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CLEANING FOR PESACH

Preparing is Avodah

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Preparing for Pesach is Part of our Avodas Hashem

In whatever time or situation we are in, we should always be aware that it is an inseparable part of our *avodas* Hashem. It doesn't matter if it is something that has to do with *ruchniyus* (spirituality) or not or if it is something more mundane. Wherever we are, whatever the situation, it is somehow part of our *avodas* Hashem.

We must wonder in every situation: how is a Jew supposed to go about this?

In these weeks, the *frum* world, who keep Torah and *mitzvos*, is very careful to clean the house scrupulously from any trace of *chametz*. We have a commandment in the Torah to make sure that we do not see or find any *chametz* in our house; but this *mitzvah* has much to it which seemingly has nothing to do with Pesach.

Upon reflection, we will be able to see how preparing for Pesach is part of our *avodas* Hashem, and how through it we can bring ourselves to be closer to Hashem.

“Melumadah” – Acting By Rote

There is a simple point that we must all know and be aware of. This simple point is that we can find Hashem in anything – without exception!

1) When a person begins to clean his house for Pesach, he first has to get rid of the “*melumadah*” – the tendency to do things by rote. We are not simply cleaning out the house for Pesach “because we have to clean.” Why are you cleaning for Pesach? Because that's what you did last year and the year before it?! That is not the reason.

2) We all know that to clean the house for Pesach is a *mitzvah* of the Torah, but what are our thoughts as we do this? If a person doesn't stop to think, he is only bothered by questions such as: What is the best way to clean the house? What needs to be cleaned, and how much? The whole relationship with Hashem is lost with all these questions.

So first, we must get rid of our tendency to just do things without thinking. We must realize that preparing for Pesach is purely *avodas* Hashem. After we know this we can begin to know how it is *avodas* Hashem, but the first step is this: don't just do it like a robot. Just like we understand that

learning and davening is *avodas Hashem*, so must we be aware that preparing for Pesach is *avodas Hashem*.

If a person feels that cleaning the house for Pesach is not part of *avodas Hashem*, we can almost tell him that he is forbidden to do it! The *Chovos HeLevovos* writes that there is no such thing as a gray area; it's either forbidden or permissible. If it's not a *mitzvah*, then it's wrong to do.

We will try to explain how cleaning for Pesach can be *avodas Hashem*, in a way how everyone will be able to enter the Yom Tov amidst *avodas Hashem*, not amidst stress.

Why Do We Clean The House?

If we think into it, besides for the *mitzvah* of the Torah to keep the house clean from *chametz* on Pesach, there are more reasons why we need to clean the house.

3) One possible reason why a person cleans is because he feels bad to make the rest of his family do everything! He personally doesn't care for the house to be clean. Most of the Pesach preparations have nothing to do with the *mitzvah* of destroying *chametz* – just various household chores. Why does a person do all these things for Pesach? Many times it is simply because he feels bad standing around and watching everyone else do all the work. He's doing it all for the sake of *chessed*.

That is one possible reason why a person spends so much time with Pesach preparations.

4) Another possibility could be that we don't like it when the house is dirty. Hashem created each person with a natural desire to have a clean house. Some people are cleaner than others, and they can't take even the slightest amount of messiness. But all people want their house clean somewhat, so they clean for the house for Pesach.

5) Another possibility can also be because people like it when things are orderly. During the rest of the year people are very busy, and they want to have one time in the year where they sit down and just arrange everything in its place (This is not the same thing as a desire for neatness.)

So far we have mentioned five possibilities why a person cleans the house for Pesach: Acting robotic, doing it because it's a *mitzvah* of the Torah, kindness, cleanliness or orderliness.

The first kind of person we mentioned – the one who does it robotically – is obviously not doing it in the right way. That is simple and we don't need to explain why.

The second kind of person, who does it because it's a *mitzvah*, has to put some more thought into it. It is not enough to know that he must clean the house – there must be some more life involved, some more thinking.

Before he begins to clean the house, he should talk to Hashem and say, “*Ribono shel olam*, Why am I going to clean my house? I have other things to do; I can be learning or relaxing. The reason why I am going to clean my house now is because You, the *Ribono shel Olam*, commanded me that the house be free of *chametz*. Since I want to give You a *nachas ruach*, I will exert myself now to clean my house.”

While a person is cleaning the house, this is what he should be saying to himself. If someone knows how to think in learning Torah as he does something, then he should think in learning and he doesn't have to do this. But if someone usually doesn't think in learning as he cleans the house, and his thoughts are just floating elsewhere, then he should at least for a few minutes here and there remind himself of what he's doing and why he's doing it.

We are speaking about a very simple thing one can do; there are people who are on a very high level and always have *d'veykus* in Hashem wherever they are, but we are not speaking of this. We are speaking about something very basic and simple.

If a person cleans the house because he wants to be nice and doesn't want everyone else to do all the work, he also has to think about this and say, “*Ribono shel olam*, Why am I doing this? I don't personally feel a need to clean my house. The only reason why I am doing it is so that I can do *chessed* with my family.”

A person should keep talking to Hashem throughout the entire time: “*Ribono shel olam*, it is my will to do Your will. One of the pillars of the world is *chessed*, and I am thus doing *chessed* in order to give You a *nachas ruach*.”

After a day of doing this, besides for the physical exercise you get out of cleaning the house, your entire day is filled with pure *avodas* Hashem. In this way, a person never leaves *ruchniyus* even while being involved in this mundane world.

The Natural Desire for Cleanliness

Let us elaborate on the last two points, which are more subtle points about our soul.

There is a desire in a person for cleanliness. Everyone loves cleanliness – some more, and some less. The soul of a person naturally recoils a bit from messiness. People often see a mess and start cleaning it, and if you ask them, “What are you doing? Why you are cleaning it up?” the answer is, “It bothers me.”

People clean because they can't stand the sight of something dirty or messy, and cleaning it up removes this anxiety. It seems that this has nothing to do with trying to become close to Hashem, and that a person is trying to save his soul from some pain.

But if we think into it just a little, we can connect everything to Hashem. If a person likes to clean, the first thing he should ask himself is: “Why do I like to clean? Did I make myself this way? No. Hashem gave me this nature.”

Realize that whatever your nature is, it was Hashem who gave you such a nature. Not only that, but Hashem is constantly renewing Creation; He is constantly renewing your nature, which is that you like to clean and that you hate messiness.

After you realize with certainty that it was Hashem who gave you this nature to desire cleanliness, and that He continues to renew this nature in you, now think: “Why did Hashem give me such a nature? What is the purpose of wanting cleanliness, and how do I use this natural desire in a person? What are the pros and cons of it?”

The desire for cleanliness doesn’t happen on its own. (It is absurd to think that it does, but the *yetzer hora* gets a person to succeed not to think.) A person must think to himself, “Hashem gave me this desire for cleanliness. It was Him who placed this desire in me.”

This realization helps you begin your relationship with Hashem.

What indeed is the root of why we like cleanliness?

Cleanliness (*nekiyus*) is one of the ten steps in the ladder of *avodas* Hashem as described by Rebbi Pinchos ben Yair, the basis of *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*. Cleanliness exists for us to cleanse ourselves from sin, because sin sullies our soul. Every power in the soul is also manifested somehow in our body; the power of cleanliness of our soul manifests itself in our body with the need for physical cleanliness.

The truth is that the more a person grows spiritually, the more he increases his cleanliness. Some people are very clean in their soul and others are very particular also about physical cleanliness (in addition to their spiritual cleanliness), but the point is that the more a person purifies himself, the more of a need for cleanliness he has, and the purer his soul becomes.

The root behind cleanliness comes from an inner desire to be purified. This gives us a whole different attitude to have about our need for physical cleanliness – it is rooted in our soul’s need for cleanliness and purity.

Knowing Your Motivation For Cleanliness

There are two reasons why a person wants physical cleanliness; one reason is unnecessary and more of a luxury to a person, while the other reason is coming from our soul’s need for purity and closeness.

There are situations in which we clean more than we have to, and it is extra. It is hard to say exactly what is considered overdoing it, and each person needs to decide for himself what is considered already too much. If a person is just taking a shower or brushing his teeth simply because he is very concerned about his body, this is totally unnecessary (except for certain rare individuals who won’t get affected by this).

Something even worse than this is when a person is really bothered by uncleanliness and he doesn't clean. Such a person not only has physical messiness, but he damages his soul with this. He is denying his soul's demand for cleanliness.

So before begins to clean, he must ask himself: What is my motivation in cleaning the house? Am I doing it out of a compulsiveness to clean (just like there are people who indulge in food and drinking), or am I doing it to help my household? If he realizes that he is doing it to help, then he should work on the *avodah* we mentioned before (which is to say a *tefillah* to Hashem).

If he discovers that he's doing it because he has a personal need for cleanliness, he must really ask himself if he is overdoing it or not, or if it comes from a sensitivity in his soul for cleanliness (and he therefore needs it). Everyone must uncover what is motivating him to clean.

Most people do not have these issues. We will therefore discuss a more simple kind of issue that people have which is much more common: when people love to clean something that is clearly a mess. In this, we need to put some thought into the cleaning.

Before a person cleans, he should say: "*Ribono shel olam*, this mess really bothers me. Who gave me this feeling? You – Hashem. Where does this nature in me come from? It comes from a power in my soul to demand purity. *Ribono shel olam*, is it Your will that I break this nature of mine and endure the messiness? Or is it Your will that I live with purity and cleanliness? Since it is clear to me that You want my soul to desire this cleanliness, I will go clean the house in order to get close to You and give You pleasure."

Even though you're doing it *shelo lishmah* – not for the sake of Heaven (because you're doing it out of your need for cleanliness) – you can still add this element of *lishmah* into your action.

But always remember that cleaning the house for Pesach is purely *avodas* Hashem. It must be done properly with thought and concentration.

The Importance Of Orderliness

Another point to be addressed is the fifth reason why a person wants to clean the house: to have orderliness.

Just like a person has a natural need for cleanliness, and this comes from the soul's desire for purity which Hashem put in us, so did Hashem put in us a natural desire for orderliness.

Some people have a more of a need to be organized than others, but all people have a need to get things organized. This is not by itself – it is a nature which Hashem gave each person.

Without our natural desire for orderliness, no one would get anywhere. In order to build up anything, there is a certain order involved. Since every person on this world must build himself, Hashem endowed each person with an ability to have orderliness. Without orderliness, we wouldn't be able to develop our *avodas* Hashem.

The more orderly a person is, the more he is able to develop in *avodas* Hashem. The less orderly a person is, the more confusion he has, and he feels like he is an exile. A person has to get out of this exile of confusion and become more orderly. This is the beginning of an inner freedom.

Orderliness is thus a need of our soul, but we often use it just for our body's physical needs, such as the need to look very put together and organized.

Just like a dirty house makes our soul suffer, so can living in a messy house bother us so much that it is an impediment to our *avodas* Hashem. If we don't care about how our house looks inside, we will definitely be affected spiritually as well.

It is well-known that when a *tzaddik* would look for a prospective match for his daughter, he would inspect the boy's room and see if he's neat. When a person has no sense of orderliness when it comes to the physical, it is a sign that he has is spiritually messy as well.

In order for our soul to get orderliness in spiritual matters, a person needs to first make sure he's neat when it comes to his physical matters. But we must always remember that it is Hashem who gives us such a nature. We must recognize that our need for orderliness comes from Hashem, and that this need that people have doesn't come by itself.

Realize that this need for orderliness can be used as a way to connect to the Creator. Like this, a person can take the physical world and use it to develop a relationship with Hashem. It is an inner kind of life, a life spent with Hashem even in ordinary, mundane actions.

When a person realizes that the need for organization is necessary in his *avodas* Hashem, he is able to realize that organizing the house is not just an act of kindness with his family, but it is a necessary part in one's personal *avodas* Hashem.

In this, there are two parts. Some people were born with a need for orderliness, and it really bothers them when things aren't in place. The *avodah* of such a person is to realize that this need comes from Hashem, and it is a way to serve Hashem.

But others don't feel such a need for cleanliness. They know with their minds that a person should be orderly, but they don't feel that this is a need for their soul. Such people feel that it makes sense to clean the house once a year, or else the house becomes unlivable...but not more than once a year.

This person's *avodah* is the opposite of the first kind of person. Besides for the fact that he must organize his house, he also needs to awaken in his soul a desire to have orderliness.

Days Which We Can Grow From

A person wonders: Why did Hashem make it that people have to work so hard on *Erev* Pesach? Doesn't this sacrifice our opportunities to grow spiritually by making preparations for Yom Tov? If we have to work so hard cleaning up, how do we prepare for the Yom Tov??

But if you think about it, these days before Pesach contain tremendous areas which we can use to attain growth in. If Hashem made it this way that we have to clean and organize the house, then that is the way for us to acquire all the precious areas of growth which we need.

Really, cleaning up and organizing the house are there to remind us of our soul's need for purity. This is a precious gain in our *avodas* Hashem. But the *yetzer hora* comes and takes away the message of it and turns it into mundane actions, drying it up from all the *avodas* Hashem contained in it.

If a person understands the depth of *avodas* Hashem, he doesn't clean the house simply because he wants it to be clean. He cleans the house because through that, he connects to an inner point in his soul – the need for spiritual cleanliness. He understands that now is precisely the time to work on this.

The truth is that all of life is like this: the *yetzer hora* comes and takes what's very important and turns it into something that's not important. In whatever we encounter, we should always see the greatness we can achieve in this situation. The more confusing and seemingly pointless a situation appears, the more greatness lies in it if we uncover it.

If a person before Pesach is caught up in this and that and he comes into the Yom Tov exhausted and stressed out, what is all our hard work worth? We don't gain from this kind of a life.

If we don't see how everything we do can be a form of *avodas* Hashem and how much being involved with the world takes away from our soul, then these days go to waste. Our preparation for Pesach should not be a physical preparation; although we do exert our body to prepare for Pesach, really, there is an inner depth taking place in what we are doing. It is really a preparation of our soul for the coming days. Through preparing for it in the right way, a person comes into Yom Tov the way he should.

Each person can take these words and open them up more to himself, each to his own. The common denominator between all people is the days preceding Pesach are days of *ruchniyus*, not days of materialistic pursuits. They are days of closeness to Hashem.

Hashem should help us that we prepare properly for Pesach during these days, from a sincere desire to give pleasure to our Creator. In these days preceding Pesach, each of us should merit to increase our true closeness and love of Hashem.