



SELF-NULLIFICATION AT THE SEA

Lot [the nephew of Avraham Avinu] was saved from the destruction of Sodom only in the merit of Avraham Avinu (*Midrash Tanchuma: Vayeira: 9*). This doesn't simply mean that Avraham Avinu's merits saved Lot. Rather, this statement means that the inner recesses of Lot were infused with the inner traits of Avraham Avinu who had taught him. It was this inner quality which saved Lot from destruction. What exactly was this inner quality? It was the *mesirus nefesh*, the self-sacrifice which Avraham had in practicing kindness to guests, which was mirrored by the self-sacrifice which Lot showed when he was willing to house guests in Sodom. *Mesirus nefesh* was the only thing which could save him from the immorality [and destruction] of Sodom.

We are living in a generation today which is steeped in *tum'ah* (*defilement*). The only way to be saved from the strange, unwanted "winds" of immorality that blow through the world is, by having *mesirus nefesh* (*to be willing to give up what we want, in order to do Hashem's will*). If a person today does not have *mesirus nefesh*, simply speaking, in order to do Hashem's will, he cannot survive our generation. The obligation that is upon us in our times is: to have total *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

Before the event of *kerias Yam Suf* (*the splitting of the sea*) when the Egyptians were chasing the Jewish people, the Torah says, "And Hashem said to Moshe, why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the children of Yisrael and journey on." Rashi explains that that Moshe was davening, and Hashem said to him, "Now is not the time to be lengthy in prayer,

when the Jewish people are in a predicament." This begs a well-known question: If not now, when? Don't the Sages always teach that when a person is found in a predicament, he should grab onto the "art of the forefathers" which we have in our hands, and daven to Hashem? Why is it that when they came to the sea, their *avodah* was precisely not to daven?!

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When a person is davening, it is because he wants a certain thing. He may want one thing, or more than one thing, to happen. He is trying to attain his *ratzon* (*will*), through praying to Hashem to get it. But at the sea, the people had the *avodah* to transcend any of their personal *ratzon*, and to arrive at total self-nullification (*bittul*), of having no personal *ratzon* at all. At the sea, their *avodah* was to come to the recognition that "I only want what Hashem wants. If Hashem's will is for me to live, then I want to live. If Hashem wills the opposite, then that is my will also."

When the Jewish people were leaving Egypt, they had a will to leave it: "They cried out, and their prayers arose to G-d from all of their difficult labor, and Hashem heard their groans." But now when they were standing in front of the sea, they had a loftier *avodah* to do. Now their *avodah* was to have absolute *mesirus nefesh*: to be willing to give up their souls entirely for Hashem, and to accept the will of Hashem wholeheartedly. When that is the case, there is no gain in davening, and it would only be detrimental to do so.

FREEDOM FROM THE EVIL INCLINATION

Pesach is called zman cheiruseinu – “time of our freedom”.

There is a well-known Mishnah in Avos: “There is no ben chorin (*free man*) except for one who studies Torah.” If the Sages say that cheirus\freedom is only found by one who studies Torah, then why is Pesach called zman cheiruseinu? Chazal were very specific in saying that cheirus\freedom is only possible where there is Torah. If so, what does it mean that Pesach is a time of cheirus? Don’t these two statements of Chazal contradict each other?

THE THIRD KIND OF EVIL WE FACE: AN EVIL INFLUENCE AMONG OURSELVES

When we left Egypt, we were no longer subjugated to the Egyptian exile, and the only thing holding us back from fulfilling Hashem’s will was the yetzer hora. But as we left Egypt, there were other forces of evil that came with us – and this was the “Erev Rav”, a group of Egyptians who wished to join our people. The Erev Rav brought with them the evil influences of Egypt, and in this way, we still had an aspect of being subjugated to the influences of exile.

In fact, due to the Erev Rav joining us as we left Egypt, there was a whole new kind of subjugation to exile that came with them. It was a secular government that entered us within our own camps – a whole different kind of influence that had never been here until then! Until the redemption from Egypt, the problem was that we had to endure the Egyptian rule. When we left Egypt, we were finally free from that exile, but then the Erev Rav entered us.

They represent a new influence of evil upon the Jewish people – an evil government that resides within the Jewish people. They brought about a third, deeper kind of evil that we face.

At Har Sinai, the Erev Rav didn’t want to hear the Torah from Hashem. They were the ones who requested that Moshe should speak, instead of Hashem. They could not bear the holiness of Hashem’s voice. While everyone else in the Jewish people were prepared to die in order to hear the Torah from Hashem – as Chazal say, that our souls left us as we heard Hashem speaking to us – the Erev Rav did not have this mesirus nefesh (*self-sacrifice*) that we had. They therefore chose not to hear the Torah from Hashem, and they instead requested that Moshe speak instead.

At Har Sinai when we heard the Torah, we were elevated,

and we attained true cheirus (*freedom*). It was the completion to our cheirus from Egypt. We went free from all evil impurity of the Egyptian exile. But once we sinned by the Golden Calf, we once again descended to the level of impurity that had been removed from us. The members of the Erev Rav were the ones who came up with the idea of the Golden Calf.

Every year, we can return to the freedom we attained when we left Egypt, as well as the freedom we received at the giving of the Torah. But at the same time, the evil influence of the Erev returns as well in order to counter all of that holiness we can receive. And concerning our era - End of the Days - it is written in our sefarim hakedoshim that the Erev Rav will return to once again influence us and prevent us from attaining holiness.

By Har Sinai, our souls left us when we heard the Torah. The evil inclination left us as well – but the Erev Rav was still present with us. The same Erev Rav who didn’t want to have mesirus nefesh to hear the Torah come back each year to prevent us from having mesirus nefesh.

PREPARING FOR PESACH AND SHAVUOS – THROUGH MESIRUS NEFESH

We must therefore prepare for the freedom of Pesach and for the giving of the Torah by being preparing ourselves to have mesirus nefesh. In order to receive the holiness that Yom Tov has to offer us, we must prepare for it by having mesirus nefesh for the Torah. If anyone seeks the truth, he should prepare himself to have mesirus nefesh for Hashem and His Torah. Any Jew of the past who succeeded in his life was only due to the mesirus nefesh that he exhibited.

If a person wants to make sure that he is not being influenced by the Erev Rav, he must have mesirus nefesh in learning the Torah. “There is no free person except the one who learns Torah.”

What does it mean to have mesirus nefesh for Hashem? It means “Retzoinenu laasos retzoncha” – It is our will to do Your will. We must reveal our innermost ratzon to only do Hashem’s will. This will help us have mesirus nefesh.

May we be zoche to search for our true ratzon in life – that our entire yearning in life should be to do always reveal the will of Hashem. [פסח 004 זמן חרותנו, תשס”ב]