from the results that this decline brings about. This allowance expresses mankind’s new, deficient and complex situation, and the evil and death which from now on are its lot. Still, if the transition from the prohibition of *chametz* to its allowance reflects the process of man's decline, the following question remains, and even becomes stronger: how is it that offering *chametz* turns into a mitzvaon Shavuot?

We need to take another look at *chametz* in order to understand the path that leads to its inclusion in the Divine service in the Sanctuary on Shavuot. The allowance of *chametz* which stands by itself, and which stems from man's diminished situation, in the wake of which *chametz-*bread becomes humanity's main food, is not the same thing as the Torah's allowance of *chametz,* which stems from an upward movement, a movement that begins with the Pesach service and continues from it.

The allowance of *chametz* granted to the people of Israel is found between Pesach and Shavuot, between its annihilation and its becoming a *mitzva*. The significance of the process that reaches its climax on Shavuot follows from its beginning, which occurs on the Festival of *Matzot.* That holiday opens the process dealing with grain, which ends with the two-loaves offering brought on Shavuot, and by studying it we can lay the foundation for clarifying the matter of *chametz* on Shavuot.

We have already seen that Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden creates a new pattern of life for mankind, in which man contains an intermingling of good and evil, and one lives a life over which death hovers, and one is permitted to eat *chametz* despite the mixture of good and evil in it. This is the deficient state of mankind, which becomes its permanent situation. The Torah, however, does not reconcile itself to man's new situation, but rather it imposes on the people of Israel the mission to reverse the direction of movement and effect a course of repair.

This process of repair begins on the Festival of *Matzot.* The unique commandments of this holiday, which mainly focus on absolute distancing from *chametz* and on the positive precept of eating matza, direct the people of Israel to contend with and repair Adam's sin. The focus of the service on the Festival of *Matzot* lies in man’s confronting matzaand *chametz* in order that one choose the matza and reject the *chametz*, creating an expanse of life that is totally free of *chametz*. We have already seen that matza and *chametz* parallel the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and therefore the choice of matza and the rejection of *chametz* parallel the choice of the Tree of Life and rejection of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which arouses desire and leads to death. The allowance of *chametz* after Pesach is the next stage in a process that leads ultimately to Shavuot. Let us now consider this process that takes place in the annual cycle.

Every year on the Festival of *Matzot,* as a new year opens, the Torah returns the people of Israel to Adam and Chava’s point of choice before their sin, directing them to choose the Tree of Life. This choice builds Israel's fundamental attitude toward eating. Eating is directed at receiving life, rather than subjugation to taste and appearance, the palate and desire.

This fundamental attitude, which is built at the beginning point of the year, allows one to confront the entire year from a new angle and with a new objective. After the relationship has been established between the essential (the life resources in food) and the secondary matter (the taste and appearance that accompany the food), the objective of eating may now be directed first and foremost to receiving life from God through the connection with Him.

From now on the allowance of *chametz* reflects not only man's decline, the mixing of good and evil inside man, and the correspondence between the deficient food and the deficient man; it reflects also the fact that the people of Israel are released on Pesach from bondage to *chametz*, they build the proper attitude to it, and from now on they can deal with it while it is present in their lives.

However, in addition, once a path has been cleared to deal with *chametz* in daily life, the Jewish people may rise up another level and repair the *chametz.* The process that begins after Pesach is a process of dynamism and growth, not just an expression of their deficient static situation after the sin. At the climax of this process, on the holiday of Shavuot, *chametz* is transformed from something foul and rejected into something desirable and positive. Now at last we can consider the following question, with which we opened this analysis: how does *chametz* turn on Shavuot into a mitzva*?*

**(Translated by David Strauss)**

1. This phenomenon of bringing a *chametz* meal-offering to the Sanctuary, even though it is not offered on the altar, has only one parallel, the thanksgiving offering. This offering is brought with forty thankskgiving loaves, thirty of which are *matza* and ten of which are *chametz.* They too, like the two-loaves offering, are not offered on the altar. In the case of the thanksgiving-offering, however, the main part of the offering is the animal, and the loaves merely accompany it; mporeover, the majority of the loaves are *matza* and only a minority are *chametz*. On the other hand, on Shavuot the loaves constitute the primary offering, and the lambs accompany them, as follows from a precise reading of the verses: "You shall bring out of your dwellings two wave-loaves… And you shall present with the bread seven lambs without blemish… And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the first-fruits for a wave-offering before the Lord…" (*Vayikra* 23:16-20). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)