

Shavuot is approaching on May 19-21<sup>st</sup>, the celebration of the giving of Torah at Mt. Sinai. It is also the celebration of the ancient wheat harvest, and our ancestors would bring baked loaves of bread as offerings to the holy Temple in Jerusalem. These loaves were particularly instructed to be *risen* loaves, that is, leavened – *chametz*.

How can this be? In preparation for Pesach, we are instructed to scour our homes to be *rid of chametz!* It is associated with ego, with extravagance. How can it be the *commanded* offering only seven weeks later?

Turns out, with *chametz* (as with many other topics), context matters. Chametz is what happens when dough's potential to rise is realized. The focus of Pesach is on unrealized-potential: the journey to liberation that is only begun and not yet complete, our own potential to be a holy people; these correspond to the *matzah* that is just mixed and has not risen.

The approaching holiday of Shavuot, on the other hand, focuses more on realizing potential: our arrival to a physical and mental state of readiness to receive revelation of Torah as liberated people corresponds to the dough's fermentation into risen loaves. Just as we need to be rid of *chametz* on Pesach, we need *chametz* on Shavuot.

Rabbi Avi Killip writes that rising bread corresponds to human reciprocity of divine blessings: "...why is it that bread makes an appropriate offering for God? Why is the first produce a grain-product, and not primarily fruit? ...Unlike fruits and vegetable, grain is not eaten by human beings before first being processed by us. We don't eat wheat, we eat bread. It is not enough to simply receive the blessings of God's world and be grateful—we are expected to take the resources we are given and make something."

*Chametz* is a manifestation of human creativity. It can be turned to ego, or to gratitude. As Shavuot approaches this year, how can we turn *our* creativity towards expressions of gratitude for our blessings? What will be *your* offering? What will be your Torah?