

On One Foot – 30 Days Before Pesach

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.

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 *Shehechyanu* blessing we say on the mitzvah of eating it.

The minimalist approach (from the Talmud) is to refrain on the day itself. The Mishna Brura 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!