



AVODAH ON SHVI'I SHEL PESACH

QUESTION: What is the avodah on Shvi'i shel Pesach? Should we join our soul to the level of song (שירה) and on the level of self-sacrifice (מסירות נפש)?

ANSWER: First self-sacrifice (מסירות נפש), like Nachshon ben Aminadav, and then song (שירה).

QUESTIONS ON MESIRUS NEFESH

QUESTION: (1) What are the conditions for “mesirus nefesh”, when it comes to (a) avodas Hashem, (b) recognizing our soul, (c) learning Torah, and (d) doing mitzvos? Through mesirus nefesh a person receives siyata d’shmaya (Heavenly assistance) to skip levels. What is the simple meaning of mesirus nefesh? Does it mean that I have to be mentally willing to be killed al kiddush Hashem over something? Does it mean that I have to spend a lot of energy on something?

ANSWER: 1) Mesirus nefesh in avodas Hashem means that a person works on an area which he finds personally difficult to work on, and he perseveres in that area, through self-sacrifice to succeed, no matter what comes his way. Mesirus nefesh should not be used when one is trying to recognize the soul, because one needs calm and quiet reflection in order to slowly recognize and understand the soul [hence trying to have “mesirus nefesh” in order to understand his soul would only deter him from reaching it].

Mesirus nefesh in learning Torah is that a person learns above his natural physical capabilities, and with mental exertion, until he exhausts his mind over it. Mesirus nefesh in doing mitzvos is that a person takes one mitzvah and does it as perfectly as possible, on his own level, according to the halachah, and with love and awe of Hashem, and with the conviction that he will never give up this mitzvah under any circumstance.

QUESTION: (2) The Rav has said that the avodah of our generation is mesirus nefesh. Is this referring to mesirus

nefesh in avodas Hashem, in doing mitzvos, or in learning Torah? Or in all of them?

ANSWER: 2) In this generation, there is a spiritual illumination of the ability to act with “mesirus nefesh”, which is called the “light of Moshiach”, the light of Dovid HaMelech, who is called a “stillborn”, with no life support of his own, whose entire life source stems from acting on the level of mesirus nefesh.

QUESTION: (3) I have heard from the Rav many times that the way of mesirus nefesh is only for individuals. If so, what is the Rav’s intention that the avodah of mesirus nefesh is for this entire generation?

ANSWER: 3) In essence, the way of mesirus nefesh is applicable only to individuals. However, as mentioned above, since we are currently in a time period where the “light of Moshiach” is shining strongly, the light of mesirus nefesh is also present, and it exists in order to aid us in contending with the evil of the “50th Gate of Defilement” that is rampant today. The only way to spiritually survive the “50th Gate of Defilement” is through mesirus nefesh.

MESIRUS NEFESH ON A PRACTICAL LEVEL

QUESTION: In the Rav’s derashah “The Avodah of Our Generation”, the Rav writes that the way to overcome the “50th Gate of Defilement” in our generation is only through mesirus nefesh [self-sacrifice]. However, in other derashos, I have heard the Rav say that there are always different paths to traverse: to go step after step, and the path of mesirus nefesh. But according to what the Rav has said in the derashah of “The Avodah of Our Generation”, it seems that there is only one path to take – mesirus nefesh.

I would be happy if the Rav can clarify what this means for me, practically. Let’s say we have a person who has difficulty with learning Torah, and he likes to sleep a lot. Does such a person need to give up his entire being, in one moment, in order to serve Hashem [by overcoming

his difficulty in learning and his desire to sleep]? How can he do this, if he's not on that level?!] So what does the Rav mean by the words "mesirus nefesh"?

ANSWER: Throughout all of the generations, there were always two paths: 1) Hadragah, to progress step after step. 2) Mesirus nefesh, self-sacrifice, as Rabbi Eliezer ben Dordaya did (see *Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 17a*).

In our generation, where the "50th Gate of Defilement" is in full force, the only way to counter it is through mesirus nefesh. Therefore, each person needs to exercise mesirus nefesh on [at least] one area of his life. However this does not mean that a person needs to do all of his actions with mesirus nefesh. It just means that a person needs to have some connection to the level of mesirus nefesh. It is possible for one to implement this idea by taking the area of his life in which he finds his greatest struggle in, and to have mesirus nefesh in that area.

Practically speaking, though, this is unfeasible for most people, so it is not close within reach of most people. So instead, one can try to find other areas in his life [where he struggles in] – each person on his own level and according to his own unique situation – and to exercise mesirus nefesh in those areas [in which he struggles in]. In that way, one can become connected to mesirus nefesh, and thereafter, one has a connection to the "50th Gate of Holiness", and he is no longer held captive by the "50th Gate of Defilement". Once a person accesses this spiritual illumination, it will be shined onto all other areas of one's avodah.

THE SONG OF MIRIAM

QUESTION: In the Torah, there are many stories. From all of the stories in the Torah, which of them is a story all about women and the most applicable to women?

ANSWER: Chazal state that in Gan Eden, there is a special chamber in Heaven, where the song of Miriam continues to be sung. It is headed by Miriam!

If so, the great miracles that happened to the Jewish people didn't end with the redemption from Egypt and the splitting of the sea. The miracles continue - because

the song of Miriam is still continuing on in Heaven. All the miracles together throughout history are therefore a continuous chain. ... It was Miriam who began the shirah. She was also the one who helped Moshe survive; these two facts are interconnected with each other, as follows.

Chazal say that when Moshe was placed into a basket in the Nile River, Miriam hid in the bushes, waiting to see what would happen to her baby brother whom she prophesied about, and she continued to look after him, watching from a distance. Chazal also state that she was older than Aharon and Moshe. In telling us this, Chazal are trying to convey to us that if not for Miriam's involvement with Moshe, there wouldn't have been a redemption.

Miriam was older than Moshe, thus she was able to look after him, and enable him to survive. If so, the whole redemption was enabled through Miriam. This is the depth behind the words of the Sages, that "In the merit of the righteous women, the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt." It is referring, in particular, to the righteous actions taken by Miriam, to ensure Moshe's survival. If not for Miriam, there would be no Moshe!

Miriam's name comes from the word "merirus", 'bitterness'. When she sang the shirah, she was alluding to the fact that although the Jewish people first went through 'bitterness' in Egypt, now, they were singing. She revealed the chain of events, through revealing the stark contrast between the the bitterness of Egypt with the miracles of the redemption and the splitting of the sea.

In a certain way, the "song of Miriam" is on a greater level than the Torah which Moshe gave. This is because it is written, "Az yashir Moshe" – "Then, Moshe sang." We learn from this that the men only sing after the miracles are complete [whereas the women were already singing before, because they believed already in the miracles].

The Gemara also states that "Az Yashir" is a song of the future, in which Moshe will lead all the men to sing; whereas Miriam was singing with the women even before the miracles. "Vatashar Miriam" - "And Miriam sang." The women, headed by Miriam, were already singing from before.