

## RABBI'S MESSAGE

### *New Beginnings...again!*

The Hebrew calendar gives us many opportunities for beginnings. There are four “New Years” days on the Jewish calendar – Rosh Hashana, the first of Tishri, Tu Beshvat, the New Year for the Trees, the first of Nisan, the month of Passover and the beginning of springtime, and the first of Elul, preparing us for the Days of Awe. Celebrating Passover year at the beginning of April, this holiday is a new beginning for us as well. The custom is to free our homes – and ourselves – from *hametz*: the rising bread as well as the crumbs that are hard to find. We are taught to get rid of bread products and anything that rises for a full week. Traditionally, we look in every corner, and like aspects of the Passover seder, it becomes a hide-and-seek game to play with children. A few crumbs are hidden to be swept up by a feather and burned with a candle. If there is anything we haven't found, we can symbolically “sell” whatever *hametz* is left in our homes, offices or cars to a non-Jewish agent, who sells it back to us at the end of the week. Traditional Jews maintain four sets of dishes: meat and dairy for most of the year, and a special set of meat and dairy dishes used only on Pesach.

My family growing up did not go to those lengths. In fact, my father joked that his mother kept five sets of dishes: the four traditional ones, and a separate set used only for *treif* (non-kosher food). His philosophy was, and is, “Everyone has his own *shulchan aruch*. The *shulchan aruch*, literally “the set table” is the Code of Jewish Law that was established in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century defining essentials of Jewish practice. By saying everyone has his own *shulchan aruch*, my father basically said that we all take on the practices in our own way. But tradition still gives us a guide and a philosophical deeper meaning.

The first of the Four Questions at the seder is, “Why do we eat matzah on Passover?” The easy answer, of course, is that when we left Egypt, we did not have time to let the bread rise. Modern interpretations compare the rising of the bread with ego that can make us feel “puffed up,” or better than others. A week without that puffing up reminds us of the importance of humility. Those last few crumbs might be the secret areas of our souls that keep us from being our pure selves. We keep the darkest part of our lives hidden, often even from ourselves. If we never look for those crumbs, they stick around to attract insects, bugs and roaches. Pretending the offending *hametz* doesn't exist gives it a life of its own, potentially to multiply and get worse. Pesach gives us an annual opportunity to look at our internal *hametz*, and sweep away the crumbs that stand in the way of finding our most holy potential.

Spring is a time to embrace starting over again. Pausing for a week those elements of bravado that may cause us to judge others. Eliminating the crumbs allows us to rejuvenate with unique purity. Whether or not we fulfill every physical action in the most traditional ways, we can mentally take this season as an opportunity to embrace new possibilities. Just as we open the door to Elijah at the seder, we can open our hearts to the self we have been striving to become. L'shalom,

***Rabbi Dan Gordon***