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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" - The Evil Inclination (External and Internal)

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" - Our Ratzon Is Imprisoned From Us

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.

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 Hashem.

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 Rav 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.

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