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guest column

by Kimberly Gadette

don't bread on me

Fine, so before Passover we remove the leaven from our homes. That half loaf of challah was teetering on the edge of stale anyway. We'll bring in matzah, macaroons, a couple of bottles of Manischewitz, dust off the Seder plate, roast a shank bone, find the haggadah books, invite the Mishpucheh and be done with it.

But if one were to adhere to strict Jewish law, then the act of removing every speck of leaven, the chametz (rhymes with "crumb-ettes") is no piece of cake. Oy, did I just mention cake?

The Sages state that we must obliterate every iota of wheat, barley, oats, rye and spelt (spelt? Who knows from spelt?). According to the rabbis, this crumb-erasing is also a symbolic way of eliminating the "puffiness," aka the arrogance, from our Jewish souls.

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Couldn't we just take a diuretic and call it a day?

It turns out that this "rule of crumb" is some big megillah. As per Judaism 101 (jewfaq.org): "The process of cleaning the home of all chametz in preparation for Pesach is an enormous task... you must prepare for several weeks and spend several days scrubbing everything down, going over the edges of your stove and fridge with a toothpick and a Q-Tip, covering all surfaces that come in contact with food with foil or shelf-liner...after the cleaning is completed, the morning before the seder, a formal search of the house for chametz is undertaken, and any remaining chametz is burned."

These draconian rules bring up far more questions than answers.

When searching, does one wear white evening gloves for the dark breads (your pumpernickels, your wheats, your dark ryes), switching to black evening gloves for your challahs, your sourdoughs, your CPK crusts? And what about that marble rye that you served the Schwartzmans last summer?

How best to remove these crumb-bums? A Crustbuster? The dog? Oy, speaking of the dog, get this, anything that a Jew owns or leases is his. Therefore, if you own four paws of pooch, one Muttel the Mastiff, then by G-d, Muttel needs to be as leaven-free as you are.

An entry from a rebbetzin's blog wrote of the tsooris of having to cook special for her dog. She'd fixed a tasty dish of chicken and potato, along with just the right touch of matzah – but was then deeply concerned over his ensuing constipation. "He'd just go through the motions and cry."

Blogs like this, they can break your heart.

And it's not just the kitchen that requires a search-and-destroy mission, no-siree-slob. Don't forget the baby's diaper bag, with remnants of gummed Zwieback; or the couch, with the hefty leather cushions that have managed to grind the Pringles to a fine paste; or your husband's last bout of flu, when he could barely choke down three boxes of Saltines as he lay abed, kaynahorah. And what if you should forget to burn the vacuum cleaner bag full of all those wicked, wicked crumbs?

And you thought the fast on Yom Kippur was a challenge.

Another actual fact, to spur you on to greater heights of hysteria: On the evening prior to Passover, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi was so preoccupied with his preparations for the search for chametz that he ate nothing the entire day. The search took all night... though Rabbi Zalman and his wife lived in a single room at the time.

Hold on there, missy, put that bottle of whiskey down. Other than kosher wine, the grain and fermentation in alcohol is verboten. Heaven forbid someone in the family owns a liquor store. Or a brewery.

But let's take a moment to look at the dustbin as half-full. Consider your noodnik brother-in-law who's been lolling on the convertible sofabed in the rumpus room for the last six weeks. A crumb if ever there was one. And if crumbs have to go... bye, bye, bro.

Now I understand why Jews wandered through the desert for 40 years, shlepping a portable Tabernacle behind. High desert winds, no pantries, refrigerators or cupboards meant no chametz.

Hmmm... an open-air Pesach in Palm Springs might be just the thing.

For feedback, contact editor@sdjewishjournal.com.