

BILVAVI

**CLEANING
FOR
PESACH**

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Preparing For Pesach Is Part Of Our Avodas Hashem

Each time period we are experiencing in the Jewish calendar brings with it a particular, unique role in our *avodas Hashem*. Some *avodah* may seem more mundane or physical and some may be more overtly spiritual. But it is all somehow part of our *avodas Hashem* of this particular time period. In order to enhance our *avodah*, we should inquire as to the underlying spiritual component behind every physical *avodah*.

For instance, in the weeks leading up to Pesach, a Jew is very careful to clean the house scrupulously and to get rid of every trace of *chametz*. Though the Torah commands us to make sure that we do not see or find any *chametz* in our homes, at first glance this may seem to be just like ‘spring cleaning’ and nothing to do with Pesach. Only when we reflect on the underlying spiritual aspect of our cleaning can we learn how the physical action of this can bring us closer to Hashem.

“Melumadah” --Acting By Rote

We must believe without a doubt that we can find Hashem in anything – without exception! Unfortunately, one of the biggest barriers to experiencing this truth is the practice of carrying out each physical activity “*melumadah*” – by rote. This risk is especially high in our Pesach preparations. For instance, we may start to clean our houses in preparation for Pesach simply “because we have to” or “because we do it every year.” If this is our sole motivation and intention, we are essentially doing the *mitzvah* by rote. In turn, this form of cleaning prevents us from elevating our actions by connecting to Hashem through the physical, mundane action.

Yet, it is not enough simply to be consciously aware that we are cleaning the house for Pesach just because it is a *mitzvah* of the Torah. We must also consider what our thoughts are as we do this? If we fail to stop and contemplate the true *kavanah* /intention behind our actions, we may still be at risk of focusing only on physical questions such as “What is the best way to clean the house?” or “What needs to be cleaned, and how much?” In doing so, we will lose this precious opportunity to increase our relationship with Hashem in the process.

Thus, the first step is to be conscious of the tendency and try to avoid carrying out our actions by rote. We must realize that a fundamental part of preparing for Pesach is our *avodas Hashem* and our connecting to Him through the physical actions. Only after we put thought into our actions and avoid acting by rote can we then figure out how we can enhance our *avodas Hashem* through this practice of cleaning. We must realize that cleaning and preparing for Pesach is *avodas Hashem* in the same way that davening and learning Torah is. An additional benefit of this approach is that by understanding that cleaning for Pesach can be *avodas Hashem*, we can maximize our potential for viewing the Yom Tov with an elevated positive mindset, and reduce our stress over the physical status of our cleaning tasks.

Mistaken Intentions Behind Cleaning The House For Pesach

Some people do not have any intention at all when they clean for Pesach, and just do their Pesach cleaning by rote. Others may have intentions in doing it which are not linked to Hashem and His *mitzvos* at all. Some people may clean because they feel bad standing around and watching everyone else do all the work. In this sense, they are acting for the sake of *chesed*.

Another possible underlying reason for cleaning at Pesach time could be that we naturally crave cleanliness and thus seize this opportunity at this time of the year to “spring-clean” the house. Hashem created each person with different levels of tolerance for mess. Those that have a lower tolerance for dirt may simply be using this time period to exercise their natural born tendency to clean.

Another possible underlying drive for a person’s pre-Pesach clean-up may be their desire for orderliness. During the rest of the year people may be very busy so they set aside this time before Pesach to arrange everything in their house. (Note that this is not the same thing as a desire for cleanliness).

How can we alter the above underlying reasons, so that our intentions will elevate our Pesach cleaning? Obviously, those who are simply on ‘auto pilot’ and clean the house robotically, must try to put more thought into their cleaning and remember that it is ultimately done in order to find *chametz* as Hashem commanded. However, even

those who clean the house with the underlying awareness that it is a *mitzvah* can put more thought into their physical actions.

A practical suggestion may be that before one begins to clean the house, one can talk to Hashem and say, “*Ribono shel olam*, for what purpose am I going to clean my house? I have other things to do, I could 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.” One should spend at least a few minutes reminding oneself as to the real reason why one is doing what one is doing. Another alternative is to think Torah thoughts and thus learn Torah in one’s mind as one cleans.

Such intellectual exercises are not geared or limited to people who are on a very high level and always have *d’veykus* in Hashem wherever they are. Rather, this practice can be something very basic.

For instance, those who clean the house because they want to do a *chesed* for others can contemplate their actions first. They can speak to Hashem 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 *chesed* with my family.” They can remind themselves “*Ribono shel olam*, it is my will to do Your will. One of the pillars of the world is *chesed* and I am thus doing *chesed* in order to give You a *nachas ruach*.”

The advantage of this will be that instead of being purely a physical exercise of cleaning the house, one’s entire day is filled with pure *avodas Hashem*. In this way, a person is attached to *ruchniyus* even while being involved in this mundane world.

The Natural Desire For Cleanliness

Most people appreciate cleanliness, to a greater or lesser extent. The soul of each person naturally recoils from messiness to varying degrees. Those who are naturally more attracted to cleanliness may simply clean before Pesach because cleaning up reduces the aversion they have for dirt. This rationale alone appears to have nothing to do with trying to become closer to Hashem. Rather, this type of person is simply trying to save his soul from some pain.

In order for this type of person to elevate his cleaning activities before Pesach, one can try to connect one's physical labor to Hashem by asking: "Why do I like to clean? Did I make myself this way? No. Hashem gave me this nature." A second step is to ask oneself: "Why did Hashem give me such a nature? What is the purpose of wanting cleanliness, and how do I use this natural desire? What are the pros and cons of it?" This process of contemplation can help one bring Hashem into one's mundane, physical act of cleaning and thereby enhance the relationship.

What Is The Root Of Our Desire For Cleanliness?

Cleanliness/*nekiyus* is one of the ten steps in the ladder of *avodas Hashem* as described by the sage Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair, which is the basis of *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*. In spiritual terms, the concept of cleanliness exists in order for us to cleanse ourselves from sin, since sin sullies our soul. Since every power in the soul manifests itself somehow in our body, our physical need for cleanliness represents the soul's yearning to be free of sin.

The truth is that the more a person grows spiritually, the more he increases his need for cleanliness. Some people are very clean in their soul [making sure to purify their character and keep away from sin], and in others this nature of cleanliness is expressed as being very particular about physical cleanliness (in addition to their need for spiritual cleanliness). The point is that the more a person purifies himself, the more of a need he has for cleanliness and the purer his soul becomes.

The root of our desire for physical cleanliness comes from an inner desire to be purified spiritually. However, many people mistakenly only focus on the physical aspect of it and fail to focus on the spiritual 'mess' their soul is in. Knowing this underlying cause of our desire for physical cleanliness can help us focus on our real *avodah*: our soul's need for cleanliness and purity.

The Importance Of Orderliness

Just like a person has a natural need for cleanliness which stems from Hashem embedding in our souls a desire for purity, so did Hashem instill in our souls a natural

desire for orderliness. Some people have more of a need to be organized than others, but all people have a need to get things organized.

Often, we may simply assume that this is a physical trait alone, and hence use our desire for organization in order to cater to our body's physical needs, such as the need to look very put together and organized.

A person whose cleaning stems from a desire for orderliness must first recognize that some people were born with a need for orderliness. This need is a characteristic from Hashem and it is a way to serve Hashem.

Then, one can examine and contemplate true underlying soul-based reasons for one's desire. Physical orderliness can stem from a need of our soul to also be orderly. The more orderly a person is, the more one may systematically be able to build and work on one's *avodas Hashem*. In this way, this need for orderliness can be used as a way to connect to the Creator.

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 being. 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 is spiritually messy as well. Thus, some people who are not naturally bothered by disorder may do well to not only realize that they need to tend to the 'order' in their soul but also to awaken a desire to have orderliness.

Days That Provide Opportunity To Grow

One may wonder why Hashem commanded us to do something so physical and mundane in order to prepare for such a spiritual festival such as Pesach. Doesn't this hard physical labor seem contradictory to our opportunity to grow spiritually?

However, we must remember that Hashem knows best how we can serve Him. Since Hashem commanded us to clean and organize the house, then this is surely the best way for us to acquire our maximum, precious spiritual growth as well.

In whatever situation we encounter, we should always seek out the potentially higher level we can achieve. Often, the more confusing and seemingly pointless a situation appears, the more greatness lies in it when we uncover it. We can enhance our spiritual growth at this time by remembering that our physical cleanliness and orderliness can represent a spiritual cleanliness and orderliness. Therefore, there is a precious gain contained here, with regards to *avodas Hashem*. The *yetzer hora* may seek to steal this lofty level away by turning our physical cleaning into merely mundane actions, bereft of all spiritual connection to Hashem.

Another way to enhance our *avodas Hashem* is to simply bring Hashem into all our physical labor. We should remember that He commanded us to clean and this is the best thing for our souls too.

As a rule, everything we do can be a form of *avodas Hashem*. If we spend these days before Pesach simply doing rote, mechanical, physical actions without elevating and connecting our behavior to Hashem, then even though we may have a clean house free of *chametz*, we have missed a precious chance to connect to Hashem. Though we exert our bodies to prepare for Pesach, we really need to become aware of the inner depth in what we are doing. It is really a preparation of our soul for the coming days. By preparing for Pesach in the right way, a person comes into Yom Tov the way he should, rather than simply exhausted and stressed out from all the physical, meaningless labor. In this way, the days preceding days of Pesach can be days of *ruchniyus* through the mundane, special days of closeness to Hashem.

In Conclusion

Hashem should help us that we prepare properly for Pesach with a sincere desire to give pleasure to our Creator and fulfill His will. May each of us merit increasing our true closeness and love of Hashem in these days preceding Pesach.



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