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## Pesach - 004 Time of Our Freedom

### **Freedom - The Root of Our Inner Avodah**

The Yom Tov of Pesach is called “*zman cheiruseinu*” (time of our freedom). We will try to explain what the concept of *zman cheiruseinu* is and how it applies to our very soul. We will also try to explain what *cheirus* (freedom) is – and how we can attain it.

Chazal say, “There is no *ben choirin* (free person) - except the one who studies Torah”.<sup>[1]</sup> We must understand why it is that true freedom is only found by one who studies Torah!

Man is comprised of a body (*guf*) and a soul (*neshamah*). The soul is a piece of G-d, a “*cheilek eloka mimaal*”. The body is made up of materialism – as it is written, “*For earth you are, and to earth you shall return.*” From the time we are born, we naturally identify ourselves as a physical body, and it is our body which is at the forefront of things. Our soul is almost completely concealed from us from the very beginning. The purpose of man is to come to cleave to his Creator, and therefore, the beginning of man’s avodah is to reveal his existence as a soul. Upon revealing the soul, it becomes possible for a person to connect to Hashem; “The Holy One, the Torah, and Yisrael are one.”

As long as the soul of a person remains concealed from one’s awareness, it’s very possible that, although, he’s learning Torah and doing the mitzvos his whole life, he never reaches the desired goal of life – closeness with Hashem.

It’s impossible to reach closeness with Hashem unless one identifies himself with his *neshamah*.

All of the *Yomim Tovim* begin with Pesach. The *Yomim Tovim* determine the orderly progression of our avodas Hashem. Since Pesach is the beginning of the *Yomim Tovim*, and Pesach is *zman cheiruseinu* (time of our freedom), it is therefore upon us to understand that its concept of “freedom” is the root of our entire inner avodah.

### **“Remove the body from your soul”**

What exactly is *cheirus*/freedom?

On Shabbos, we rest from labor; “Six days you shall labor, and on the seventh day, you shall rest.” The Hebrew word for “you shall rest” is “*tishbos*” – the root of the word “Shabbos.” Why is rest referred to as “Shabbos”, as opposed to the word “*cheirus*”? If the purpose of Shabbos is to rest from work, shouldn’t Shabbos be called *zman cheiruseinu*, “time of our freedom”? Why is it that only Pesach gets the title of *zman cheiruseinu*?

[In order to answer this, we must know the following.] Egypt is *Mitzrayim*, which comes from the word *meitzar* (prison). Egypt was the epitome of a prison. The exile of Egypt represents the root of all exiles and imprisonment. In our soul, there can also be imprisonment.

What is the greatest imprisonment to our *neshamah*? It is the body. The body conceals our soul from us – it is the strongest force that imprisons us from revealing G-dliness in ourselves. It affects each member of the Jewish people, without exception.

In order to understand how our body indeed imprisons us, we need to first reflect and understand what exactly is being imprisoned by the body: we need to know what our soul is, and we need to know how the body conceals it from us.

Understanding our soul is not like any other knowledge we come across. Our entire mission on this world is to reveal our soul, and therefore, we must understand before anything what it is that we are searching for on this world. After we understand what we are supposed to be searching for, can we understand *how* to search for it. If we don’t know what we search for, then we will keep evading it, and we won’t ever come across it.

The same idea applies to everything: before we work to acquire a matter, we first have to understand its concept. We need to know where to begin and where we are supposed to end off at; as we say in *Lecha Dodi*, “*The end of the actions is first with thought.*” If we don’t have carefully planned thought first in what we want to accomplish, we won’t be able to get to the “end of the actions” which is the goal. It is also written, “*With wisdom, a house is built.*” Before we take action and build something, we first need carefully planned thought.

We must therefore first understand what our soul is, what our body is, and how they contradict each other. We need to understand how the body hides our soul from us, and only after understanding this can we attempt to remove the body’s hold on us and reveal our soul.

Our *neshamah* (soul) is called a *cheilek eloka mimaal*, “a portion of G-d from above.” Our soul is, so to speak, an actual part of Hashem [not that we can comprehend that].

Generally speaking, there are two reasons why the body conceals our soul from us. We must remove these two barriers and fulfill the dictum of Chazal, “Remove your body from your *neshamah*.”<sup>[2]</sup>

The first point we should understand is as follows: “Similarities attract.” Our soul loves spirituality (*ruchniyus*) and longs for it constantly; it craves closeness G-dliness and closeness with Hashem. It is hard to define “spirituality”, because “spirituality” is a very general term. It would be more precise to say that our soul desires “G-dliness” (“*elokus*” in Hebrew). The more a person merits entering inward, the more a person understands that he is meant to search for the inner G-dliness that is present within everything there is.

“Spirituality” includes angels and other kinds of esoteric matters, but if our soul merits to understand the truth, it can recognize that even esoteric matters do not define spirituality. They are definitely included in spirituality, but they do not define it.

Our spirituality is defined by the search to somehow find the inherent G-dliness in everything. We can search for more and more G-dliness until we arrive at G-dliness at its utterly simple level.

Our soul recoils from materialistic pursuits. All our *neshamah* wants to do is to fulfill the possuk, “*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*” Our body by contrast was created from the earth, and therefore it desires all kinds of things that are earthy and thus materialistic. When our soul enters our body as we are born, it gets hidden away by the body, and the body has a hold on it. In our initial state of being a pure soul with no body (before we were born) all we wanted was spirituality and closeness with Hashem. But our body desires materialism, and it is at its strongest when we are young and undeveloped. You can see this from a baby, who only desires food and other kinds of physical desires.

The avodah of man is to somehow release his soul from the prison of his body, to remove its hold from the soul – “Remove your body from your soul” – and to reveal the true desire of man, which is the desire for the completely spiritual.

1) The first kind of imprisonment that our soul experiences are the restrictions of the body. We need to redeem ourselves from that captivity, and this resembles the *mitzvah* of *pidyon shevuyim* – “redeeming captives”. We need to redeem our soul from our body.

2) The second kind of imprisonment we are in is that even after we succeed in purifying the understanding about our existence. We understand that we are essentially a soul, and not a body, and we solely desire spirituality, but we still have another problem we come across. Our soul is contained by the body, and this doesn’t allow the soul to expand by the body and transcend time and place. The body is basically telling you, “You are either here or there; you cannot be in two places at once! And you are bound to time. Either you are currently in Pesach, or in Shavuot, or in Sukkos. But you are not found in all three at once.”

But from our soul’s perspective, things look totally different. Our soul understands that it is beyond time and thus not bound to it, because the soul desires complete spirituality, it is all-inclusive. Our soul can therefore access different times at once.

So the first part of our avodah is to leave our materialistic pursuits and instead enter into spirituality. Our second part of our avodah is that even after we reveal our soul’s perspective and we desire spirituality, we need to leave the limits of time and place.

Generally speaking, these are the two factors holding back our soul (desiring materialism, and feeling limited to time and place). Now we can understand what the concept of cheirus/freedom is – it is to free our soul from the prison that it’s in. We need to essentially leave the Egypt within us – the body that is truly and utterly confining us. We must each leave our personal inner imprisonment – our body – and instead reveal our soul and get in touch with it.

## **Tranquility of the Body vs. Freedom of the Soul**

As we explained, the beginning of our *avodah* is to free ourselves from our materialistic drives and instead enter the world of spirituality.

If a person attempts to reach freedom from among his materialistic pursuits and he hasn’t yet

revealed his soul, he has a misconception about what it means to be free. About the tribe of Yissocher, the Torah writes, “Yissocher is a strong-boned donkey, he rests between the boundaries. He saw tranquility that it was good, and the land that it was pleasant, yet he bent his shoulder to bear.” The Hebrew word for donkey is chamor, which has the same root letters as the word choimer, “materialism.” This hints to the fact that man must work with his “donkey” – he has to work with materialism.

But working with materialism doesn’t give us freedom. Freedom is acquired only by our soul, and not through our body. Our body has to work and bear the brunt of having to labor hard.

If a person attempts to reach freedom by working to get it through his body, he’s using the wrong power for the wrong reason. By using his body, he essentially conceals his soul in the process, because he’s in touch with his body. It is impossible to get close to Hashem through the body, because since the body conceals the soul, it doesn’t allow the connection.

Yissocher “saw that tranquility that it was good.” The Hebrew word in the Torah for tranquility is called “menuchah”, and menuchah is not the same concept as cheirus/freedom. They are two different concepts – cheirus, and menuchah. On Shabbos we can reach what is called menuchah, and on Pesach we can reach what is called cheirus. But they are two totally different, opposite concepts.

When a person erroneously thinks that cheirus/freedom can be reached through menuchah – for example, when he goes to all sorts of places on Chol HaMoed to gratify his body, because he thinks that this will give him some menuchah/tranquility – he misses the *avodah* of Pesach. Our *avodah* on Pesach is not to attain menuchah, but rather to attain cheirus. And cheirus is a totally opposite concept of menuchah [as we will soon explain].

There are two kinds of menuchah – there is the lower kind of menuchah, which is physical and body-oriented tranquility, and there is higher menuchah, which is the serenity of the soul.

The lower kind of menuchah, which is physical tranquility of the body, is mentioned many times in sefer Mesillas Yesharim, and the point of it is that a person needs a certain amount of physical calm in order to serve Hashem properly. For example, a person needs the amount of rest and food that he needs in order to feel serene. Everyone needs a basic amount of calmness in their life.

The higher kind of menuchah, though, is the menuchah of Shabbos. Shabbos is called “yoma d’nishmasa”, “day of the soul. During the week, we use our body for work, and it acts a garment over our soul; our body is purified through the hard work of the weekday. But on Shabbos, we are entirely devoted to our soul; it is a “day of the soul.”

But in order to reach true menuchah/tranquility, we need to first experience cheirus/freedom. Without escaping our body’s hold, we cannot reach menuchah. Pesach helps us to free our soul from its captivity of the body, and menuchah can only be a result of revealing our soul. So if someone is trying to reach cheirus/freedom through attaining physical serenity, it will not happen, because this is confusing two opposing concepts.

## **Yearn To Go Free**

We will now return to the previous point. As we explained in the beginning of this discussion, the order of the *Yomim Tovim* teach and direct us. Yom Tov begins with Pesach, and therefore, Pesach shows us what the beginning point of our *avodah* should be.

On Pesach, when we left Egypt, we left in haste, and therefore the bread we were carrying did not have a chance to become leavened (*chometz*). We left with unleavened bread - *matzah* - which is called *lechem oni*, "the poor man's bread." Why should it matter that we left Egypt with unleavened bread? What does this fact of history have to do with us now?

It has relevance to us, even now. Pesach, the "*Chag HaMatzos*" - the festival of unleavened bread - is called *zman cheiruseinu*, the time of our freedom. Therefore, *matzah* hints how we can reach *cheirus*/freedom. The mitzvah on Pesach to eat *matzah* serves for us a way to enter our soul - by leaving materialism.

When the Jewish people were enslaved in Egypt, they had to work with bricks (*choimer*) and mortar (*levainim*). The Hebrew word for bricks is *choimer*, which can also mean "materialism". In other words, leaving Egypt was essentially about leaving our materialistic pursuits and entering into spirituality, represented by *matzah*, which was a very simple kind of bread, a poor man's bread. The lesson we learn from this is that when we go with simplicity, we can enter the world of spirituality.

On every Yom Tov, there is a mitzvah to rejoice. How do we rejoice with our freedom we have on Pesach?

There must be joy amongst our feeling of freedom, or else we can't call it freedom. Freedom that has no joy in it cannot be called freedom. So if we reach the desire to leave materialistic pursuits and instead enter into spirituality, it should be with the same mentality that the people had when they left Egypt. When we left Egypt, it wasn't because we wanted to reach high levels in spirituality or deep levels of understanding. It was because we couldn't wait to escape the enormous pressure that was upon us then, the immense pressure of exile that did not allow our soul to have serenity.

If one reaches the understanding that it is worthwhile to leave materialistic pursuits and instead enter into spiritual pursuits, it shouldn't be with the attitude that spirituality is the "good thing to do, therefore, I will pursue it." Of course, spirituality is good, and Chazal tell us that is the only true good there is; we believe in this and we yearn for that true good. But this should not be our initial motivation in seeking spirituality.

Our initial motivation should be: "*And the Egyptians made the children of Israel work with cruel labor, and they embittered their lives, with difficult work, with bricks and mortar.*"

A person has to realize that life on this world involves materialism, and this means that we are forced to be in this cruel labor of materialism! Living a life of materialistic pursuit is really a form of bitterness. If someone doesn't feel this way, he hasn't yet uncovered a desire to want to leave this exile and have the redemption. If one doesn't have a true desire to leave his exile, he can't be redeemed...

Leaving a physical prison is not the same kind of redemption as leaving a spiritual kind of imprisonment. When a person gets out of jail, he's free, whether or not he wanted to get out. But when it comes to leaving our spiritual prison within us, the only way to get out of it is if we truly want to get out of it. Otherwise, we won't be able to get out of it.

In order to start serving Hashem, we must first come to the recognition that our life of materialistic pursuits actually resembles the cruel labor of Egypt, since the "bricks and mortar" - a.k.a. materialism - imprisoned us. The body, which keeps our soul in prison, is a cruel prison to our soul. We must feel a true wish to go free from the bonds of materialistic pursuits that are entrapping the soul.

After we come to that recognition, we must then come to do as the people did in Egypt when they realized their suffering, which was that they cried out to Hashem (and their groans were indeed heard

by Hashem). It is therefore not enough for us to have a desire to leave exile – ultimately, it is up to Hashem to take us out, whenever it is His will to do so. For this reason, we must cry out to Hashem in prayer, just as the people did in Egypt.

We must cry out to Hashem from the very depths of the soul.

We must feel that our body's hold on our soul is a form of cruel labor. We must feel the bitterness of this in the same way that we felt embittered by the Egyptians. If we don't feel this bitterness, then we won't be able to cry out to Hashem from a true desire to escape.

A person must realize that he needs to get out of his inner imprisonment which entails crying to Hashem for days and nights, from the depth of our hearts and not just to cry 'crocodile tears'. There can be no hope for a person to truly serve Hashem without crying from the depth of his heart, because he will be missing the first, basic point that he needs to start with.

May Hashem help all of us that we should first come to recognize the lowliness of our situation, to realize that without being close to Him, life is not a life, but a total fantasy. May this recognition cause to feel, with Hashem's help, a true yearning to be freed from this dark exile – and to reach the light of the redemption, speedily in our days. Amen.

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[\[1\]](#) Pirkei Avos 6:2

[\[2\]](#) Rabbeinu Yonah to Berachos 22b

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