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**WEEKLY PARSHA
ARCHIVE Q&A**

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INTRODUCTION: A QUESTION

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 TWO FACTORS WHICH PREVENT US FROM DOING HASHEM’S WILL

There is a well-known Gemara that says, “It is our will to do Your will (“*retzoneinu laasos retzoncha*”), but it is the “yeast in the sourdough” (a reference to the evil inclination) and the jurisdiction of the government which is holding us back.” Our soul by its very essence wants to do the right thing, but the evil inclination, as well as the subjugation we have to go through in the exile – are the two factors which are getting in the way of us doing Hashem’s will.

What is the “yeast in the sourdough” and what is the “jurisdiction to the government” that are holding us back from doing the right thing?

THE “YEAST IN THE SOURDOUGH”

It is well-known that the “yeast in the sourdough” is referring to the *yetzer hora*, the evil inclination. What exactly is the *yetzer hora*?

Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote that there are two forces of evil present in a person. One kind of evil is an outer force, an angel, which convinces a person to do evil. Another kind of evil is an internal kind

of evil that is enmeshed in our very heart, causing us to have evil desires. The *Chovos HaLevovos* wrote that the *yetzer hora* is mixed into our being and enmeshed with our heart, an evil force that is inside us telling us to commit evil. This is describing the second kind of *yetzer hora* that Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote about.

What is the difference between the two kinds of evil that is found in man? The inner kind of evil is perceived by us as a part of our essence, so it is much harder to overcome. By contrast, the outer force of evil which can influence us is easier to overcome, since we are aware that it is not a part of our being. It's harder to overcome our nature than to overcome this angel! This is written in *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*.

That is the “yeast in the sourdough” that prevents us from doing the right thing – the *yetzer hora*, which manifests in two forms: outer evil and internal evil.

THE “SUBJUGATION TO THE GOVERNMENT”

The second factor which gets in our way is our “subjugation to the government.” Simply speaking, it is because we are enslaved by the exile and we have to be subjugated to the nations.

But the deeper meaning of this concept is that our very will is subjugated to evil. Our power of *ratzon* (will) can be taken over by the various evil desires that the challenges of exile tempts us with.

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 *retzon* to only do Hashem's will. This will help us have *mesirus nefesh*.

BILVAVI-STYLE EMUNAH

I don't understand the Rav's style in sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh teaches that we need to develop our emunah in a question-and-answer format by asking ourselves questions how the world got created and then clarifying that Hashem created it, etc. This sounds like an intellectual and philosophical approach towards emunah, which is very different from the emunah I was taught as a child, which is that we need to simply believe that Hashem is here, there, everywhere and without clarifying how this is true and without getting into questions.

ANSWER It is like when we say the questions of the Mah Nishtanah by the Pesach seder, which is in question-and-answer format. We are not asking the questions because we are honestly questioning it and looking for an answer [rather, we already know the answer and we are just clarifying it to ourselves so that our knowledge can internalize].

FINAL PLAGUE OF EGYPT & TODAY

It seems we have gotten past the “plague of darkness” and that the latest epidemic is “smiting of the firstborn” (makas bechoros). What will that mean for us?

ANSWER Unlike by the plagues in Egypt, in which there was a plague of darkness that ended and which was then followed by the smiting of the firstborn, which was a night that shone like the day for the Jewish people [the night of Pesach], the current plague is a continuous plague of darkness, like “light and darkness serving together in a mixture”, where the darkness has entered together with the smiting of firstborns. (This represents the “two beginnings”, Keser and Chochmah, together.)

The “plague of the firstborn” right now is essentially the striking down of the “firstborn”: the striking down of beginnings. In Egypt, both the firstborn people and firstborn animals were smitten, and now, all of the “beginnings” of the world of falsity are being smitten down, and presiding over all of them is the beginning of all the nations: Amalek, whose end will be destruction. Hashem is striking down and uprooting every “head” [ruler] of the world – every evil beginning point, in all three dimensions of place, time, and soul, and in every kind of creation: the inanimate creations, the animate creations, the animals, and people. The topic is long and deep.

RETURNING TO A HIGHER EXPERIENCE

Is the purpose of all of the Rav’s teachings about inner avodas Hashem so that we can bring Mashiach? It is hard for me to understand how the Rav’s approach will help people bring Mashiach, because I am under the impression that all of one’s avodas Hashem is supposed to excite a person and feel a great yearning that Mashiach should come. Yet I don’t see the Rav’s approach emphasizing this. Maybe I’m mistaken. Can the Rav help me understand?

ANSWER It is similar to the night of Pesach, which is a high level that we experience and the day after it is gone, and we need 49 days afterwards of purifying our middos in order to return to it, so that we will be able to live with it correctly

THE SOUL AFTER DEATH

QUESTION 1) What does the soul see at the first moment it leaves the body?

ANSWER It depends on what the person’s level is. If one is zocheh, he sees the light of the Shechinah and he melts into it, and then he leaves [the

world]. If one is at a lower level, he sees his relatives or those whom he was close with, who come to greet him. There are others who see both [the light of the Shechinah and also their relatives/close friends].

QUESTION 2) Is the soul afraid at death?

ANSWER Refer to the previous answer, regarding the soul's fear. However, that is only after the soul leaves the body. But before that, if one is not zocheh, he sees the Angel of Death wielding its sword, as the Gemara says. See sefer Raishis Chochmah, shaar haYirah, and Maseches Chibut HaKever.

QUESTION 3) If a person sees himself as a soul (neshamah) even during this lifetime, will this ease the process for the soul at death?

ANSWER Yes, certainly. Part of the fear is because the soul is separating from the body, and therefore when one learns to identify himself as a soul already in his lifetimes, it makes the transition a lot easier.

QUESTION 4) Is there anything the Rav can tell me to see all of this [the transition of the soul at death] in a way that's not frightening?

ANSWER Feel that you are with Hashem, constantly, at all times and in every place, and He is watching you, with His endless love.

QUESTION 5) When the soul leaves the body, does it realize that it woke up from a dream, now that it has left the world and it is at the true kind of life?

ANSWER Yes. It is like what is written about the future, that when we return to Tziyon we will realize that during the exile "Then, we were like dreamers." Life on This World is all a dream, compared to life in the Next World. As an aside, only think about these topics for a little bit of time during the day, but for the rest of the time, be happy with all the good things that Hashem does.