

Biur Hametz

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

Source: Rabbi Daniel Roth and Rabbi William Friedman <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-haggadah/>

The Mishnah in Pesachim cites a disagreement regarding how to fulfill the Torah's commandment (to eliminate the *hametz* (leavened bread) on the eve of Passover (See Exodus 12:15):

משנה פסחים ב: א "רבי יהודה אומר: אין ביעור חמץ אלא שריפה. וחכמים אומרים: אף מפרר וזורה לרוח או מטיל לים."

Mishnah Pesachim 2:1 Rabbi Yehudah says: "Destruction of hametz can only be accomplished through burning. But the Sages say: One may even crumble it up and throw it into the wind or toss it in the sea."

Rabbi Yehudah's position is that getting rid of hametz requires the act of burning it in fire, according to some, even to the point that someone who doesn't have access to a flame must hold on to it even on Passover itself (see Mekhilta deRashbi 12:15). The Sages, on the other hand, argue that the point is simply to get rid of hametz before Passover starts, in whatever way you can. What's at stake in this disagreement? The Sages take a very pragmatic position – since hametz must be eliminated before Passover starts, the actual method is ultimately irrelevant. R. Yehudah, on the other hand, insists on the need for experiencing the radical break from hametz as symbolized by the fiery destruction of the hametz.

It may be helpful to consider a modern analogue, one which shows up in conversations about getting rid of weapons following a civil war. On the one hand, there is a pragmatic need to gather up and get rid of as many weapons as possible as quickly as possible. On the other hand, "a public destruction ceremony reassures participants that surrendered weapons will not be reused and sends a powerful message to the public at large about the importance of removing the tools of violence from society." As we get rid of our hametz this Passover eve, may we pray that those societies being torn apart by violent conflict merit the appropriate method to rid themselves of those destructive forces, and may we, on a personal level, find the appropriate ways to free ourselves of the internal hametz that prevents us from achieving spiritual freedom.

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