



## **Yeast or leavened?**

*(15 minute read)*

### **What is leaven?**

Removing the leaven (*chametz*) from the home for Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread has a debate for many people. This is especially so if one considers the wide range of instructions in the Jewish culture. The directions start with getting rid of the obvious, which is traditional bread. But what about getting rid of other food and drink like beer, vanilla extract, cookies, crackers, pitas, flatbreads, tortillas, cereal, and even noodles that are suggested in some circles? What are leavened foods?

The dough ancient Israel considered leavened (*chametz*) was where fermentation occurred within it. It's related to the word *chamutz*, which means "sour." Their leavened bread was forbidden during Passover to remember leaving Egypt in haste. It's because of the lengthy time it took to make. The Israelites let their dough sit to leaven from the natural yeasts in the air and save starter dough (*se'or*) portions to start new batches.

Exodus 12: <sup>34</sup> So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders.

<sup>39</sup> And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

## **“Eighteen Minute Rule”**

Do we really need to set the timer? When making bread during Passover, Jewish Law, not YHWH's, determines the time the dough (no yeast granules or starter dough, of course!) may rest before being baked. If it sits longer, it's considered leavened. This is called the “Eighteen Minute Rule.” The scriptures don't inform us how much time and, of course, realistically, fermentation depends on temperature.

Because of this eighteen-minute rule, fewer people also remove their flour from their homes. Technically, flour isn't chametz. However, wheat kernels are tempered (sprayed) with water before milling begins. They sit until the moisture penetrates. So, by this standard, being exposed to water longer than eighteen minutes before baking or cooking makes it chametz. This is also why pasta, cookies, crackers, beer, or whisky made from grains are removed from the house.

Jewish culture, which abides by this rule, uses Matzo flour instead, along with purchasing Kosher-for-Passover matza, which has a strictly controlled process to make.

## Baking Powder and Baking Soda?

Yes! You can keep them, but there's much debate on their use. I'll give you the thoughts behind each side of this debate in order to clarify. Hopefully!

Some questions to consider behind the debate:

### 1. “Does the use of them make the dough leavened (*chametz which comes from the root word relating to sour (fermented?)*)”

■ **No.** Neither of these agents will ferment the dough, but they release carbon dioxide gases to create rising through a chemical reaction. Both are “quick-bakes.”

### 2. “Does the use of them make the dough leavened?”

■ **Yes.** The word “leavening” in modern baking is used to show there is volume added.

### 3. “Does it matter if the dough is raised by chemical reaction vs fermentation?”

■ **Well, it depends!** The answer will differ on your thought process. This is where we walk out our own salvation through our journey with YHWH’s written word.

- **No**, if you want to remember the commandant of no leavened bread regardless of what makes it “leavened.” Some believe these leaveners take away the significance of the command to abstain from leavened foods, whether it’s from fermentation or other.
- **Yes**, if you want to remember the commandment as the ancient Israelites did. They used only leavening from yeast. This is produced through the timely fermentation process. Thus, only what is leavened through fermentation is removed.

In Leviticus, we're given the holy days to remember for all generations. Here, the word "unleavened" is not written in the Hebrew text, but the word "bread" is. Matza is bread without yeast but is referenced as unleavened to describe it.

Lev 23: 6 And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened **Bread** **מַצֹּת** **matzot from mtztz (matza)** to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened **bread. מַצֹּת** **matzot from mtztz (matza)** bread.

So to use baking soda or baking powder during Passover is a personal choice. Do you see YHWH's instructions pertaining to all "unleavened" bread as we know it through today's modern baking? Or do you see His instructions pertaining to bread risen with yeast which takes time?

Jewish culture has the general rule to keep these leaveners in the house during Passover. They have arguments about baking with and without them. Most, who feel it's okay, will use it with other flours rather than with the five grains mentioned in Torah; wheat, spelt, barley, oats, and rye.

## Eggs

Eggs are fine during Passover. They are often referred to as a "leavener." Again, "leavened" in modern baking is used as giving "volume." The protein in the egg basically holds its shape as it bakes when all the air is being dispersed. Therefore, it keeps it fluffy, standing, and "risen." No fermentation occurs.

## Yeast

Yeast granules are probably the most misunderstood item to keep or throw out. Do yeast granules need to be removed from our homes along with leavened foods? No. But then why the confusion? Different bible translations use the word yeast instead of leaven. Looking at the Hebrew words below, we see what the Israelites actually were instructed to do. Therefore, understand how to follow those same instructions today.

As mentioned, The ancient Israelites would let their dough sit to leaven from the natural yeasts in the air. Anytime you see se'or in Hebrew, it is a leavened lump of dough and not yeast, as we know. Yeast by itself is not leaven but a leavening agent.

Exodus 12: 15 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove **leaven** **סֵּאֹר** **se'or from s'or (leavened)** out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is **leavened** **חָמֵץ**, **chametz from chmtz (leaven)** from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

Think sourdough starter when se'or is used for leaven. A portion is taken out before baking another batch. It's then used as a starter by adding it to the next batch of dough. The process would continue again and again. Thus, one saves a portion each time before baking the loaves. In ancient times, this portion of dough is considered "the old leaven," as we read in Corinthians.

1 Cor 5:6-8 <sup>6</sup> Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little **leaven ζύμη zume, (yeast, leaven)** leavens the whole lump? <sup>7</sup> Cleanse out the old **leaven ζύμη zume, (yeast, leaven)** that you may be a new lump, as you really are **unleavened ἄζυμοι azumoi, (unleavened bread)**. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old **leaven ζύμη zume, (yeast, leaven)**, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the **unleavened ἄζυμοι azumoi (unleavened bread)** bread of sincerity and truth.

Here it shows the old leaven is thrown out. After the Feast of Passover of Unleavened Bread, a new dough is made and left to ferment to make leavened bread once again.

We see in this Greek text the words “yeast and leaven” are the same. But, again, the yeast we know today wasn’t made available until the 19th century. You can find the history of modern baker’s yeast online at <http://www.historyofbread.com/bread-history/history-of-bakers-yeast/>

To help clarify this further, the following three excerpts are taken from the following website if you’d like to read it in context: <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/artful-amoeba/yeast-making-food-great-for-5000-years-but-what-exactly-is-it/>

“Clearly, we've been harnessing yeast for a long, long time to make some of the most celebrated foods in the world. But most people are probably still as clueless as the Egyptians were as to the strange substance turns wheat, barley, and grapes into bread, beer, and wine. What is it, anyway? It's not simply the tan, granulated contents of the Fleischmann's packet. *S. cerevisiae*, the stuff made by Fleischmann's whose traces were also found in the tomb of King Scorpion is indeed a yeast. But yeast is not *S. cerevisiae*. Not by a long shot.”

“Yeasts are naturally found floating in air and on just about every surface on Earth, including every opened cheese in your fridge (upon which they will form small cream-colored colonies if left long enough) and on grape skins. It's not a long stretch to go from grape juice to wine if said juice is left sitting around for a bit, which is no doubt how the first wine got going.”

“Yeasts are good at making bread, beer, and wine because they are good at harvesting energy from sugar without oxygen, a process called fermentation. In addition to energy, it produces two by-products: carbon dioxide, which puts the lift in leavened bread and the bubbles in beer; and the alcohol called ethanol, which adds interesting but well-known properties to wine and beer, but evaporates in the bread oven.”

The biblical instructions to Israel were to remove the leaven from their home. Since they only used the form of sourdough making to create leaven in their breads, it makes sense for us to follow the same pattern by removing what is ALREADY leaven in our own homes. If anything else were used, like yeast granules, they wouldn't have been able to make leavened bread again until the ability to trade with other nations. We know that's not possible because of the timing of being in the wilderness.

Some choose to rid their yeast, baking soda, and baking powder because they are leavening agents. There's nothing wrong with doing this. We just don't see it being the context of what the Israelites were instructed to do. Knowing how we truly can't get rid of yeast from our home because it's naturally everywhere, we simply choose to rid our house of all leavened doughs (sourdough starters) and bread or foods already leavened from yeasts. We think it's just that simple.

The instructions given by YHWH weren't meant to be complicated. We, as a people, just make it that way. To help you in further study, listed below are the Hebrew and Greek words used pertaining to leaven for observing Passover.

May you be blessed!

Growing in Him,  
Angela

### **Hebrew Text:**

**These first two Hebrew words have different vowel points but their meanings are identical. They are used in the context of being starter dough. It's the old portion of leavened dough used to make new bread.**

שֶׁאֵר se'or from s'or (leavened)

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חָמֵץ chametz from chmtz (leaven)

מַחְמֵצֶת machmetzet from chmtz (leavened thing)

מַצּוֹת matzot from mtztz (matza)

לֶחֶם lechem from lechm (food or bread)

### **Greek Text:**

ζύμη zume, (yeast, leaven)

ἄζυμοι azumoi (unleavened bread)

**The additional scriptures below (ESV Translation) are instructions of how to celebrate Passover and Unleavened Bread:**

Exodus 12:19 For seven days no **leaven** שֵׂאֵר se'or from s'or (**leavened**) is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is **leavened** מַחְמֵצִים machmetzet from chmtz (**leavened thing**) that person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land.

<sup>20</sup> You shall eat nothing **leavened** מַחְמֵצִים machmetzet from **chmtz (leavened thing)**; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened **bread** מַצּוֹת matzot from mtztz (**matza**).”

Exodus 13:7 Unleavened **bread** מַצּוֹת matzot from mtztz (**matza**) shall be eaten for seven days; no **leavened** חָמֵץ chametz from chmtz (**leaven**) bread shall be seen with you, and no **leaven** שֵׂאֵר se'or from s'or (**leavened**) shall be seen with you in all your territory.

Lev 23: 6 And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened **Bread** מַצּוֹת matzot from mtztz (**matza**) to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened **bread**. מַצּוֹת matzot from **mtztz (matza)**

Deut 16:3-4 You shall eat no **leavened** חָמֵץ chametz from chmtz (**leaven**) bread with it. Seven days you shall eat it with **unleavened** מַצּוֹת matzot from mtztz (**matza**) bread, the **bread** לֶחֶם lechem **from lechm (food or bread)** of affliction—for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste—that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt. <sup>4</sup> No **leaven** שֵׂאֵר se'or

**from s'or (leavened)** shall be seen with you in all your territory for seven days, nor shall any of the flesh that you sacrifice on the evening of the first day remain all night until morning.