



BILVAVI

PESACH TALKS

**COLLECTION OF DRASHAS FROM THE
AUTHOR OF BILVAVI MISHKAN EVNEH**

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Part One:
The
Month
of Nissan

1.1 | Cleaning For Pesach

Preparing For Pesach Is Part Of Our Avodas Hashem

In whatever time or situation we are in, we should always be aware that it is an inseparable part of our *Avodas Hashem* upon us. It doesn't matter if it is something that has to do with *ruchniyus* (spirituality) or if it something more mundane – wherever we are, whatever the situation, it is somehow part of our *Avodas Hashem*. We must wonder in every situation we have: how is a Jew supposed to go about this?

In these weeks, the Torah observant Jews of the world are very careful to clean the house scrupulously from any trace of *chametz*. We have a commandment in the Torah to make sure that we do not see or find any *chametz* in our house; but this *mitzvah* has much to it which seemingly has nothing to do with Pesach.

Upon reflection, we will be able to see how preparing for Pesach is part of our *Avodas Hashem*, and how through it we can bring ourselves to be closer to Hashem.

Step I: Don't Do It Mechanically

There is a simple point that we must all know and be aware of. This simple point is that we can find Hashem in anything – without exception! When a person begins to clean his house for Pesach, he first has to get rid of the “*melumadah*” – the tendency to do things by rote. We are not simply cleaning out the house for Pesach “because we have to clean.” Why are you cleaning for Pesach? Because that's what you did last year and the year before it?! That is not the reason.

We all know that to clean the house for Pesach is a *mitzvah* of the Torah, but what are our thoughts as we do this? If a person doesn't stop to think, he is only bothered by questions such as: What is the best way to clean the house? What needs to be cleaned, and how much? The whole relationship with Hashem is lost with all these questions.

So first, we must get rid of our tendency to just do things without thinking. We must realize that preparing for Pesach is purely *Avodas Hashem*. After we know this we can begin to know how it is *Avodas Hashem*, but the first step is this: don't just do it like a robot. Just like we understand that learning and davening is *Avodas Hashem*, so must we be aware that preparing for Pesach is *Avodas Hashem*. If a person feels that cleaning the house for Pesach is not part of *Avodas Hashem*, we can

almost tell him that he is forbidden to do it! The *Chovos HeLevovos* writes that there is no such thing as a gray area; it's either forbidden or permissible. If it's not a *mitzvah*, then it's wrong to do.

We will now try to explain how cleaning for Pesach can be *Avodas Hashem*, in a way how everyone will be able to enter the *Yom Tov* amidst *Avodas Hashem*, as opposed to entering it amidst stress.

Step 2: Knowing Why You Clean

If we reflect, we will discover that besides for the *mitzvah* of the Torah to keep the house clean from *chametz* on Pesach, there are more reasons why we need to clean the house.

One possible reason why a person cleans is because he feels bad to make the rest of his family do everything. He personally doesn't care for the house to be clean. Most of the Pesach preparations have nothing to do with the *mitzvah* of destroying *chametz* – just various household chores. Why does a person do all these things for Pesach? Many times it is simply because he feels bad standing around and watching everyone else do all the work. He's doing it all for the sake of *chessed*.

That is one possible reason why a person spends so much time with Pesach preparations.

Another possibility could be that we don't like it when the house is dirty. Hashem created each person with a natural desire to have a clean house. Some people are cleaner than others, and they can't take even the slightest amount of messiness. But all people want their house clean somewhat, so they clean for the house for Pesach.

Another possibility can also be because people like it when things are orderly. During the rest of the year people are very busy, and they want to have one time in the year where they sit down and just arrange everything in its place (This is not the same thing as a desire for neatness.)

So far we have mentioned five possibilities why a person cleans the house for Pesach: Acting robotic, doing it because it's a *mitzvah* of the Torah, kindness, cleanliness or orderliness.

The first kind of person we mentioned – the one who does it robotically – is obviously not doing it in the right way. That is simple and we don't need to explain why.

The second kind of person, who does it solely because it's a *mitzvah*, has to put some more thought into it. It is not enough to know that he must clean the house – there must be some more life involved, some more thinking.

Before he begins to clean the house, he should 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 can 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.”

While a person is cleaning the house, this is what he should be saying to himself. If someone knows how to think in learning Torah as he does something, then he should think in learning and he doesn't have to do this. But if someone usually doesn't think in learning as he cleans the house, and his thoughts are just floating elsewhere, then he should at least pause for a few minutes every so often and remind himself of what he's doing - and why he's doing it.

We are speaking about a very simple thing that anyone can do, even for those who aren't on a high level of constant *d'veykus* with Hashem. Of course, there do exist individuals who have reached a very high level and they always have *d'veykus* in Hashem wherever they are, but we are not speaking of this lofty level. We are speaking about something very basic and simple which anyone can do.

If a person cleans the house simply because he feels bad that his family has to clean the house and he doesn't want everyone else to do all the work, he also has to think about this 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 *chessed* with my family.”

A person should keep talking to Hashem throughout the entire time: “*Ribono shel olam*, it is my will to do Your will. One of the pillars of the world is *chessed*, and I am thus doing *chessed* in order to give You a *nachas ruach*.”

After a day of doing this, besides for the physical exercise you get out of cleaning the house, your entire day is filled with pure *Avodas Hashem*. In this way, a person never leaves his state of *ruchniyus* - even while being involved in this mundane world.

The Natural Desire For Cleanliness

Let us elaborate on the last two points, which are more subtle points about our soul.

There is a natural desire in a person for cleanliness. Everyone loves cleanliness – some more and some less. The soul naturally recoils a bit from messiness. People often see a mess and start cleaning it, and if you ask them, “What are you doing? Why you are cleaning it up?” the answer is, “It just bothers me.”

People clean because they can't stand the sight of something dirty or messy, and cleaning it up removes this anxiety. It seems that this has nothing to do with trying to become close to Hashem, and that a person is trying to save his soul from some pain. But if we think into this just a little, we can connect this also with Hashem, because ultimately, we can connect everything with Hashem.

So if a person likes to clean, the first thing he should ask himself is: “Why do I like to clean? Did I make myself this way? No. Hashem gave me this nature.”

Realize that whatever your nature is, it was Hashem who gave you such a nature. Not only that, but Hashem is constantly renewing Creation; He is constantly renewing your nature, which is that you like to clean and that you hate messiness.

After you realize with certainty that it was Hashem who gave you this nature to desire cleanliness, and that He continues to renew this nature in you, now think: “Why did Hashem give me such a nature? What is the purpose of wanting cleanliness, and how do I use this natural desire in a person? What are the pros and cons of it?”

The desire for cleanliness doesn’t happen on its own. (It is absurd to think that it does, but the *yetzer hora* gets a person to succeed not to think.) A person must think to himself, “Hashem gave me this desire for cleanliness. It was Him who placed this desire in me.”

This realization helps you begin your relationship with Hashem as you clean for Pesach.

The Deep Reason Why We Like Cleanliness

What indeed is the root reason behind why we like cleanliness?

Cleanliness (*nekiyus*) is one of the ten steps in the ladder of *Avodas Hashem* as described by Rebbi Pinchos ben Yair, the basis of *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*. The concept for cleanliness exists for us so that we can realize that we must cleanse ourselves from sin, because sin sullies our soul. Every power in the soul is also manifested somehow in our body; the power of cleanliness of our soul manifests itself in our body, with the need for physical cleanliness.

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, and others are very particular also about physical cleanliness (in addition to their spiritual cleanliness), but the point is that the more a person purifies himself [internally], the more of a need for cleanliness he has, and the purer his soul becomes.

The root behind the need cleanliness thus comes from an inner desire to become purified. This gives us a whole different attitude to have about our need for physical cleanliness: it is rooted in our soul’s need for cleanliness and purity.

Knowing Your Motivation For Cleanliness

There are two reasons why a person wants physical cleanliness; one reason is unnecessary and more of a luxury to a person, while the other reason is coming from the soul's need for purity and closeness with Hashem.

There are situations in which we clean more than we have to, and here the cleanliness is being overdone. It is hard to say exactly what is considered overdoing it, and each person needs to decide for himself what is considered already too much.

If a person is just taking a shower or brushing his teeth simply because he is very concerned about his body, this is totally unnecessary (except for certain rare individuals who won't get affected by this).

Something even worse than this, though, is when a person is really bothered by uncleanliness, yet he ignored it and doesn't make the effort to clean. Such a person not only has physical messiness, but he damages his soul as he ignores the mess, because in doing so, he is suffocating his soul's demand for cleanliness.

So before a person begins to clean, he should ask himself: "What is my motivation in cleaning the house? Am I doing it out of a compulsiveness to clean (just like there are people who indulge in food and drinking), or am I doing it to help my household? If he realizes that he is doing it to help, then he should work on the *Avodah* we mentioned before (which is to say a *Tefillah* to Hashem).

If he discovers that he's doing it because he has a personal need for cleanliness, he must really ask himself if he is overdoing it or not, or if it comes from a sensitivity in his soul for cleanliness (and he therefore needs it). Each person should uncover what exactly is motivating him to clean. Most people do not have these issues, though.

We will therefore discuss a more simple kind of issue that people have which is much more common: when people love to clean something that is clearly a mess. In this, we need to put some thought into the cleaning.

Before a person cleans, he should say: "*Ribono shel olam*, this mess really bothers me. Who gave me this feeling? You – Hashem. Where does this nature in me come from? It comes from a power in my soul to demand purity. *Ribono shel olam*, is it Your will that I break this nature of mine and endure the messiness? Or is it Your will that I live with purity and cleanliness? Since it is clear to me that You want my soul to desire this cleanliness, I will go clean the house in order to get close to You and give You pleasure." Even though you're doing it *shelo lishmah* – not for the sake of Heaven (because you're doing it out of your need for cleanliness) – you can still add this element of *lishmah* into your action. Always remember that cleaning the house for Pesach is purely a form of *Avodas Hashem* - it must be done properly with thought and concentration.

The Importance Of Orderliness

Another point to be addressed is the fifth reason why a person wants to clean the house: to have orderliness.

Just like a person has a natural need for cleanliness - and this need comes from the soul's desire for purity which Hashem put in us - so did Hashem put in us a natural desire for orderliness.

Some people have a more of a need to be organized than others, but all people in general have a need to get things organized. This is not by chance – it is a nature which Hashem gave each person.

Without our natural desire for orderliness, we wouldn't get anywhere. In order for anything to become properly built and developed, there is a certain order involved to build it. Since every person on this world ultimately must properly build himself and develop, Hashem endowed each person with an ability to have orderliness. Without orderliness, we wouldn't be able to build and develop ourselves in *Avodas Hashem*.

The more orderly a person is, the more he is able to build himself in his *Avodas Hashem*. The less orderly a person is, the more confusion he has, and he feels like he is in exile from this. A person has to get out of this exile of confusion and become more orderly. This will feel like the beginning of a personal inner freedom.

Orderliness is thus a need of our soul, but we often use it just for our body's physical needs, such as the need to look very put together and organized.

Just like a dirty house makes our soul suffer, so can living in a messy house bother us so much that it is an impediment to our *Avodas Hashem*. If we don't care about how our house looks inside, we will definitely be affected spiritually as well by this.

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 has is 'spiritually' messy as well. 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 matters.

But we must always remember that it is Hashem who gives us such a nature. We must recognize that our need for orderliness comes from Hashem, and that this need that people have doesn't come by itself.

Realize that this need for orderliness can be used as a way to connect to the Creator. In this way, a person can take the physical world and use it to develop a relationship with Hashem. It is an inner kind of life - a life spent with Hashem even in ordinary, mundane actions. When a person realizes that the need for organization is necessary in his *Avodas Hashem*, he is able to realize that organizing

the house is not just an act of kindness with his family, but that it is a necessary part in one's personal *Avodas Hashem*.

In this, there are two parts. Some people were born with a need for orderliness, and it really bothers them when things aren't in place. The *Avodah* of such a person is to realize that this need comes from Hashem, and it is a way to serve Hashem.

But others don't feel such a need for cleanliness. They know with their minds that a person should be orderly, but they don't feel that this is a need for their soul. Such people understand that it makes sense to clean the house once a year, or else the house becomes unlivable, but they do not feel that this has to be done more than once a year.

Such a person has an opposite *Avodah* to do than the first kind of person. Besides for the fact that he must go against his nature and organize his house, he also needs to awaken in his soul a desire to have more orderliness.

Days Which We Can Grow From

A person wonders: Why did Hashem make it that people have to work so hard on Erev Pesach? Doesn't this sacrifice our opportunities to grow spiritually by making preparations for *Yom Tov*? And if we have to work so hard cleaning up, how do we prepare for the *Yom Tov*...?

But if you think about it, these days before Pesach contain tremendous areas which we can use to attain growth. If Hashem made it this way that we have to clean and organize the house, then that is the way for us to acquire all the precious areas of growth which we need.

Really, the acts of cleaning up and organizing the house are here to remind us of our soul's need for purity. This is a precious gain in our *Avodas Hashem*. But the *yetzer hora* comes and takes away the message of it and turns it into mundane actions, drying it up from all the *Avodas Hashem* contained in it.

If a person understands the depth of *Avodas Hashem*, he doesn't clean the house simply because he wants it to be clean. He cleans the house because through that, he connects to an inner point in his soul – the need for spiritual cleanliness. He understands that now is precisely the time to work on this.

The truth is that all of life is like this: the *yetzer hora* comes and takes what's very important and turns it into something that's not important. In whatever we encounter, we should always see the greatness we can achieve in this situation. The more confusing and seemingly pointless a situation appears, the more greatness lies in it if we uncover it.

If a person before Pesach gets caught up in different things from all his hard work, and then he comes into the *Yom Tov* exhausted and stressed out, what is all the hard work worth? We don't gain from this kind of stressed lifestyle. If we don't see how everything we do can be a form of *Avodas Hashem* and how much being involved with the world takes away from our soul, then these days go to waste.

Our preparation for Pesach should not simply be a physical preparation; although we do exert our body to prepare for Pesach, really, there is an inner depth taking place in what we are doing. It is really a preparation of our *soul* for the coming days. Through preparing for it in the right way, a person comes into *Yom Tov* the way he should.

Each person on his own can take these words and open them up more to himself. The common denominator between all people, though, is that the days preceding Pesach are days of *ruchniyus*, not days of materialistic pursuits. They are days of closeness to Hashem.

May Hashem help us that we prepare properly for Pesach during these days, from a sincere desire to give pleasure to our Creator. In these days preceding Pesach, each of us can merit to increase our true closeness and love for Hashem.

1.2 | Nissan – Conversation

Nissan: Speech

The special ability in the month of Nissan (according to the *Vilna Gaon*) is identified as the power of speech (“*sichah*”).¹ The power of speech is mainly utilized by women, as our Chazal say, that the women took ninety percent of speech, while the men only took ten percent.² In addition, Chazal state that in the merit of the righteous women, the Jewish nation merited to be redeemed from Egypt.

Thus, the power of speech, which is the nature of the month of Nissan, is mainly reflected in the speech of women, whose merit brought about the redemption.

With the help of Hashem, let us learn how we can utilize the soul’s power of speech.

Three Kinds of Talking

It is brought in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that there are generally three kinds of speech:

(1) Talking for the sake of a *mitzvah* (i.e. *davening*, or speaking with someone in order to help him); (2) Talking about matters that are not about a *mitzvah*, but are nonetheless necessary (such as talking about matters that we need to take care of); there is nothing wrong with this. (3) Talking about things that are unnecessary.

Man Is A Creature of Speech

A person is called “*medaber*” (a social creature). The Torah calls man a ‘*nefesh chayah*’ (living spirit), which is interpreted by *Targum Onkelos* to mean “*ruach memalelah*” – a “talking spirit”. Speech personifies man. Thus, speech is clearly an ability in man that can be used for holiness.

¹ Editor’s Note: This shiur, part of the “*Rosh Chodesh Avodah*” series, was given to women and is geared towards women specifically, in how to use the power of “*sichah*” in the month of Nissan. A shiur similar to this one was given to men – see *Fixing Your Wind* #09, #010, and #011. For a deeper understanding of the power of ‘*sichah*’ in the month of Nissan, see *Essence of Rosh Chodesh 01. Nissan. Speech and Prayer*.

² *Kiddushin* 49b

Analyzing Our Conversations

Let us think about the following: How much time of a day do we spend talking, throughout the 24 hours of the day?

Once we're thinking about that, now we need to think: What is the nature of our conversations? Are we talking about things that are a *mitzvah* to talk about? Are we talking about things we need to take care of? Or are we engaging in empty chatter?

Making this reflection helps us become aware of our speech and how we are conversing. Being that there are three kinds of speech (*mitzvah*, necessary, and unnecessary), we need to first identify these three kinds of speech in our own conversations. Most people, upon making this reflection, will discover that most of their conversations are not necessary.

When our power of speech is mostly being used for unnecessary conversations, we can let it bother us that our power of '*medaber*' which defines man is being used for lower and unholy purposes. In fact, many of us will discover that our speech is mostly being used to speak about things that are forbidden – such as *lashon hora* (gossip) and *rechilus* (slander), and *motzi shem ra* (spreading false and derogatory information about others). This is even more degrading to the power of '*medaber*' which personifies man.

Thus, the first thing we have to become aware of is to realize that most of our conversations are not utilizing the true and intended purpose of speech.

Two Kinds of Unnecessary Speech

When it comes to speaking about unnecessary matters, there are actually two kinds of this.

One example of idle speech is when people meet each other and they get into a conversation, and they talk about meaningless things. For example, when two friends meet each other in the store or on the bus, or in the street, or if a bunch of people are sitting together and chatting; they will speak about all kinds of various topics in the conversation, which are really not important to speak about.

Another example of idle speech is when a person finds himself alone, like when's alone in the house, and he wants to relieve his loneliness, so he picks up the phone and calls a friend. This is a more idle kind of talking, because here, the person *seeks* the conversation and initiates the idle conversation.

In the first example of idle speech that we brought, the person encounters a situation in which he ends up talking pointlessly. It can happen when he's with his family or when he goes to other places where he meets people, and he finds himself having pointless conversations. In the second example

of idle speech that we brought, the person actively seeks a conversation with another; he deliberately places himself in that situation.

These two examples we brought are not merely two different scenarios of idle speech that can happen. They are two completely different reasons for unnecessary speech.

Why Do People Like To Chat?

Let's analyze the first example of idle speech that we brought: when a person meets others and ends up chatting with them, speaking about pointless things.

Certainly, when a person is around other people, he should talk to them, because it is '*derech erez*' (proper manners) to do so. People become uncomfortable when they are with a person who isn't engaging in a conversation. It's considered rude and unpleasant to be completely silent around others; therefore, it is only proper that we allow ourselves to engage in conversation with others.

However, most of the time, we are not talking to others simply out of '*derech erez*' for them. It's because we simply enjoy talking! There's a certain pleasure in talking. Just as we enjoy food, so do we enjoy talking. Thus, the deeper reason of why people like to engage in idle chatter is because there is a certain pleasure in talking with others.

On a deeper level, ever since the sin of Adam, there has been pleasure in talking simply for the sake of talking, due to the negative effect of the Snake on mankind. Chazal state that all of the animals asked the Snake, "What pleasure do you have in speaking *lashon hora*?" [For it spoke *lashon hora* to Adam and Chavah]. This implies that although there is no pleasure in speaking *lashon hora*, there is pleasure in talking itself.

Talking In Order To Relieve Boredom and Inner Emptiness

In the second example of idle speech we brought, a person seeks a conversation with others because he is bored and he feels empty inside, so he wants to relieve his feeling of loneliness, through chatting with others.

When a person is getting anxious from the loneliness and emptiness that he is feeling, and he doesn't know how to fill the loneliness, he will seek to fill it through external means, and one of these ways is through chatting with others. In this way, he takes his mind off his troubles.

Chazal say that "A worry in the heart of man, should be spoken to others". When a person is worried or upset about something, he should speak to others about it in order to be able to relieve his anxiousness. Even if a person isn't worried about anything particular, and he's rather just feeling

bored inside and a general lack of happiness towards himself, he feels a need to speak with others in order to take away his feeling of inner emptiness and boredom.

The problem with this, though, is that it causes a person to remove himself from his own inner world, as he exits himself and gets involved with the external and superficial world, via all kinds of conversation and chatting.

So we have explained that there are two motivations for talking to others: Either because there is a pleasure in talking to others, or because of loneliness, boredom and emptiness.

In Summary

To clarify, let us summarize until now [and add on some additional points, for clarification]. There is a normal and healthy need of the soul to talk to others, but the problem is when we go beyond the normal amount of talking. There are two reasons why people speak unnecessarily: because there is pleasure in talking, or because a person wants to relieve his loneliness or boredom.

Sometimes, both factors are present when we talk. When a person meets others and he ends up engaging in conversation with them, it is not always because he simply enjoys having a conversation; it can very well be because he feels bored. He feels tension when there is quietness between him and others, so he talks, in order to avoid that feeling of boredom.

Let us again emphasize that there are three motivating reasons of why we talk. Sometimes we talk when it is a *mitzvah* to do so, sometimes we talk in order to take care of things that are necessary, and some of our speech is unnecessary.

Defining 'Necessary' Speech

To clarify, 'necessary' speech doesn't mean that a person will only say things so long as it takes care of something important. This cannot be, because we have a natural and healthy need to talk, and this is also considered 'necessary' speech. It is a need of our soul. What we are coming to address here is, that part of our speech is used for things that are totally unnecessary to talk about, and it is this part of our speech that we need to eliminate.

The Vilna *Gaon* says that the Torah is acquired through "less speech", and that this means that a little bit of talking beyond what we actually need ['schmoozing'] is in fact a 'necessary' kind of talking, for our basic emotional needs. Therefore, our discussion here about 'unnecessary' speech is only concerning speech that we don't need; it does not apply to the basic amount of talking which we need in our life.

Elevating Our Speech

Thus, altogether, we have learned that there are really four kinds of speech:

- (1) Talking for the purpose of a *mitzvah*,
- (2) Talking for something necessary that we need to take care of,
- (3) Pleasurable talking (which is necessary for our emotional health, but it is sometimes overdone),
- (4) Talking out of loneliness and boredom.

Our *avodah* is to fix the third and fourth kinds of speech: when we talk unnecessarily and it's beyond our normal needs for talking, and when we talk out of boredom. It is these kinds of speech which need to be fixed.

We explained that there are two kinds of unnecessary talking: talking for the sake of pleasure (when it's beyond our normal needs), and talking out of boredom. If we analyze our unnecessary conversations, we will discover that both of these factors are usually present. The only issue is in the percentages: how much of the extra talking is being motivated by pleasure to talk, and how much of a percentage in the extra talking is coming from boredom?

Talking For Enjoyment (When It's More Than The Usual)

When a person talks simply because it's enjoyable (when it's more than the usual healthy need), this is like anything else we do that's enjoyable. People do things that are enjoyable, even if it's not purposeful; whatever a person enjoys, he naturally does it. Even if nothing constructive comes from such talking, as long as the person is enjoying the conversation, he will continue on talking for a very long time.

We can see that this kind of conversation is very common. A person goes to a wedding or a *simcha*, or he meets someone on a trip, and he gets into a lengthy conversation with another person he meets; it can go from being two minutes to being several hours! And it is entirely an empty conversation, with nothing of purpose that was discussed. Where does this nature stem from?

What we need to understand is that everything which Hashem created, He created it for a purpose. The purpose of Creation is often not on one's mind; usually, a person is mainly concerned at the moment to do what he enjoys. To illustrate, a child enjoys anything that will give instant pleasure; when he plays games, he is doing so that he can enjoy the results. When he gets that enjoyment, it lasts momentarily, and then he's onto the next thing he enjoys. So there is a deep

nature in man to always seek something pleasurable at the moment. Usually, this desire for pleasure manifests in one's speech.

With most people, their conversations are unnecessary. The conversations that most people have are for the purpose of an enjoyable conversation, and not about anything in particular that is of purpose to discuss.

But if a person reveals purpose in his life, he will begin to notice that there is no longer a need to have most of his conversations. He will realize that most conversations are empty and meaningless. The less a person is living with purpose, the more he engages in conversations that have no purpose; he can chat for hours on end, about nothing important, yet it doesn't bother him that he is having empty conversations. Even worse, most conversations that lack purpose to them often lead to speaking about matters that are forbidden.

To summarize: the more a person lives with purpose in his life, the less he is dominated by the pleasure of the moment. His conversations will become more purposeful and 'to the point'. In contrast, the less a person lives with purpose, the more he is drawn after what's pleasure right now, and he will find it difficult to pull away from an enjoyable conversation that has no purpose to it.

Thoughtless Talking

We explained that there is another motivation for talking unnecessarily: when a person gets used to talking without thinking at all about what he's saying. The Ramban says, "Think about the words [that you are about to say], before you release them from your mouth." If we reflect, we can see that most conversations are thoughtless.

It is shocking to see, but it is very common: We can see people going on and on in their conversations, talking about topics that they have no idea about!

In the first kind of unnecessary talking that we discussed, a person might talk about things that he knows about, but it is simply a conversation that has no purpose to it. For example, a person meets someone and says to him, "I did such-and-such yesterday....Tomorrow, I plan to do such-and-such...My daughter did....My baby woke me up last night. I got up, then I walked around, then I had a drink, then I sat back down." Conversations like this are meaningless. However, at least the person knows what he is talking about.

In the current kind of talking we are discussing, though, a person is having a lengthy conversation about matters that he really doesn't know anything about. He has no clue about the topics he's discussing, yet he talks about them anyway. Many times, a person will have a whole

conversation in which he offers his opinions about all kinds of topics, when in reality he doesn't know what he's talking about.

For example, he will give his opinion on politics, on how the principal should run his child's school, his views on *chinuch* (child education), and on current events. It's very possible that he has absolutely no idea what he's talking about, yet he continues to express his views on such matters. Where does this nature stem from?

It is a result of living for the pleasure of the moment. Such an orientation doesn't allow a person to connect his thoughts with his speech. When a person doesn't think, he cannot talk properly; thus, when people don't think, their words sound thoughtless and meaningless. Of course, there is always some minimal thought that goes into how we speak, enough to carry a conversation, but the words will still be lacking a great degree of content. In most scenarios, the words will come out of his mouth quickly, with no involvement of thought beforehand.

There is another problem with thoughtless conversations: the quality of the conversations is often devoid of any real content. So the more a person puts thought into his conversations, thinking before he talks [as the Ramban writes], the more he will talk with precision, and his words will be less. He won't have to speak so much, because he is already putting content into his conversations. When a conversation has content and meaning to it, it's impossible for a person to talk so much, for his words will be limited to speak a certain amount that is necessary.

Let's summarize the two steps in elevating our conversations that we have spoken about until now. Most extraneous conversations that people have are being motivated for either of two reasons. Either a person is engaging in idle chatter because he is missing a sense of purpose in his life, which results in talking many words that have no purpose to them. Or, the conversations are thoughtless, because the person is simply talking without thinking beforehand of what he will talk about.

If we examine most of the conversations that go on in the world, we can see that most conversations lack purpose to them, in addition to being thoughtless, or with minimal thought from beforehand.

How To Think Before You Talk

The more a person gets used to having purposeful conversations, and he is thinking of how he can put more content into his conversations, he will see an overhaul in how he talks. He will suddenly discover an entirely new power of speech in his life.

Practically speaking, before a person knows he will have a conversation, he should think about what he will say. Let's say a person knows he will go to a certain place and meet people there, and

he will know that he will end up ‘shmoozing’. He should prepare the conversation: what kind of subjects he will speak about, and how; and what the purpose of the conversations will be.

A person should try doing this once a day. This slowly gets a person used to speaking with thought and with purpose. Understandably, along with this, a person also needs to lessen the amount of idle chatter in his conversations and to avoid speaking words that are thoughtless and purposeless.

[On a deeper note], getting used to this enables a person to reach the holy power of “*sichah*” (conversation) – to leave the “*peh ra*” (evil mouth) that is hinted to in the word “*Pharoah*”, and to instead enter into the holy kind of “*sichah*” – to tell over the story of the exodus for the entire night of Pesach.

Don't Speak About Everything That Comes To Mind

There is also another fundamental point to consider: A person needs to get used to the idea of not always saying everything that comes to mind.

Just because a person has an opinion about something doesn't require him to say it. One must know that there are things he has no understanding of, as well as things he doesn't have that much understanding about, as well as things which he doesn't understand at all. So just because you see a bunch of men or a bunch of women sitting together and discussing a certain topic does not require you to express your personal opinion about the subject being discussed.

A person needs to get used to talking only about things he is clear about. When a person limits his conversations to only speaking about matters that he is clear about, this will also lessen the amount of idle chatter in his conversations, because he will be speaking a lot less. When a person is used to talking so much without any restraint to his speech, he will naturally talk about all kinds of subjects, as if he knows it all. This is more than just a habit that one acquires; it is human nature for a person to talk about all kinds of topics.

So it is very important for a person to train himself to only speak about matters that he knows about, and not to speak about all kinds of topics. As Chazal say, “Teach your tongue to say, “I don't know.” These are the three steps we need in order to elevate our conversations: to seek purpose in our conversations, to think before we talk, and to only speak about things we know about and avoid speaking things that we don't know about.

Conversations Caused By Boredom and Emptiness

Until now, we explained how to fix the first kind of idle chatter, which stems from a pleasure in talking. We explained the three steps we need in order to elevate our conversations.

But there is another kind of idle chatter we mentioned: when a person feels lonely, or empty, or bored, so he engages in conversation with another, to relieve his feeling of emptiness. Either he will go to a friend's house, or he will pick up the phone and call, or he will use any of the means of communication that are available today.

This is a different kind of 'schmoozing' than when two people meet and they get into a conversation. Here, the person actively seeks out a person to have a conversation with. It is usually stemming from inner emptiness and boredom.

The first step to overcome this is for a person to become aware, in the first place, of the loneliness. When he's picking up the phone to call his friend, or as he's feeling the need to communicate, he should stop and ask himself: "Why do I want to talk to my friend now? Is there a real need for this, or is it just a desire I have?"

If a person realizes that it is more of a desire than a need, the next step is for him to analyze where this desire is coming from. Is it coming from a desire for the pleasure of talking, or is it coming from boredom? When he realizes that it is coming from boredom, he should become aware that the boredom is a sign of emptiness. If so, the communication with another that he wants is stemming from a need to fill his emptiness. But it is not really filling his emptiness – he is rather running away from it, by seeking a friend to get into a conversation with.

The first thing one must realize, then, is to become aware of his situation. After that he can work on a solution, as we will soon say (with the help of Hashem), but the very first and essential step must be that he become aware of this in the first place. If one realizes that deep down he feels empty, he should know that this comes from a lack of satisfaction within himself. A person needs to learn how to solve his general sense of emptiness in life, but here we are not addressing this³. Here we are addressing how to solve conversations that stem from emptiness.

Chatting With a Friend vs. Talking With Hashem

As we brought from the words of the Vilna *Gaon*, every person has a normal and healthy need to converse with others. This is necessary for peace of mind. But most of our conversations are more than the normal amount of speech that we need in order to stay emotionally healthy. The question is, how much of our speech is necessary for our peace of mind, and how much of it is unnecessary? We definitely need to 'schmooze' a little, and the only question is, how much.

³ See the derasha called "The Void"; refer also to *Reaching Your Essence #02 – Searching For Satisfaction*

The more a person lives an inner kind of life, he lives deeper. He lives more with the Creator in his life. He will naturally talk to Hashem a lot more. When a person is alone, and he is used to talking to Hashem, “as a man talks to his friend” (as the *Mesillas Yescharim* writes), he will find himself talking to Hashem a lot when he is alone. He can do so mentally or verbally. His speech will mainly be utilized to talk with Hashem, and as a result, he will feel much less of a need to speak with people.

We must know, clearly, that the desire to talk is human nature. We all have it. Most people are not talking as much with Hashem as they are used to talking with people. Talking to Hashem, by most people, is limited to the times of *davening*, but this is not nearly enough; often a person does not feel that he is standing in front of Hashem as he *davens*. A person often does not feel as he is *davening* that he is talking to Hashem; he thinks he is just saying words. Therefore, most people are not using their power of *sichah* properly, and instead, their power of *sichah* is turned outwards – empty chatter with others.

But the more a person is living inwardly and deeper, he is more connected with his true self, and he connects to the Creator more often. His power of *sichah*, for the most part, will be used towards Hashem. When he finds himself alone, instead of becoming bored and seeking a conversation with another, he will realize that being with himself means that he is with Hashem. When he feels a need to talk, he mainly talks with Hashem. This doesn't mean he never talks to others. He talks to others too; it is just that most of his speech is directed towards talking with Hashem.

The more a person is living inwardly, he trains himself to think more. The first gain from this is that he will find that he speaks less with others, (because he is living more in the ‘world of thought’ than in a ‘world of speech’).

To Speak To Hashem, Naturally

Additionally, one must understand the following important point. We see people who can talk, talk, and talk. Human nature is that we like to talk. Women, especially, have a nature to talk; Chazal say that the women took nine out of ten measurements of speech. The only issue is what we do with all of this talking. It needs to be mainly channeled towards speaking with Hashem.

When two people meet, they can get into a conversation that lasts for hours. If a Jew truly lives with Hashem in his life, he will speak to Him a lot, throughout the day. Speaking to Hashem is not limited to the three times of the day that we *daven*. Nor is it limited to when we do *hisbodedus*

(meditation). Talking to Hashem is meant for the entire day! It is to speak with Hashem, naturally; to recognize that Hashem is the partner in your life, Whom you include your whole life with⁴.

This will sound very foreign to certain people when they hear it. It might even sound strange and weird. But a person only reacts that way when he isn't used to living with the Creator in his life in a palpable sense. The more a person lives with Hashem in his life, in his heart, in his thoughts – and he feels that he is actually with Hashem, and he feels Him in his heart – he will naturally talk to Him. His power of *sichah* is then channeled towards its true Source.

This is the depth of the redemption from Egypt, when we were redeemed from Pharaoh, from “*peh ra*”, the “evil mouth”, and we instead entered the holy kind of *sichah*. In the true way that a Jew lives life, he indeed speaks a lot – he speaks in prayer to Hashem, and in addition, he speaks a lot with Hashem throughout the day.

Of course, this does not mean to imply that a husband should lessen how much he talks with his wife, and that a wife should talk less with her husband, or that the parents should speak less with the children. This cannot be done, because it is not *derech erez*, and it is not a way to live. Life requires us to speak with our family members a lot. We are only addressing the many extraneous conversations that people have, which are not necessary. It all stems from a lack of sensing Hashem in one's life.

In Summary

To summarize, when it comes to unnecessary speech, we explained that there are two kinds.

There are conversations that stem from the pleasure to talk; in this, the way to improve is by training ourselves to speak with purpose. In the general sense, this means to live life with a sense of purpose, and on a more specific level, it means to speak with purpose: to infuse content into our conversations. It also includes thinking before we talk about what we will talk about, and to only talk about things we know about, as opposed to talking about things that we don't know about.

The second kind of unnecessary speech is when a person engages in conversation because he is feeling bored or empty. The way we improve this is by speaking with Hashem whenever we find ourselves alone.

When one gets used to talking Hashem when he is alone, his life will undergo a complete overhaul. He will feel new, even more new than how a convert feels upon becoming a Jew. He will feel like he has left a narrowed kind of existence in which he was living disparate from the Creator, and that instead he has entered a world in which he lives together with Hashem, connected with

⁴ See the shiur of *Getting To Know Your Hisbodedus (Practice)* #018 - “Talking Continuously With Hashem”

Him. Every person needs to get used to talking with Hashem, simply, and earnestly. Sometimes we talk to Him from the depths of our heart, and sometimes less. But in either situation, we need to train ourselves to always talk to Hashem, on a regular basis. We can talk to Hashem verbally or mentally.

Understandably, talking to Hashem needs to be done sensibly and only when it is not disrespectful to others to do so. The point is that a Jew needs to get used to living life this way, in which he lives with Hashem and he speaks with Him on a regular basis. His nature of *sichah* is then turned towards the Creator.

This is the meaning behind the redemption from Egypt. May we merit with the help of Hashem to speak words of holiness, to tell over the story of the exodus, to speak to others properly, both in our family life as well as towards our friends, neighbors, and those we know.

Even more so, may we merit that our power of speech mainly be used to speak with Hashem, to connect to Him completely – which will make our speech true and holy.

Questions & Answers With The Rav

QUESTION: *What exactly is the power of a woman to talk (since they took ninety percent of speech), more than a man?*

ANSWER: Since a woman's heart is [generally] more opened than a man's heart, she can speak more easily from her heart to Hashem.

QUESTION: *If a woman is very reserved and doesn't like to talk to her neighbors, and instead spends her time reading books all the time (I know such a person), does that come from an emotional problem (since a woman by nature likes to talk), or does it come from avoiding idle chatter?*

ANSWER: It depends. Some people have a more reserved nature and don't like to get into lengthy conversations, and they only talk out of *derech erez*. They will say "Hello" or "Good morning", but they don't like to get into conversations. This can also be because some women are more intellectual by nature, and would rather spend their time reading than talking. But if a woman doesn't like to talk to people, it might come from an emotional issue that she has which needs to be addressed. It could be that she is very afraid what others think of her, and she has an unhealthy fear of people which she must work to get rid of.

QUESTION: *When someone insults another person or talks to hurt people, from where does this come from in a person? Which kind of speech is this included in – talking out of enjoyment (because the person enjoys hurting someone) or out of inner emptiness?*

ANSWER: When a person talks, he reveals what's going on inside his *pnimiyus*. Since we are made up of good and bad, the bad inside a person is revealed by how he talks, and that is why a person can talk to harm another person. Part of what's going on deep down needs to be fixed and dealt with.

QUESTION: *If I'm talking to a close friend and we are just talking mutually, isn't that a mitzvah of chessed?*

ANSWER: We do not mean that a person has to measure every single word that comes out of his mouth. It is impossible to live like this. A father who talks to his child only about what's absolutely necessary is sorely lacking in his relationship with his child. A husband and wife who only talk with each other about what's absolutely necessary is not a way to live together. In every

relationship, it's necessary also to talk things that are unnecessary in order to maintain a healthy relationship. We are not saying that a person has to have "exact" speech and only speak what's necessary; this is an impossible way to live. We are just saying that many times, we speak about unnecessary things that have no benefit whatsoever, speech which doesn't contribute to a relationship. This is a fine line we need to think about: what is considered small talk that is necessary for a relationship, and what is considered small talk that is unnecessary.

QUESTION: *If a woman has a certain nature to be very outgoing and friendly, does she have to work on uprooting her nature? For example, if someone has a daughter who is very talkative, does she have to train her daughter not to talk so much?*

ANSWER: We cannot tell our child exactly how much to talk. We cannot tell a child, "Don't talk more than 30 minutes every day with someone." We just need to give them over a general message, that we need to make our conversations more meaningful and not to always talk mindlessly.

QUESTION: *If a woman is more intellectual and doesn't like to talk so much, does that mean that something is wrong with her heart and that she needs to open up her heart more?*

ANSWER: This is a deep question. Generally speaking, a woman's heart is more open than a man's heart, and therefore a woman has a nature to talk more with Hashem about her feelings more than a man does. But although this is a rule, there do exist exceptions to the rule. There are some men whose hearts have been opened up much more than most women, and there are some women who are more intellectual than others. If a woman is more of an intellectual and has a hard time talking out her feelings, it might be that she is an exception to the rule, and it is merely upon her to learn how to speak out her thoughts. But no matter how intellectual a woman is, every woman is still a woman, and she has a heart which she can access if she works to get there. A more intellectual kind of a woman might have a harder time getting to her heart, but she still has a heart in her, and she can work to get to it.

But, it can also come from an emotional issue that she has, or it can come from a difficult time she is going through, like if there are major problems in her marriage or in her house. These are emotional problems which can all be dealt with, and it doesn't mean that something is wrong with her natural heart.

1.3 | Nissan - Speech & Prayer

Nissan – ‘Head of The Months’

Of the month of *Nissan*, the Torah writes, “*This month is to you, as the head of the months, the first of the months of the year.*” The month of *Nissan* is called ‘head of the months’; it is the time of the year when the Jewish people left Egypt. This has ramifications both in time as well as in our own personal soul.

We will try to explain the roots of this matter: what exactly the “head” of the months is that *Nissan* personifies.

The Twelve Months of the Year: The Roots Of Our Soul

In our soul, there are three [active] elements – wind, fire, and water. (Earth is the element which holds them together, but it is not active). There are also seven powers which branch out from the soul. The Vilna *Gaon* says that these seven powers are not intrinsic of the soul, and therefore it is possible for a person to part from them at times; whereas there are ‘intrinsic’ abilities of the soul that a person cannot part from [which includes 12 roots].

The seven [branching] abilities of the soul are: 1) *chochmah* (wisdom), 2) *oisher* (wealth), 3) *zera* (offspring), 4) *chaim* (life), 5) *memshalah* (dominion), 6) *shalom* (peace), and 7) *chein* (grace).⁵

Here we will not discuss these seven abilities; instead we will focus on the twelve essential roots of the soul, which are represented by each of the twelve months that span Nissan through Adar.

Furthermore, the Vilna *Gaon* lists a unique attribute to each month of the year: (1) *Nissan* is the month of *sichah* (speech). (2) *Iyar* is the month of *hirhur* (thinking). (3) *Sivan* is the month of *halichah* (walking). (4) *Tamuz* is the month of *re'iyah* (seeing). (5) *Av* is the month of *shemiah* (hearing). (6) *Elul* is the month of *maaseh* (action). (7) *Tishrei* is the month of *mishush* (touch). (8) *Cheshvan* is the month of *re'iach* (smell). (9) *Teves* is the month of *rogez* (anger). (10) *Kislev* is the

⁵ In different terminologies, the seven powers of the soul are known as *chesed* (kindness) *gevurah* (restraint) *tiferes* (harmony) *netzach* (eternity) *hod* (beauty), *yesod* (foundation), and *malchus* (royalty). In a different system, the seven are known as *chessed\ahavah* (kindness\love), *gevurah\yirah\din* (restraint\awe\judgment) *rachamim* (compassion), *nitzuach* (victory), *hodaah* (nullification), *hiskashrus* (connection) and *shiflus* (lowliness).

month of *sheinah* (sleep). (11) *Shevat* is the month of *l'eitah* (chewing/eating). (12) *Adar* is the month of *sechok* (laughter).

These are the words of our holy Sages, and it gives us the general picture of the 12 months of the year.

Nissan: The Month of Speech

Nissan, the first month, is the month of *sichah*, speech. The month of Nissan is called “first”, which implies that it is the root of all the other months; if so, speech is the root of all the other abilities contained in the rest of the year.

We can see how speech is a common theme that runs throughout Pesach. On Pesach, we went free from *Pharoah*. The word *Pharoah* is from the words “*peh ra*”, “evil mouth”, implying that we were redeemed from evil speech [and gained the holy kind of speech]. *Pesach* is from the words *peh sach*, “a mouth that speaks.” There is also a *mitzvah* on Pesach to tell over the story of the exodus, which uses our power of speech.

This is a month all about using the power of speech - and it is not a coincidence that it is like this.

Man is called “*medaber*”, a social creature, and this is what sets him apart from other creations. The Jewish people in particular are called “*medaber*”, for the Sages state that the Jewish people are called “*adam*” (man), whereas the other nations of the world are not called “*adam*”; and “*adam*” is synonymous with the term “*medaber*”, being that “*adam*” is called “*medaber*”. The month of Nissan, which contains the festival of Pesach, builds the particular aspect of the Jewish people that is “*medaber*”: the power to speak.

It is written, “*And man became a living spirit*”, and *Targum* translates this to mean that he became a *ruach memalelah*, a “talking spirit.” This is referring in particular to the soul of a Jew, whom the power of speech is mainly manifest with, in contrast to the other nations of the world.

“*Yisrael v'oiraisa*” – the Jewish people are interconnected with the Torah; the two of these uphold the world’s existence. The connection between the Jewish people and the Torah is through the power of speech. The *mitzvah* to learn Torah is specifically “*And you shall speak in it*”.⁶ It is a verbal kind of *mitzvah*, unlike all of the *mitzvos* which are fulfilled through an action.

⁶ Editor’s Note: We also find that the *mitzvah* to learn Torah is fulfilled mentally, when one “thinks in learning”, and indeed, thought is the essence of Torah, as the Rav explains in many places. (See *Getting To Know Your Thoughts* – Chapter 3). However, there is also a specific command of the Torah to not only learn the Torah and to delve in it, but to speak of it.

The Jewish people personify the aspect of man that is *medaber*: the power to speak. There were Ten Commandments said by Har Sinai, where the Torah was given, parallel to the Ten Utterances of Creation.

Thus, the root of the entire year for the Jewish people begins with the month of Nissan. Nissan is the month of the conception of the Jewish people. Although the month of *Elul* is also considered the beginning of the year, that is true with regards to our actions; with regards to our speech, it is *Nissan* which is the root of the year, for the Jewish people.

Within the month *Nissan*, there is the festival of Pesach, which contains the words “*peh sach*”, “a mouth that talks”. It is the time of the year which builds each of the souls of the Jewish people, each of us on a personal level, with specific regards to our power of *medaber*/speech.

Three Kinds of Speech: 'Amirah', 'Dibbur', and 'Sichah'

We find several terms for speech in the Torah. There is *amirah* (to speak softly), *dibbur* (to speak harshly), and *sichah* (conversation).

It is written, “*So shall you say to the house of Jacob [the women] and so shall you speak to the children of Israel [the men].*” *Rashi* explains that the women needed to be addressed in a softer manner, *amirah*, whereas men need to be addressed in a harsher manner, *dibbur*.

We find the difference between *amirah* and *dibbur* with regards to the difference between Creation and the Torah. The world was created through Ten Utterances, “*maamaros*”, which is from the word *amirah*, whereas the Torah was given through Ten Commandments, “*dibros*.”

A third form of speech is called *sichah* (conversation). The word *sichah* is contained in the word Pesach, which is from the word “*peh sach*” (a mouth that talks). The *Gemara* says that “There is no *sichah* except in prayer⁷, for it is written, “*Tefillah l’oni, ki yaatof, v’lifnei Hashem yishpoch sicho*” - “A prayer for the afflicted man when he swoons, and pours forth his supplications before Hashem.”⁸

Thus, different kinds of speech are used, depending on the situation. The term “*dibbur*” is used in reference to Torah, whereas the term “*sichah*” is used in reference to *tefillah*, prayer.

Being that Nissan is called the month of *sichah*, it follows that it is a month of *sichah/tefillah* – times of speaking with Hashem, in prayer, in conversation.

What is the depth that lies behind this?

⁷ *Berachos* 26b

⁸ *Tehillim* 102:1

'Sichah': When There Is No 'Daas'

In the *Gemara*, there is a *halachah* of '*masiach l'fi tumo*', "conversing casually": if two people are overheard talking with each other, and in midst of their casual conversation they mention certain facts about someone, we can rely on what has been overheard during this conversation and accept it as testimony in *Beis Din*, because there is no reason to assume that they are lying. The concept of *masiach l'fi tumo* is rooted in the term *sichah*.

Elsewhere, the *Gemara* says that ten measurements of *sichah* (talking) descended onto the world; nine of these measurements were taken by women." Here we also see a usage of *sichah*.

What is the depth behind this matter? It is because there are two kinds of speech [as we are about to explain]. The *Gemara* says that an impoverished person is one who lacks *daas* (knowledge of Torah).⁹ There, the *Gemara* says, "*Dida bei, kula bei, u'do lo da bei, ma bei?*" - If one knows the Torah, he has everything, through it; and if he lacks Torah, what does he have?" The *Gemara* brings proof to this from the *posuk* we quoted before: "*A prayer for the afflicted man, when he swoons, and pours forth his supplications before Hashem.*"

So it is a lack of *daas* that epitomizes *oni*/poverty; and that being the case, the impoverished man, the *oni*, pours forth his *sichah* (supplications) in front of Hashem. Thus, we learn from this that '*daas*' is the opposite of '*sichah*' [so when there is no *daas* (knowledge), a person is left with nothing but *sichah* (conversation)]. We have learned thus far that *daas* is used in reference to knowledge of the Torah, whereas *sichah* does not flow from one's *daas*.

In learning Torah, the mitzvah to speak of Torah is *dibbur* ("And you shall speak in it") which comes from one's '*daas*'; as it is written, "*For the lips of the Kohen, guard daas*". This is referring to the Torah learning, which stems from his '*daas*'. The term '*daas*' is also associated with the concept of *hanhagah*, to lead [for Moshe *Rabbeinu* it is the epitome of *daas*, and he was granted the power of *hanhagah* over the Jewish people]. Thus, *daas* is the power of Torah, and it is the power which "leads"; and from *daas*, comes our *dibbur*, an orderly kind of speech which is fused by holy intellect of the Torah. *Sichah*, however, is the lack of *daas*; as we brought before from the *Gemara*, an impoverished person is defined as someone has a poor amount of *daas*.

Sichah: Speaking From The Heart, To Hashem

⁹ *Nedarim 41a*

If *sichah* doesn't stem from one's *daas*, where does it come from? The answer lies in the term, "*masiach l'fi tumo*" – "casual conversation" – it stems from '*tumo*'¹⁰. This does not stem from one's *daas*. *Sichah* does not come from *daas*; it comes from the *lev*, the heart. The Sages said that "Words that come from the heart, enter the heart." This is the essence behind the power of *tefillah*/prayer. In contrast, learning the Torah uses a completely different ability: the ability of *daas* (knowledge). Torah is all about *daas*, whereas *tefillah*/prayer is all about an absence of *daas*.

Sichah, the power of the month of Nissan, is the concept behind its festival, Pesach. Leaving Egypt (Pesach) was the beginning of our path, and we ended it when stood at Har Sinai to receive the Torah (Shavuos). So our path began with *sichah*, with Nissan/Pesach – a month in which our power of *tefillah* was revealed – and it ends with *daas*, with the giving of the Torah/the festival of Shavuos, in which we received the Ten Commandments, the *dibbur*/speech that stems from *daas*.

The exodus from Egypt did not take place due to the merit of the Torah, for the Torah was not given yet. It was entirely achieved through prayer! Of course, they had Torah learning as well, for the Sages state there was a *yeshivah* in Goshen. But there was no giving of the Torah yet, so there wasn't enough of a level of Torah for them to be redeemed. It was prayer which redeemed us from Egypt: "*And their supplications arose.*"

When Moshe told the people that they would be redeemed soon, they did not listen, from their "*koitzer ruach*" – they were "short of breath." In other words, they were not yet connected to *daas*; they could not yet connect to the words of Moshe, who is *daas*, for they had not reached *daas* yet.¹¹ They were at the level of *tefillah l'oni*, "A prayer for the afflicted man." Although they certainly possessed *dibbur*/speech, it wasn't a *dibbur* of the giving of the Torah yet, and instead all they had in them was their ability to cry out to Hashem in prayer: "*And their supplications arose.*"

Every year, when the month of Nissan returns, this power of *sichah/tefillah* (earnest prayer and conversation with Hashem) comes back with it. It is the power which brings us redemption; it returns to us every year, enabling us a new chance each year to merit redemption.

Telling Over The Story of the Exodus: The Power of 'Sichah'

In the *Haggaddah*, we say, "Even if we were all wise sages, even if we were all understanding, it is an obligation to tell over the story of the exodus from Egypt." There are many explanations of this matter, but we will present an explanation of this according to the lines of our discussion.

¹⁰ Editor's Note: Later in this shiur, it will be explained that "*tumo*" is referring to "*temimus*" – "earnestness." It will also be explained that *temimus* does not stem from our *daas*, and it is rather 'above' our *daas*.

¹¹ Editor's Note: This is in line with the words of the Arizal, that the Egyptian exile was an "exile of the *daas*". In Pesach #002 (Redeeming Our Soul), the Rav elaborates further upon this concept of "exile of the *daas*."

Telling over the story of the exodus – *sippur yetzias mitzraim* – is not a *mitzvah* accomplished through the powers of our intellect. It is very unlike the *mitzvah* of learning Torah, in which we use our powers of the intellect, *chochmah* and *daas*. The *mitzvah* of *sippur yetzias mitzraim* is reminiscent of the concept we brought earlier from the *Gemara*: the idea of “*masiach l’fi tumo*” – “casual conversation”. It is a kind of simple speech, which flows from pure earnestness in ourselves, and not from the area of the rational intellect. “*Even if we were all wise sages, even if we all understand, it is an obligation to tell over the story of the exodus.*” This *mitzvah* is not dependent on being a Torah scholar or not! It is not about wisdom. It is about being able to tell over the story just as when you are having a casual conversation, simply, earnestly – ‘*masiach l’fi tumo*’.

Nissan, The Tribe of Yehudah, and Temimus/Earnestness

The month of Nissan is explained in our *sefarim hakedoshim* as being represented by the tribe of Yehudah¹². Upon the birth of Yehudah, our matriarch Leah expressed her gratitude to Hashem, “*This time I thank Hashem.*” [We will explain the depth behind this matter]. There are two roots of the twelve tribes: Rachel and Leah. Yaakov *Avinu* possessed two uniquely different qualities: he is called the ‘*ish tam*’, (wholesome man), which refers to his power of *temimus/earnestness*, and he is the one whose “hand grips onto the heel of Esav”, which refers to his power of destroying Esav in the future. The two main wives of Yaakov *Avinu*, Rachel and Leah, received one of these two powers.

Yosef, the son of Rachel, received Yaakov’s power to destroy Esav in the future. In one of the prophecies about the future, Yosef is compared to a fire that will destroy the “straw” that is Esav. This is not the *temimus* of Yaakov *Avinu*; it is Yaakov’s other power, his power to destroy Esav, and it is essentially this power which Yosef received from the Torah that he learned from his father Yaakov. It was Yehudah who received the *temimus* from Yaakov *Avinu*. His mother Leah thanked Hashem upon his birth, which hints to the *sichah/temimus* which she connected to in Yaakov and received from him. So Yosef received the *chochmah* (wisdom) from Yaakov *Avinu*, while it is Yehudah who received the *temimus* (earnestness) from Yaakov *Avinu*. Yosef received the Torah from his father Yaakov *Avinu*, through *daas*. This enabled him to receive the *chochmah* of Yaakov *Avinu*. But Yehudah received from Yaakov *Avinu* the power of *temimus*.

The power of *temimus* is a whole different kind of understanding. It is written, “*Toras Hashem Temimah, meshivas nafesh*” – “the Torah of Hashem is complete, it settles the soul.” This concept does not mean to imply that Torah/*daas* and prayer/*temimus* are separate from each other, *chas v’shalom*. Rather, it means that there is a part of Torah which is attained through *daas*, and there is

¹² There is an entire series devoted to explaining the avodah of the 12 months of the year based on each of the 12 tribes; see *Tribe of Rosh Chodesh #001 – Nissan -Yehudah*

a part of Torah which is attained through *temimus*. The power of the month of Nissan, which is *sichah*, is essentially the power that is identified with “*temimus*” (earnestness). [Thus, *sichah* flows from our *temimus*.]

The Holy and Evil Uses of 'Temimus'

The power of *temimus* exists both in the side of holiness as well as in the side of evil. So there is a good and holy way to use *temimus*, and there is also a negative connotation of *temimus*.

The negative implication of *temimus* implies a lack of *daas* when it is detrimental to the person. *Chazal* say, “Women have light *daas*”, therefore, women naturally have more *temimus*, because they are less inclined towards *daas*. But when there is a lack of *daas*, a person will develop an uneducated and foolish kind of earnestness, [“pseudo-*temimus*”], such as becoming naïve and other negative attributes. This is an evil [and undeveloped] kind of *temimus*.

In contrast, the holy kind of *temimus* is to be an “*ish tam*”, as it was said of Yaakov *Avinu* - which implies *shleimus*, wholesomeness and completion. A *tam* is an unblemished animal, whereas a *baal mum* is a blemished animal; thus the term “*tam*” implies being whole and perfect.

Many people have a negative connotation of *temimus*, thinking that it implies foolish naiveté. But *temimus* is entirely different than how most people think of it. *Temimus* is indeed superficial when it stems from a simple lack of *daas*. Such *temimus* flows from incompleteness. It is holy when it stems from the power to be wholesome and perfect, and to be earnest from that place in oneself; such *temimus* is stemming from completion.

It is brought in the words of the Sages that Yaakov *Avinu*'s ‘wholesome image’ is carved into the Throne of Glory. Elsewhere, the *Gemara* says that the beauty of Yaakov *Avinu* was reminiscent of the body of Adam *HaRishon*. The meaning of this is that Yaakov had reached *shleimus*, completion, which was symbolized through his trait of being an *ish tam*; in that way, he resembled Adam *HaRishon*, the epitome of perfection [before the sin].

Prayer - Standing Before The King: A Glimpse At Shleimus/Completion

The Sages said that “There is no *sichah* (conversation) except prayer.”¹³ Prayer is to “stand before the King”. All creations are lacking; no one is complete. There is only One who is complete: *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. When one truly stands before Hashem in prayer, he is coming into contact

¹³ *Berachos* 26b

with a *hakarah* (recognition) of what it means to view *shleimus* (completion). In contrast, one who does not “stand in front of the King” is one who does not have any recognition of *shleimus*.

When one truly senses that he is before Hashem as he prays, he recognizes the reality of Hashem’s existence. His heart is alive and awake to the fact that Hashem resides in his heart. That is the true, inner definition of “standing in front of the King”. He can then feel what *shleimus* is.

Of course, even with this perception, that doesn’t mean that the person has reached *shleimus*. There is no such thing as a perfect person, so it is impossible to actually reach *shleimus*. But at least one can have a recognition of what it is.

When one is engaged in prayer, he is aware that he is lacking, and that the Creator is the complete One who can fill whatever he lacks. In *Shulchan Aruch*, it is brought that one should reflect upon the greatness of the Creator and on the lowliness of man, as a prerequisite to prayer. However, this does not mean for a person to simply compare his lowliness to that of the greatness of the Creator (which is also true, on the simple level). It is deeper than that: it is for one to realize that Hashem is perfect and complete, while I am lacking and incomplete. That is the perception which must accompany one’s feelings as he prays.

This is the true depth of “standing in front of the King”: to recognize that I am lacking, while Hashem is complete. This is the depth behind all of prayer. When a person is praying with this perspective, his prayers to Hashem are not stemming from a mere will to complete what he lacks, for that would not be ‘*sichah*.’ Rather, ‘*sichah*’ is to be like “*the afflicted man when he swoons, and pours forth his supplications in front of Hashem.*” It is to recognize that “I am lacking, for I recognize that I am in front of Hashem – Who is perfect”, because that allows me to recognize what *shleimus* is. *Sichah* is to be ‘*masiach l’fi tumo*’. The more a person is lacking, the more he will pray to Hashem, and that is true; but this is not yet the depth of prayer. The depth of prayer is for one to recognize that he stands before Hashem, and from that perception, one prays. This is the *sichah* that is *tefillah*: “*masiach l’fi tumo*”, to be able to let the words flow casually and freely, in recognition of the perfect *temimus* of Hashem.

‘Temimus’ Stems From ‘Shleimus’

So we must not have the mistaken notion that *temimus* is to simply lack *daas*. It is rather to recognize what *shleimus* is; out of a recognition that I stand before Hashem, aware that He is complete and perfect, which means that I am not complete. When *temimus* does not come from this perspective, such *temimus* is the kind of *temimus* that came about after the sin of Adam, a *temimus* which connotes deficiency, and such *temimus* is not holy. Only the *temimus* that stems

from “*In front of Hashem, he pours out his supplications*”, is the *temimus* which comes from the depths of [recognizing] *shleimus*.

The Incomplete, Facing The Complete

When we were enslaved in Egypt and we cried out to Hashem to be saved, such prayer stemmed from how we felt lacking in our situation. Therefore, it did not represent the depth of our salvation from Egypt. The redemption from Egypt is rather epitomized by the *possuk*, “*I, Hashem, am going out, amidst Egypt.*” When Hashem revealed Himself at the end of the plagues, this was the apex of the exodus; it was what made that night into Pesach. From this episode came our redemption.

Egypt is *Mitzraim*, from the word *meitzar*, “confinement”, which implies a situation in which we are missing and lacking. When Hashem revealed Himself in Egypt at the end of the plagues, this was the revelation of perfection amidst all that was lacking. It was the revelation of the Endless amidst the limited and confined. It was the stark contrast of the absolutely complete against the backdrop of the utterly incomplete.

It is not by coincidence that Hashem chose to reveal Himself in that manner. It was to show us that as we are aware of our own incompleteness, we need to view what Completion is. On one side of the coin, we must be aware of our deficiencies, and on the other side of the coin, we must be aware of the great Perfection that exists: the perfection of the Creator. This is the depth behind prayer.

It is not Torah which reveals this perspective; it is only prayer where this concept is revealed. Torah is all about perfection, for it is perfect and complete, whereas prayer is all about the incompleteness of man. In the exodus of Egypt, we were utterly incomplete and lacking, and we came into contact with perfection: the revelation of Hashem, amidst all the incompleteness we were in. It was not about just revealing the state of perfection or about showing us how incomplete we are. None of these alone is the lesson. Rather, the purpose of it was to show us how the incomplete must recognize that which is Complete.

In the laws of telling over the story of the exodus, the *Rambam* writes that we must “begin with disparage, and end with praise.” [We begin the *Haggaddah* by saying how dismal the Jewish people had become, and we end with praise, describing the greatness which we became.] This is the idea of the concept we are describing, in which perfection is revealed amidst incompleteness.

This idea is what lies behind prayer: for one to recognize that because Hashem is perfect, I am lacking, as I stand before Him. It is that perception which truly enables one to pray and pour out his heart to Hashem. It is not simply for one to feel that he is lacking; although it is certainly true when one prays, he needs to feel that he is lacking. It is to recognize that because *Hashem is perfect*,

I am not, therefore, I pray. [Thus, the main emphasis of a person during prayer should therefore be, on the fact that “Hashem is perfect”, as opposed to dwelling on one’s own imperfections].

For this reason, the entire *Shemoneh Esrei* is composed as a public prayer, and not in the private and individual language. It is because prayer is not about turning to Hashem from my own personal imperfections; rather, it is that because we turn to Hashem, from there, we recognize how lacking we are.

The Difference Between “Daas” and “Temimus”

During this time of the year – the month of Nissan, and on Pesach specifically, we can reach the depth of the power of *sichah*. *Sichah* is also from the word ‘*shach*’, to bend, to be lowered. The *Gemara* learns out that *shechitah* (ritual slaughter) on animals is the place of the body which is “*shach*”, a part of the body which bends over, which is the neck¹⁴. We also find this term with the word ‘*shiach*’, a burrow in the ground, which is a low place. *Sichah* is thus about lowering oneself and being subservient.

The Sages praise one who lowers himself “like an animal” and is able to engender high qualities of character because of this. This is referring to the trait of *temimus*. It does not come from a lack of *daas*; to the contrary, it comes from *shleimus*, from perfected character.

Shleimus – self-perfection – is not able to be achieved through *daas*. Our *daas* is limited. Even Moshe *Rabbeinu*, who achieved the highest level of *daas* possible, was only able to comprehend as far as his *daas* could understand. It was his *daas*; it was not the *daas* of the Creator. *Daas* can understand only so much, but it cannot grasp the plane of *shleimus*. Only through *tefillah*/prayer, which stems from *temimus*, can a person reach *shleimus*. This is because *temimus* is above *daas*. It can be said that at the point where *daas* ends, that is where *temimus* begins.¹⁵ Therefore, one’s *temimus* can grasp perceptions that his *daas* cannot grasp.

The Egyptian exile is called the “exile to our *daas*.”¹⁶ It follows, then, that the redemption from Egypt meant that our *daas* had been redeemed. Yet, besides for this aspect, there was even deeper revelation: the revelation of our power of *sichah/temimus* - which is higher than *daas*.

Telling Over The Story Of The Exodus, All Night Long: The Power of “Sichah/Temimus”

¹⁴ *Chullin 27a*

¹⁵ Editor’s Note: This statement is reminiscent of a statement of Rav Dessler, “In the place where *seichel* (intellect) ends, that is where *emunah* (faith) begins.”

¹⁶ A statement of the Arizal. For further elaboration of this concept, see Pesach #002 – Redeeming Our Soul

The *mitzvah* to tell over the story of the exodus, ideally, is meant to span the entire night of the *sefer*, for as long as one is capable of doing so. This is the spiritual light that is *temimus*: the state of perfection that was revealed from Hashem's Presence appearing in Egypt, the peak of our exodus. The *mitzvah* to tell over the story of the exodus is not something you read, hear, or merely "learn". It comes from a deep recognition in our souls of "*I, Hashem, will go out, in the midst of Egypt.*"

The deeper the recognition of this, the deeper the *mitzvah* of telling over the story of the exodus will become.

From Pesach To Shavuos: From "Temimus" To "Daas"

These days of the month of *Nissan* are days in which we have the special opportunity to acquire the power of *sichah*. Through our power of *daas*, we cannot reach anything perfectly, because *daas* cannot reach *shleimus*, as we explained. *Shleimus* can only be reached when a person has a recognition of it, which comes from his *temimus*.

When Shavuos comes, it is the time to accept the Torah, and the Torah is a "*Toras Hashem Temimah*", a Torah that requires *temimus*. It is written, "*Wisdom, from where is it found?*" The *possuk* is saying that the source of all *chochmah*/wisdom is *ayin*, "nothingness", which is really referring to the *temimus* that must precede all of the *chochmah* of the Torah. It is *temimus* which is the deep source of all *chochmah*. If one has reached *temimus* on Pesach, he has the prerequisite to be able to receive the Torah on Shavuos.

The next month, *Iyar*, contains the power called '*hirhur*', deep and reflective thought. If *hirhur* is not preceded with this *sichah*, though, then *hirhur* becomes superficial: one will only be thinking about various personal issues that are not of real importance.

The true way to prepare to receive the Torah is only through *temimus*: to recognize the *shleimus* of Hashem. "*Remember the day in which you stood before the mount of Sinai*" – the deeper meaning of this is that Torah must first be nursed from an inner source: from "standing at Har Sinai." In other words, in order to accept the Torah and learn its wisdom, one must first have some recognition of perfection: to view the perfection of the Creator.

"*Follow after Me, into the desert.*" This is referring to the *temimus* which a Jew must have towards Hashem: to realize that Hashem is perfect and complete, so I will follow Him, wherever He takes me and wherever I must go.

The essence of Pesach, besides for its many other aspects and *halachos* which are also important, is this concept: to be '*masiach l'fi tumo*', to let our conversations with Hashem flow, freely and naturally, from our point of *temimus*.

1.4 | Nissan – The Lamb

Sanctifying The New Months In Our Times

“*The head of the months [Roshei Chodashim], to Your nation, You gave.*” The concept of *Rosh Chodesh* came into fruition when we left Egypt, whereupon we received the commandment of *Rosh Chodesh* [to sanctify the new month]. The actual names of the months [Nissan, Iyar, etc.] were not formulated until the times of Ezra, but the concept of the 12 months of *Rosh Chodesh* itself was given to us when we left Egypt.

The month of Nissan is called “*head of the months, the first unto you*” – it is the month in which the redemption from Egypt took place. When we left Egypt and we were given the *mitzvah* to sanctify the month, this was not just another detail we received; it formed the roots of the entire structure of the Jewish people.

Nowadays, we no longer have the *mitzvah* of sanctifying the new month. We don’t have a *Beis Din* to sanctify the new month, and we don’t have the ways with which the appearance of the new moon can be recognized, which our Sages established, as the *Mishnah* records. Today, it seems that sanctifying the new month is no longer relevant to us. Is sanctifying the new month still of relevance to us, today? [We will explain that it does].

The Twelve Tribes Always Remain

In the beginning of *sefer Shemos*, the Torah records all of the names of Yaakov Avinu’s descendants who went down to Egypt, which includes the 12 *shevatim* (tribes) and all of their families. When the Jewish people entered Egypt, there were 12 tribes, and when we emerged from Egypt with the exodus, the 12 tribes were still intact. The lesson that this implies is, that no matter how much we go through exile, our 12 tribes always remain.

This is the depth of the redemption from exodus, and this is the inner meaning of the “great possessions” which we left Egypt with. When we left Egypt, we were given the *mitzvah* of *Rosh Chodesh*, and the Torah calls it a “*time of atonement for all their offspring.*” – this was our “great possessions” we left with: *Rosh Chodesh*, the 12 months of the year, which are parallel to each of the 12 tribes, are an atonement for us, for all the generations to come (There are many interpretations of the meaning of “great possessions” that we left Egypt with, but this is one of them).

The 12 tribes are present both in time, soul, and place. They are manifest in time, in *Rosh Chodesh*, the 12 months of the year. And the 12 tribes also exist in the sphere of our own soul. They also manifest in “place” with the 12 allotted portions of *Eretz Yisrael*, which are each given to one of the tribes.

The *Gemara*¹⁷ states that we have a tradition, that never will any one of the tribes be destroyed.” All of the 12 tribes of the Jewish people, without exception, will survive exile. Just as there is no Jewish soul can never be extinguished, so is it impossible for one of the tribes to ever disappear. A member of a tribe can die, but the tribe as a whole will always survive. So the 12 tribes, which manifest in time, can never cease.

Being that this is so, the 12 tribes form the essence of the structure of the Jewish people. They manifest in the soul as 12 tribes, and they manifest in time as the 12 months of the year – *Rosh Chodesh*.

The Mazalos (Constellations) And How They Affect Time

Time is affected by the 12 months of the year, but besides for this, there is another factor that contributes to time: the heavenly, celestial bodies. These include four factors: the sun, the moon, the stars, and the *mazalos* (the constellations).

The Jewish people are affected by two different systems: the system of the 12 tribes, which are present in time and in soul, as well as by the system of the “7 shepherds” [Avraham, Yitzchok, Yaakov, Yosef, Moshe, Aharon, and Dovid].

How do they exist in time? The 7 shepherds in time are represented by 7 stars, which are called *kochvei leches* (“traveling stars”); this system begins from the *mazal* (constellation) known as “*maadin/dam*” (red/blood)¹⁸, and so forth. The other system affecting Creation is the system of the 12 tribes, represented by 12 *mazalos* (constellations) that are in each of the 12 months. To give a few examples, the *mazal* of the month of Nissan is the lamb; the *mazal* of the month of Iyar is the bull, and so forth.

Mazal In The Gemara and In Halacha

Of what relevance do the *mazalos* have to *Halacha*? In the *Gemara*, there is a dispute if there Jews are subject to *mazal* or not. But do we find *mazal* actually affecting us nowadays, in *Halacha*? We

¹⁷in Tractate Bava Basra

¹⁸ Editor’s Note: In terms of the Zodiac, *Maadin* is known as “Mars”

can find many places where *mazal* does affect *Halachah*. It is brought in the *Gemara*, as well as in *Shulchan Aruch*, that it is better for a Jew to go to court against a non-Jew during the month of Adar, when the *mazal* for the Jewish people is at its best, as opposed to the month of Av, where our *mazal* is at its lowest.

Additionally, the *Gemara*¹⁹ says that if an ox gores a person, it is contributed to the person's *mazal*; and the *Gemara* explains that one is liable to pay for damages only when his ox gores the ox of a Jew, not the ox of a non-Jew. Thus, *mazal* has bearings on *halachah* as well.

'Mazal' As It Applies To The Jew's Soul

With regards to our own souls, how is *mazal* manifest? There are several terminologies of *mazal* found throughout the writings of our Sages. Rashi²⁰ says that *mazal* means that “a person is *bar daas* (capable of knowledge) and therefore he knows how to protect himself.”

This needs understanding. What does *mazal* have to do with a person's *daas*? If anything, it should be the opposite; if one knows how to take care of himself, then if he was harmed, it must be because of his bad *mazal*! And if he doesn't, then it's due to his own negligence, not to his *mazal*! However, as we will explain, this is only a question that stems from a superficial lens. In reality, *mazal* is related to *daas*.

Elsewhere, the *Gemara* states that if one has a fear which he can't explain, it is coming from his *mazal*, which sees the fearful event of the future and thus causes a person to become anxious. *Rashi* explains that it is an angel who hovers above the person, which shows the person the fear.

In another place, the *Gemara*²¹ states that when the Jewish people stood at Har Sinai, the impurity ('*zuhama*') of the Snake that had been on mankind since the sin ceased. The *Gemara* asks: What about converts? The *Gemara* answers that with converts, their *mazal* was present at Har Sinai. We can imply from this as follows. The converts were not present at Sinai, but their *mazal* was. Therefore, the entire imprint from Sinai that is on a convert was experienced through the *mazal* of the convert. But the original souls of the Jewish people who stood at Sinai had not only their *mazal* present there, but they were given a special commandment then: “*Serve G-d, on this mountain.*” [So the original souls of the Jewish people received a higher experience of Sinai, besides for what their *mazal* experienced; whereas the converts only received an experience of Sinai through *mazal* alone.]

¹⁹ *Bava Kamma 2b*

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ *Shabbos 146a*

The Two Aspects of 'Mazal'

What does it mean that the *mazal* of converts was present at Har Sinai? To understand this, in general, we need to know what the term “*mazal*” is, in the language of the Torah. *Mazal* is first alluded to in the Torah by the birth of Gad. When Gad was born to Yaakov *Avinu*, Rashi states, “*Ba gad, ba mazal,*” – “Gad comes, *mazal* comes.”

The matter of *mazal* consists of two parts: (1) One aspect of *mazal* is *hashpaah* (emanation), from the word *shefa* (sustenance); being that the word “*mazal*” can mean “*nozal*”, to “flow”, the term *mazal* implies a ‘flow’, of Heavenly sustenance, which is called “*shefa*”. (2) The other aspect of *mazal* is *taharah* (purity).

The first aspect, “*hashpaah*”, is reflecting one of Hashem’s 13 Attributes of Mercy: “*Notzar chesed l’olafim,*” “He lets kindness flow for thousands [of generations]. The second aspect, *taharah*, is reflecting another of the Attributes of Mercy: “*V’nakei,*” “And He cleanses.”

The *Gemara* says that when the Jewish people stood by Har Sinai, the spirit of impurity that had entered us from the Serpent was removed. This cleansing process only took place upon the Jewish people, not with gentiles, so the gentiles still remain affected by the impurity of the Serpent. As for converts, the *Gemara* says that since their *mazal* was present at Sinai, the impurity left them. What this really implies is that their *mazal* allowed them to receive the “*taharah*” aspect of *mazal*; being at Sinai removed the impurity of the Serpent upon them, a connotation of being “cleansed”, which alludes to the “*V’nakei*” aspect in *mazal*. Those words are explicit in the words of our Sages.

Now we can ask, though: Is there a difference between the souls of the Jewish people, and the souls of converts, being that that they were all cleansed from impurity at Sinai?

According to what we have explained, there is a difference. The converts only received the “*taharah*” aspect of *mazal*, which is “*V’nakei*” – to be cleansed of impurity. In that sense, the souls of converts share the same *mazal* as the souls of all other Jews. But the converts never received the “*hashpaah*” aspect of *mazal*, which is called “*Notzar Chesed L’Alafim.*” That *mazal* was given only to the original souls of the Jewish people.

We can now understand the following. In the *Gemara*, where there is a dispute if the Jewish people are subject to *mazal* or not, the entire issue is, do the Jewish people possess higher *mazal* than that of the other nations? Are the Jewish people limited to the *mazal* of *taharah*, or do they also possess a higher *mazal* (*hashpaah*)? That is the entire issue of the *Gemara*.

Thus, *mazal* is not simply a superficial term of ‘*mazal*’ which people call it as. In terms of the Torah, the Jewish people possess two kinds of *mazal* – the aspects of “*hashpaah*” and “*taharah*”.

Zuhama (Impurity): Zilzul (Cheapening of Holiness)

Mazal is from the word “*mezalzel*”, to cheapen. Being that *mazal* for the Jewish people is essentially about *taharah* – being cleansed from impurity – it will mean that *mazal* cleanses us from *zilzul* (cheapening). When the Snake coaxed Chavah to eat from the tree and sin, it placed a spirit of impurity (*zuhama*) upon her. What exactly is this *zuhama* that entered mankind since the sin? It is defined as the nature to be *mezalzel* – to cheapen holiness.

When the Jewish people stood at Sinai, they were cleansed from the *zuhama* placed on mankind that came from the Snake: they were purified from *zilzul*. And its place, their holy *mazal* was revealed.

“*V'nakei*” is thus the trait of Hashem which refers to cleansing the Jewish people from impurities placed upon them by outer forces. It essentially cleanses us from the *zuhama* of the Snake, which is the evil habit of *zilzul*. The soul needs to be cleansed from *zilzul*. What does a person tend to be *mezalzel* in? *Chazal* say that that there are “matters which stand at the exalted heights of the world, yet people are *mezalzel* in them”. It is those matters of *zilzul* which we need to be cleansed from.

This is the depth of the festival of Pesach, in which we are cleansed from sin. The *mitzvah* of *Korbon Pesach* has a special *halachah* when carried out by converts: it had to be cleansed from any *chometz*. The *mitzvah* to get rid of *chometz* on Pesach, on its deeper level, is to cleanse ourselves from the *yetzer hora*, who is called the ‘yeast in the sourdough.’ It is essentially meant to cleanse us from *zuhama*.

The Mazal of Nissan: “T’leh” – The Lamb

The month of Nissan, “the head of the months”, is the root of the other months; therefore, its *mazal* is the root of the other *mazalos*.

The *mazal* of the month of Nissan is called ‘*t’leh*’ (טלה), the lamb, which is also called ‘*seh*,’ the calf, the animal used for the *korbon pesach* (paschal sacrifice); it is called *g’di* (the goat). It is written, “Pull, and take for you” – the Sages expound this to mean, “Pull away your hands from idol worship, and take a *korbon pesach*”.

The depth of this matter is as follows. The *mazal* of Nissan, which is *t’leh* (טלה), (the lamb), is the opposite of the word לט, *lat*, “curse.” When a person sins, he causes ruination to himself. When man sinned, he ruined the earth. *T’leh*/טלה (or the *korbon pesach*) contains the letters ט and ל, which alludes to the ט מלאכות (the 39 forms of forbidden labor on Shabbos); for *melachah* (labor) is a curse placed upon mankind. When the *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt, they rectified the sin of Adam, who was ruined through the curse of *melachah* (or ‘39 *melachos*’) placed upon him. The exodus from

Egypt revealed the aspect of “*V’nakei*”, the cleansing and purification process of the Jewish people, which cleanses mankind from the curse and ruination that was placed upon us from the sin. This was the secret behind the *t’leh*/טלה (otherwise known as the *korbon pesach*) – the opposite of the state of being “cursed” (טל).

The word *t’leh*/טלה is also related to the word *טל*/*tal*, the dew. The dew has a special nature of transforming curse into blessing. In the future, the revival of the dead will happen through dew, the *tal techias hameisim*, which will transform the ruined into the blessed.

Thus, the exodus of Egypt cleansed our souls. When Adam sinned, mankind fell into a cursed level, to the “yeast in the sourdough” [the evil inclination], the *zuhama* (spirit of impurity) of the Snake. This was what created a need for the subjugation to Egypt: to cleanse us from the cursed state of mankind, from the *zuhama* of the Snake, and to return us to the perfect state of Adam before the sin. The exodus from Egypt began the purification process, and when Hashem said “*Serve G-d, on this mountain*”, this was the complete level of the rectification.

Nissan: The Month of Renewal

The purification process of the Jewish begins, though, with the month of Nissan. The month of Nissan is called “*Hachodesh hazeh lachem*” (This month shall be to you) – it represents the power of *chiddush* (renewal), from the word “*chodesh*” (*month*).

What is the power of *chiddush*/renewal that is present in the month of Nissan? When Adam sinned, Creation entered a ruined state, it became *lat*/cursed, and in the month of Nissan, we have the power to be cleansed from that cursed state which mankind fell into ever since the sin of Adam. This is the secret behind the concept of *teshuvah* (repentance), in which a person becomes like a ‘*berya chadashah*’, a new being; the Rambam says that when a person does *teshuvah*, he must view himself as a totally new person, who is not the same person as before.

The power that we have to be cleansed from sin, “*V’nakei*”, to become a new being, is reminiscent of a convert, who is considered to be like a child born anew. When we left Egypt, we gained the status of being like a newborn child; we became entirely new. And when we stood at Sinai, we were like converts. A newborn child and a conversion to Judaism are both examples of being born anew. Thus, the month of Nissan, represented by the *mazal* of *t’leh* (lamb), bears the power of renewal to the Jewish people, to cleanse us from the sins of before and to make us completely new. It is the power to begin again anew.

On one hand, there is a continuation in Creation, of the same reality. From that perspective alone, *teshuvah* is not possible. But Hashem gave us the power of *chiddush*, to renew ourselves – to be cleansed from all previous damage. Nissan is called the ‘head of the months’, the month that is

renewal and cleanses us from the past. How does the *t'leh*/lamb [which is the *mazal* of Nissan] cleanse us off from sin? It is through the soul's power of *chiddush* (renewal), which is alluded to in the words, "*Hachodesh hazeh lachem.*" When Moshe Rabbeinu was taught about the *mitzvah* of *kiddush hachodesh* (sanctifying the new month), he found it to be difficult. The depth of this is because it was the *mitzvah* about Rosh Chodesh, which is a beginning, and "all beginning are hard", *Chazal* teach. But the difficulty of the beginning can be mitigated when a person makes sure to begin completely anew.

The Depth of Bechirah: Choosing To Begin Anew

Earlier we brought from the *Gemara* that man has *mazal*, which *Rashi* defines as being a "*bar daas*". This refers to man's power of *bechirah* (free will) – man can choose between good and evil, but on a deeper level, man can choose to begin from a new start, and that is the depth of he we use our *bechirah*. The *Sforno* writes that our *bechirah* is to choose to imitate Hashem's ways, just as Hashem 'chooses', so to speak, to act kind and compassionate.

How does Hashem 'choose'? He chooses to renew His creation every day. As it written, "*He renews, in His goodness, the act of Creation, every day.*" This is the "*bechirah*" which Hashem chooses, so to speak – He chooses to utilize His *daas*, to begin everything anew each moment.

Renewal Is Exclusive To The Jew's Soul

This is the depth of the exodus from Egypt: to separate from the previous situation, and to begin from new. When we left Egypt, we were born as a nation, and we received the power from then onward to be able to totally begin again anew, no matter what previous situation we are in.

The nations of the world begin from the New Year, but they do not have the power of a new month. Therefore, a gentile does not possess the power of renewal in his soul. Only through conversion, can a gentile ever gain the power to become renewed – and the depth of this is, because only a Jew has the power of renewal.

Renewal & Continuation

There are really two sides to *mazal*. So far, we have explained 'one side of the coin': the power of renewal. But there is 'another side to the coin': the fact that we descend from the *Avos* (our

forefathers), for “the merit of our *Avos* did not cease”. In that sense, we are a continuation of our great past, of the *Avos*. This is the opposite power of renewal: it is the power to continue the past.

So there are really two opposite powers we possess: the power of renewal, to change our situation – and the power of continuation, which is to continue the same situation as before. These two concepts contradict each other, but our soul is built from these two contradictory forces. If we would only have the power of renewal, a person could come to deny the reality of sin, *chas v’shalom*, by always believing that he can be renew himself after he sins, and he loses his concept of consequence for sin.

Yet, if a person were to only believe in his power of continuation of the *Avos*, and he is unaware of his power of renewal, such a mindset is imprisoning to the soul; if he were to be in Egypt, he would believe that he can never leave it, *chas v’shalom*, because it is an exile decreed from the times of the *Avos*, and there is no way out, no way to be renewed...

Renewal (*chiddush*) is the power that we have which can help us rise from all past failure and sin. However, it needs to be balanced with its opposite power, the power of continuation (*hamshachah*), in order for it to be properly used and not taken overdone. Only if we have already developed the power to continue from the past, can we know how to use the power of renewal properly.

Two Levels of Repentance: Renewal, and Renewal With Continuation

Based on the above, we can understand a deeper difference between two levels of *teshuvah* (repentance): *teshuvah m’yirah*, repenting out of fear, and *teshuvah m’ahavah*, repenting out of love.

The *Gemara* says that when a person does *teshuvah m’yirah*, although his sins are forgiven, the sins do not become transformed into merits; but with *teshuvah m’ahavah*, not only is he forgiven, but even his sins become transformed into merits. The understanding of this is that with *teshuvah m’yirah*, a person wants to disconnect from his past sins and move on; he gains the ability of renewal, but he is missing the concept of continuation of the past. But with *teshuvah m’ahavah*, the person is not only forging a new beginning; he is still connected to the past and continues it. Thus, his sins become transformed into merits for him.

The Inner Mazal: “Notzar Chesed L’Alafim”

Thus, there are two aspects of *mazal* in every Jew. There is the aspect of “Notzar Chesed L’Alafim” (or *hashpaah/hamshachah*), and there is the aspect of “V’nakei” (*taharah*).

The power of *V'nakei/taharah* is essentially the power of *chiddush*/renewal, to be cleansed and to become new, disconnecting from the past situation. But there is a power even deeper than this: along with becoming renewed, a person also needs to acknowledge his past [the *Avos* that he comes from]. This is the more inner kind of *mazal* [which, as it was explained earlier, is only for the original souls of the Jewish people, and not converts]: “*Notzar Chessed L'Alafim*”. The concept of *Notzar Chessed L'Alafim* implies that Hashem remembers the merits of previous generations, for thousands of generations to come.

If you think about it, we haven't even gone through thousands of generations yet, and this is not even possible within the allotted time span for Creation. So what does it mean that Hashem remembers the merits of our *Avos*, for thousands of generations to come? It means that there is a constant continuation of those merits.

The Balance Between Continuation and Renewal

Nissan is called, “*HaChodesh Hazeh lachem*” (“This month shall be to you”), from the word *chiddush*/renewal, which hints to the renewal contained in it. But it is also called “*Rishon hu lachem, l'chol chodshei hashanah*” (“The first it shall be to you, for all the months of the year”) – the *possuk* also mentions that Nissan contains a “*shanah*” (year) aspect besides for its “*choidesh*” (month) aspect. The ‘*shanah*’ aspect mentioned in the *possuk* alludes to the other power of the month of Nissan: continuation of the past. It is essentially the power to return to a previous situation.

Thus, we need [a balance of these] two opposite abilities, which are both present in the month of Nissan: the power of renewal, and the power to return to the past.

Understandably, the powers of renewal and continuation (returning to the past) are opposite concepts of each other, and they are in contradiction. If someone is not a *bar daas*, he does not know how to contain these two opposites. One who possesses *daas*, though, understands the secret of incorporating opposing and contradicting abilities within himself.

So on one hand, we must be able to renew ourselves, which is to change ourselves. On the other hand, we need to be able to attach ourselves with the Reality that never changes. When we have these two abilities together and they are in proper balance of each other, this is the perfection of a Jew's soul.

The *mazal* of Nissan is the *t'leh* (the lamb), which symbolizes the renewal, the ability to disconnect from the past, for as we explained, *t'leh* is related to the word *tal*, the dew, which symbolizes new beginnings; in the future, the dew will revive the dead.

On the other hand, as we explained, Nissan also contains a power that is the opposite of renewal: the power to continue the past, the same-old reality that never changes. This is also known as *sichah*, talking, the ability that is also associated with the month of Nissan²². *Sichah* is when a person talks simply about what he enjoys, and he can keep talking about it, continuing his conversation more and more, because he is enjoying the conversation so much.

The non-changing aspect of the soul is a deeper power than our power of renewal. In the non-changing aspect of our soul, we connect to the same-old reality that never changes; to the timeless aspect known as “*Ask your fathers, and they will say to you; you elders, and they will tell you*”. This is what lies behind the concept of “*Notzar Chessed L’Alafim*”, the inner aspect of *mazal*; it is the fact that we received a tradition passed down from our forefathers.

But as we explained, this alone will not suffice. Although we must continue the great past of our *Avos*, which is our power to be connected to the past, we also need the power of renewal, so that we can become a whole new being, and leave past failures behind.

In Conclusion

May we merit from Hashem to connect to *havayah*, to the unchanging dimension of reality [which will be fully revealed in the future], along with the renewal [of the future] in which Hashem will renew His world, with the coming of the complete redemption; may it come speedily. Amen.

²² For more on “*sichah*” in the month of Nissan, see *Essence of Rosh Chodesh_01_Nissan_Speech and Prayer as well as Rosh Chodesh Avodah_01_Nissan_Speech*

1.5 | Nissan – The Tribe of Yehudah

Nissan – The Tribe of Yehudah

The Vilna *Gaon* writes that the twelve months of the year are parallel to the twelve *shevatim* (tribes). There are many different opinions in the writings of our Rabbis concerning which months are parallel to which of the 12 tribes. According to some opinions, the month of Nissan represents the tribe of Yehudah.

Yehudah: The Expression of Hodaah (Giving Thanks)

When Yehudah was born, his mother Leah expressed thanks for him, saying, “*This time, I thank Hashem.*” The name Yehudah is rooted in the word *hodaah*, thanks, because Leah felt thankful to Hashem over his birth.

As our Sages say, being that Yaakov *Avinu* had four wives²³, and our matriarchs knew through prophecy that 12 sons would come from Yaakov *Avinu*, the natural order of events would have been that 3 children would come from each mother [4x3=12]. Therefore, Leah thought she would not beget more than the 3 children to Yaakov. When she saw that she was given a fourth child, she realized that Hashem was giving her even more than her allotted portion of children. Thus, she had special reason to thank Hashem.

The *Gemara*²⁴ says that Leah was the first person in history to give *hodaah* (thanks) to Hashem, when she gave *hodaah* to Hashem over the birth of Yehudah. However, there is also a deeper understanding to this, as we will see.

'Hodaah': Through Denying Idol Worship

The *possuk* in the *Megillah* says that Mordechai was called “*ish yehudi*” [which simply means that he descended from Yehudah]. The *Gemara* expounds upon this that “Whoever denies idol worship, is called a ‘*Yehudi*’ (a Jew).” Mordechai fought the trend of idol worship in his times, thus he

²³ The two *Imahos*, Rachel and Leah; and the two maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah.

²⁴ Talmud Bavli: Tractate Berachos: Chapter Nine

earned the title of *'ish Yehudi'*. Thus, a denial of heresy, along with acknowledging the existence of Hashem, is what constitutes being called a *'yehudi'*. If so, *hodaah* is not just about admitting to something. It is about denying the other alternative.

The Torah records that Esav married a woman whose name was “Yehudis”. *Chazal* explain that her name was called Yehudis because she denied idol worship, and anyone who denies idol worship is called *'yehudi'*. Esav married her with the agenda of impressing his father Yitzchok, marrying a righteous woman who didn't serve idols, which would get his father to think that he had given up his ways of idol worship. [In reality, this was all a deception, and later we will explain more about this].

So the root of the term *yehudi/hodaah* is not just about acknowledging Hashem. It involves a denial of idol worship, and from that, faith and acknowledgment in Hashem can then become revealed.

'Hodaah': 'Bittul'/Nullification

There is another aspect to Yehudah's name. In the episode of Yehudah and Tamar, Yehudah admitted to Tamar that she was correct; “*She is more righteous than me.*” *Chazal* praise Yehudah in this act for the fact that he “admitted, and he was not ashamed”, and because of this meritorious act, Yehudah merited that the kingdom of David descended from him. This paved the roots of Mashiach and the future redemption.

The *Gemara* says that our matriarch Rachel is praised for “grabbing onto the art of silence”, whereas Leah is praised for the “grabbing onto the art of gratitude”. We see that the *hodaah* which Leah revealed is expressed as well in the life of her son Yehudah, who is associated with that very *hodaah*, as follows.

The *Gemara* states that Yosef sanctified the name of Hashem in private²⁵, thus he merited that a letter of Hashem be added to his name; there is *possuk* in the Torah which names Yosef as “*Yehoisaf*”, so we see that a letter ה was added onto his name; whereas Yehudah sanctified Hashem's name in public²⁶, thus he merits the full name of Hashem in his name²⁷.

Thus, there is a deeper aspect to the *hodaah* in Yehudah's name. It wasn't just because Leah felt gratitude to Hashem that she had been given more than her allotted portion of children. It was because *hodaah* implies admitting to something, which is the trait of nullifying oneself. This is called *bittul* (nullification).

²⁵ By the confrontation with the wife of Potiphar, when he refrained from sinning with her

²⁶ When he admitted publicly that he was wrong and that Tamar was correct

²⁷ The name “Yehudah” contains the four letter name of Havayah

Even more so, *hodaah* implies a denial of something else. In order for a person to give *hodaah* to Hashem, he has to first deny idol worship. After denying heresy, a person can then have faith in Hashem and be thankful to Him. So in order for a person to be “*modeh al ha’emes*” – to admit to the truth – he has to first deny the opposite of truth.

The deepest implication of *hodaah* is when Hashem’s Name is sanctified in public. The *Gemara* says that because Yehudah sanctified Hashem’s Name in public [through being ‘*modeh*’ to Tamar], he merited to have Hashem’s Name of *havayah* revealed in his own name.

Denying Idol Worship: The Incomplete Level of ‘Hodaah’

Let us reflect more about Yehudah and the root concept behind his name, *hodaah*.

As explained above, *hodaah* implies a denial of the alternative option. In order to ‘admit’ that Hashem exists, one has to deny the existence of other gods, or else his *hodaah* is not a true *hodaah*. If I believe in Hashem, that means I must deny that there are other gods. Thus, all *hodaah* implies a denial of something else. As the *Gemara* says, a Jew is only called ‘*Yehudi*’ if he denies idol worship.

If this is the definition, though, such *hodaah* is not the complete level of *hodaah*, for it involves an element of denial. Although the denial here is a denial of idol worship, which strengthens the admittance to one’s belief in Hashem, the entire such *hodaah* is based on the fact that idols are denied, which makes the *hodaah* incomplete. It is *hodaah* only in the sense of the denial of idol worship [and it is not *hodaah* for the sake of *hodaah*]. It is reminiscent of the case in the *Gemara* of ‘*modeh b’miktzas*’²⁸, one who admits partially to a claim. In the case of *modeh b’miktzas*, he admits partially to the claim, but he denies the other half that he isn’t admitting to. The entire *hodaah* is based on a *kefirah* (denial) of something else. It is thus called *modeh b’miktzas*.

Thus, the *hodaah* of Leah over the birth of Yehudah wasn’t the complete level of *hodaah*. Her *hodaah* to Hashem was based on the fact that she received more than her allotted portion of children; this came at the expense of the other wives of Yaakov Avinu, who would now bear less children, now that more children were being given to Leah. Since her *hodaah* came at the expense of others, we can view it as an incomplete kind of *hodaah*, because her *hodaah* implied that she is getting her part, while the others are being denied their part.

Thus, any *hodaah* which results in a deficiency to another, cannot be called complete *hodaah*. Whenever it comes to interpersonal relationships with others, any *hodaah* that one expresses will imply that he has received what others didn’t receive, so the *hodaah* is incomplete. By contrast, the

complete level of *hodaah* is only when my *hodaah* isn't causing any deficiency to another; when it isn't coming at the expense of another.

Incomplete "Hodaah"

Thus, when *hodaah* is a denial of something else, or when it comes at the expense of another, it is the incomplete level of *hodaah*. Such *hodaah* is only considered *hodaah* from the perspective of this "world of falsity" that we live in. [In contrast, true *hodaah* comes from a higher dimension than this world of falsity].

The *Sforno* says that Yehudah was not the first person to be named Yehudah. The wife of Esav, Yehudis, preceded him. Yehudis denied idol worship, thus she is called Yehudis, for anyone who denies idol worship is called "*Yehudi*". Why indeed did Esav marry a righteous woman who denies idol worship? He wanted to trick Yitzchok *Avinu* by making him think that he married a righteous woman. If so, the entire *hodaah* of his wife Yehudis is a *hodaah* that was false! It represents a kind of *hodaah* which isn't about admitting for the sake of the truth. The true and complete kind of *hodaah* is being done for the sake of the truth, and not for any other personal reason.

Thus, *hodaah* is incomplete when it is based on a denial of the alternative option. Such *hodaah* involves an element of falsity, and it is represented by the false *hodaah* of Esav, in his marriage to Yehudis. The *hodaah* found on This World includes both admitting and denial; the "denial" aspect in it makes it incomplete, for true *hodaah* does not come from a denial of something else.

Complete 'Hodaah'

Where do we find a revelation of complete *hodaah*? It is hinted to in the words of the *Gemara* we brought earlier: Yehudah sanctified the name of Hashem in public, and because of this, he merited that the four-letter Name of Hashem (*havayah*) be part of his name. This is a kind of *hodaah* (admittance) which does not come due to any denial of something else.

It was revealed in this world by the giving of the Torah, when Hashem said, "*I am Hashem, your G-d.*" This was a revelation of the ultimate *hodaah*, the belief in Hashem's existence, before there was any mention or possibility of other gods. It was a kind of *hodaah* that is above this world entirely. Such *hodaah* is not coming for the purpose of denying other gods; it is coming to state the existence of Hashem. It is not about a denial of falsity. It is a revelation that there is only one option in reality, as opposed to "two" options (belief in Hashem vs. belief in idols and falsity).

The higher revelation of *emunah* is when it is revealed there is only “one” option – faith in Hashem - as opposed to ‘choosing’ between the ‘two’ options (faith vs. heresy). When one’s *emunah* is crystal clear, there is no possibility of another option. When one’s *emunah* is not that clear, though, although he can still have *emunah*, his *emunah* is being questioned, because he sees ‘another’ option.

This can be compared to *Chazal*’s critique of Noach for being one who ‘believes, yet doesn’t believe.’ With such *emunah*, a person believes in Hashem and admits to His existence, denying any other possibility, but he is still retaining the ‘option’ that there is another ‘possibility’. He still has doubts, and he wonders about other possibilities. As is well-known, doubts are induced by the force of Amalek in the world. When a person has any doubts in his *emunah*, Amalek has some hold on him. When *emunah* is clear, there are no doubts, no trace of Amalek. With such *emunah*, there is no need in the first place to deny the notion of false gods.

Thus, the *hodaah* represented by Yehudah is not complete *hodaah*, for it involved a denial of something else (it came at the expense of the other wives of Yaakov *Avinu*, who would now have less children, now that Leah is being given more children). Therefore, all *hodaah* which we recognize in This World is incomplete, for it is within the perspective of the current 6000 year era we are in.

Nissan, Yehudah, and Redemption

In the month of Nissan, we were redeemed, and *Chazal* state that in the future, we will be redeemed as well, in the month of Nissan. This has its roots in Yehudah, whom the month of Nissan represents. Yosef was the first to go down to Egypt. He represents the exile. Yehudah represents the power to leave the exile. How do we see this? *Chazal* state that Yehudah established a yeshiva in Goshen, in Egypt, for the duration of the exile. This laid the hidden roots for the redemption from Egypt.

In Nissan, we will be redeemed, and the redemption comes through the power of Yehudah. However, it will not be through the ‘*hodaah*’ aspect of Yehudah, which is incomplete. The future redemption will not be about denying other gods so that Hashem can be revealed. Rather, the future redemption will be like Yehudah’s act of sanctifying Hashem’s Name of public – a complete *hodaah*, a *hodaah* for the sake of revealing His name of ‘*havayah*.’ When the name of *havayah* is revealed in the future, it will be revealed then that Hashem “was, is, and will be”, the only ‘one’ option that exists.

The Sages state that nowadays, the Throne of Hashem is incomplete, due to the presence of Amalek, who does not allow for the complete revelation of Hashem’s Name. In the future, when

Amalek will be erased, there will be no more possibility of doubts, and the *emunah* in Hashem will be absolute and definite.

This is the depth of “In Nissan, in the future, they [the Jewish nation] will be redeemed.” It will be revealed then the complete level of ‘*hodaah*’ that is present in Yehudah’s name, the revelation of a reality in which there are no other possibilities, other than the full acknowledgement of Hashem’s existence.

Nissan: The Time To Reach The Complete Level of Emunah

During this time of the year, Nissan, we can reveal the more complete level of *emunah*, in which there are no ‘two’ possibilities, and that there is only ‘one’ possibility: our complete *emunah* in Hashem.

When we see *hester* (concealment) in creation, our simple way to deal with this is to choose to have *emunah*, rather than focus on the *hester*. But the deeper method, which reflects the *avodah* here we have been describing – the power of Yehudah, which is more revealed in the month of Nissan - is to view the *hester* as being part of our *emunah* itself. All *hester* that we see is somehow a part of our *emunah*, and is not in contradiction with it.

This is the concept of complete *hodaah*, of *emunah shelaimah* (complete faith), of Yehudah sanctifying the ‘Name of Hashem’ in public.

1.6 | Yerushalayim In Place, Time and Soul

Yerushalayim In Place, Time and Soul

ולירושלים עירך ברחמים תשוב We ask Hashem in this blessing to rebuild *Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem).

Mentioning *Yerushalayim* is one of the pillars that uphold the Jewish people. The *Gemara* says that when a person davens, he should direct his heart to *Eretz Yisrael*, and when davening in *Eretz Yisrael*, one should face Jerusalem (and to the *Beis HaMikdash*, and within that, to the *Kodesh Kodashim*).

The Root of Jerusalem is Pesach

There were three times a year when we would trek to Jerusalem – by the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuos, and Sukkos. Pesach is the root of all festivals, for it was when we first left Egypt. *Targum* says that the first time we sacrificed the *korbon pesach* was in Jerusalem, so our connection to *Yerushalayim* in time began on Pesach.

Today we have no *Beis HaMikdash*, but we have the spiritual light of the *Yomim Tovim* (festivals) in its stead. On Pesach, we left Egypt, and that spiritual light is still here, for each year we must imagine that we left Egypt.

We did not just leave Egypt to go to *Eretz Yisrael* - it was the time when we brought the *korbon pesach* (paschal sacrifice); it was the first time that we connected to the *Beis HaMikdash*. This is the essence of *Chodesh Nissan*, and specifically the festival of Pesach.

Holiness In Place, Time, and Soul

There is a concept of our Sages called “World, Time and Soul,”²⁹ that everything exists on three planes – in place, in time, and in our own soul. With regards to reaching holiness, there is holiness in a certain place in the world, as well as in a certain time of the year, and in our own soul.

²⁹ *Sefer Yetzirah, III*

The holiest place in the world is the *Kodesh Kodashim* (Holy of Holies) that was in the *Beis HaMikdash*. The time of holiness is found in the festivals. Holiness in our soul is reached when we are in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Our Sages state that Hashem first created Jerusalem, then Eretz Yisrael, and the rest of the world spread out from there. Jerusalem was the first place that was created. We find this with regards to our own soul as well. The *Gemara*³⁰ says that Adam's head was created from Eretz Yisrael, and to be more specific, from Jerusalem (and the rest of his body was taken from Bavel).

We ask Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei* to rebuild the *Beis HaMikdash*. Just as there can be war on the place that is *Yerushalayim* - so can there be a 'war' on the *Yerushalayim* in our soul.

Yerushalayim In Disgrace

The nations of Edom and Yishmael are dominating *Yerushalayim* today. The city of Hashem lies in disgrace. The nations dominate here and contaminate its holiness!

The place of the *Kodesh Kodashim* itself is taken over by Arabs. And now, in our soul as well, 'Edom\Esav' and 'Yishmael', which are two root forces of evil in Creation, are also dominating our *Kodesh Kodashim* within: the evil is attacking our own souls.

The Sages revealed that there are three openings to Gehinnom. One place is in the desert; another place is in the ocean, which Yonah *HaNavi* saw. Another opening to Gehinnom is *Yerushalayim* itself. *Yerushalayim* is the place that unifies the tribes of Yisrael together, but when it is disgraced through impurity, it becomes the opening to Gehinnom!

This is true in the physical *Yerushalayim* as well as in the '*Yerushalayim*' in time and in soul. Esav and Yishmael are dominating *Yerushalayim*, and now the '*Erev Rav*' is dominating the *Yerushalayim* in the time, by controlling it and all that surrounds it. And in our soul as well – just as the place of *Yerushalayim* has become disgraced – so has it become lowered in our soul.

Vacations On Pesach – A Disgrace To The Holy Time of the Year

The three festivals, and especially Pesach, is the '*Yerushalayim*' of time. The '*Yerushalayim*' of today's times has been lowered and disgraced from the true *Yerushalayim* that it is supposed to be.

It's hard to believe this, but this is the painful reality we are in, when we are in the era preceding Moshiach: people who consider themselves to fear Hashem are using advertisements to sway the

world of Torah, *bnei Torah*, to take vacations on Pesach to – to where? To **Austria?! And it says there is a *hecsber* there with *mehadrin*. They aren't advertising this to wayward people. They are advertising it to thousands of *bnei Torah*. This is a total disgrace to our holiness. It is the time of Pesach, when we are supposed to mainly connect to the holiness of *Yerushalayim*, but now, the holiness of this time has been lowered and disgraced. Only the Angel of Death could devise this! Where is the holiness of the special times going?**

Remembering 'Yerushalayim'...

We ask Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei* to return *Yerushalayim* to us and rebuild it. One part of this request, which is the simple meaning of it, is to remember the destruction that took place here hundreds of years ago. The other part of this, which is deeper, is to remember the time of the three festivals - which are now being disgraced.

The holiness of this time, even in Eretz Yisrael, is being dominated by the forces of Esav, Yishmael, and Erev Rav. Instead of the rebuilding of *Yerushalayim*, a *ruach shtus* (spirit of folly) has come here. Anyone with a little *daas* is bothered by how such a thing can happen here.

Our head was created from *Yerushalayim*. People are basically falling from the head they were created from! The holiness of this place, this place which is the 'beginning' of all holiness, is being totally and utterly disgraced, and in the very month that is called the 'beginning' all the months.

The very place in which holiness manifests has become disgraced. We are being severed from our own heads [on a spiritual level]. The holiness of the three festivals is being concealed, and now we face an opening to *Gehinnom*, right here in *Yerushalayim*. When *Yerushalayim* is contaminated from its holiness, it goes from being the holiest place in the world, to become an opening to *Gehinnom*.

The air of Eretz Yisrael makes you grow wise; the wise scholars of Jerusalem were regarded to be the wisest, according to our Sages. But the holiness of Jerusalem, when it is damaged, causes the greatest confusion to our minds - whether it is being destroyed in place, time, or soul. We ask Hashem to return Jerusalem to us. This does not mean that we simply want this physical Jerusalem to be rebuilt; there are some people, *rachmana litzlan*, who erroneously think that they have already merited to see the rebuilding of Jerusalem just because they see it.

Yerushalayim: A Perfect Place – Or An Opening To Gehinnom

Yerushalayim is from the word “*yarei shaleim*”, one who “fears perfection.” The *Ramchal* describes this as *yiras hasheleimus* – the soul's demand for perfection.

This is what is behind our prayer to rebuild Jerusalem: that perfection be restored. The “*Yerushalayim*” in our soul is when a person strives to become an *adam hashaleim* (spiritually perfected). By mentioning *Yerushalayim* all the time – not just superficially, but to think about its real concept – that is how we can truly seek *shleimus*.

But when the holiness of *Yerushalayim* is being lowered, disgraced, and concealed from us, instead, the opposite of *shleimus* comes. It is not just an absence of *shleimus*. Rather, the antithesis to *shleimus* comes here. The holiness of Jerusalem is opposed by the opening to *Gehinnom*, and then all the qualities of Jerusalem fall to the Other Side of Evil and are concealed.

Our Ultimate Choice To Make

Here we come to the true choice we must make. The main thing we must choose is *yiras shomayim*, for this is our whole *bechirah* (free will); for “everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven.” Our Rabbis wrote that in the era preceding Moshiach, the true power of *bechirah* will be revealed.

In previous generations, they didn’t have to use *bechirah* as much as we have to today. They didn’t face such evil like we are facing today. But now, when *Yerushalayim* is being disgraced and *shleimus* is concealed, the truth is very covered over from us. Things which were never done here, things which people used to be embarrassed of doing here, nowadays, it has all entered *Yerushalayim*.

Now comes the true test of *bechirah*. People are swaying *bnei Torah* to disgrace the holy times of the year by going to these foreign places in the world, and now we are being tested with the ultimate choice: what will we choose? Will we really choose Hashem’s Will and we seek *shleimus* - or the opposite of this, *rachmana litzlan*?

The previous generations never had to use *bechirah* like we have today. Today, we are being faced with choosing between good vs. the very *worst* kinds of evil. The depth of our power of free will is if we will choose to use our free will to become a *yarei shaleim* – to seek spiritual perfection; to *long* for it.

This is our inner and real meaning of our request to rebuild “*Yerushalayim*”. May we merit that rebuilding of “*Yerushalayim*” – speedily in our days. Amen.



Part Two:
Pesach

2.1 | The Essence of The Three Festivals

Terms for Yom Tov

There are three festivals – Pesach, Shavuos, and Sukkos. We find different terms used by our *Chazal* (holy Sages) in describing the festivals. Our festivals are called *zmanim*, *chagim*, *moadim*, and *regalim*.

They are called *zmanim* and *moadim*, since they are established as certain times of the year. They are called *chagim* from the word *machog*, which means to “cycle”, because the cycle of the festivals repeats itself each year.

They are also called *moadim* from the word *vaad*, which means “meetings.” Three times a year we would trek to the *Beis HaMikdash* and bring a *korbon*; we would all gather together and ascend upon the mountain of Hashem, the site of the *Beis HaMikdash*. But this was not just a “*vaad*” in the sense that we were all gathered together. It was our meeting with Hashem – we would appear “in front of Hashem”. It was a *vaad* in that we were all gathered together, and it was a *vaad* because we were all meeting with Hashem.

Another term to describe the three festivals is “*regalim*.” The simple meaning of this is “feet” that we would all walk by foot to travel to Jerusalem for *Yom Tov*. For example, the *Gemara*³¹ deduces from the word *regalim* that a person is only obligated in the *mitzvah* if he has normal feet to walk with, but if he limps, he is exempt from the *mitzvah*.

Regel/Walking – Going From One Place To Another

Let us reflect on the “*regalim*” aspect of the *Yom Tov*.

Chazal say that the world stands on three pillars – Torah, *Avodah*, and *Chessed*; these are like three “feet” which the world stands upon. The world stands on three pillars, and so does time. Time stands on the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuos and Sukkos, which are like the three pillars that uphold time.

³¹ *Chagigah 4a*

The word *regel*, besides for its simple meaning of “foot”, can also mean “because of”, like when Yaakov told Lavan, “*And Hashem blessed you, because of me.*” It is also written, “*The feet of His pious ones are protected* [because they are pious].”

In other words, the three festivals are not a purpose unto themselves; they exist “because” of a greater goal. The festivals take us and lead us to a certain point.

If a person is unaware that the *Yomim Tovim* serve a greater goal that they lead to, then he does not experience *Yom Tov* through his soul; he only experiences it through his body. The festivals are given to us so we can use them to reach a higher place than we were at until now. A festival moves us from one point to the next point.

We have so far mentioned two aspects of *Yom Tov*. One aspect of *Yom Tov*, we mentioned, is that it upholds a person. The second aspect of *Yom Tov* is that it leads us to a higher point. Thus, meeting with Hashem for three times a year was not just to travel there with our feet. The purpose of *Yom Tov* was that we should ascend to a higher point. That is the deeper implication of *regalim*.

Yom Tov is a time to ascend spiritually. Just as we ascended onto a certain place in the world on *Yom Tov* – the site of the *Beis HaMikdash* – so must we ascend, in our very soul, to a higher place than the one we are at now.

Holy Habits

How do we ascend in our souls through *Yom Tov*?

The answer lies in the following: there is another meaning of the word “*regel*”. It can also mean to “search”, as we find in the word *meraglim*, “visitors” of the land, who really come to search out the land. This hints to us that the way we ascend through *Yom Tov*/the *regalim* is by “searching” for something. The first *regel* is Pesach, which we begin by searching for any *chometz*.

Yom Tov is a “*regel*”, and this implies that we need to search for something on *Yom Tov*.

Chazal say that it is better had man not been born; now that we have been born, we need to examine our deeds. We need to search inside ourselves. What is it that we need to search for?

The word “*regel*” can also come from the word “*hergel*”, which means “habit.” We ask of Hashem, “*Shetargileinu B'Torasecha*”, that “we should become accustomed in Your Torah” – we want to develop a habit for the words of Torah. Doing things out of habit is usually not a good thing [this is called *melumadah*, doing things by rote]. But there are times in which we find that doing things out of habit is a good thing [and then *hergel* is being used for holiness]. On *Yom Tov*, we need to search inside ourselves and see which of our habits are good, and which are not good.

We count 50 days of the Omer until we get to the giving of the Torah, in which we have hopefully become accustomed to the Torah by then, when we have hopefully reached our aspiration of “*And we should become accustomed in Your Torah.*” At first we search ourselves out on the night before Pesach, and this is the beginning aspect of the *regel*. In between Pesach and Shavuot, we have hopefully become more accustomed to going to the *Beis Midrash*, that our feet are naturally taking us towards the *Beis Midrash* [as Dovid *HaMelech* describes in *Tehillim*]. On Shavuot, we ideally reach the apex of getting used to holiness, which is the purpose.

This is the first aspect of the three *regalim*, which begins with Pesach – at first we search inside ourselves to see what our habits are, if they are holy or unholy. If we find habits in ourselves that are not for holiness, we need to destroy it, just as we destroy the *chometz* we find in any nooks and crannies. Along with this, we need to gain good kinds of habits – to become used to learning Torah, which is how we use the power of *hergel*/habit, for holiness. “*Shetargileinu B’Torasecha.*”

The First Step In Growing From Tom Tov: Inner Order To Our Soul

When we search inside ourselves to discover what our habits are, we must proceed in steps. It is written of the Jewish people when they would travel to Jerusalem, “*How beautiful are your steps.*” When we would travel to Jerusalem by foot, it was with “steps” – in other words, our *avodah* needs to be practiced in steps. We must give ourselves some inner order to our soul. As the *Mesillas Yesharim* says, we cannot acquire the various levels of piety all at once. Spiritual growth is a gradual, step-by-step process. So when we search ourselves inside, we must do this in steps. It must be done with carefully planned thought; “*Sof maaseh b’machshavah techilah*” – “The end of actions is first with thought.”

Thus, we need to gain a clear perception of what our soul’s abilities are. As one of the Sages said, “You see a clear world.” We should be clear in what our soul abilities are, from the lowest point to the highest point, and be aware of the many parts in our soul. Then we should search our entire soul, in an orderly fashion [beginning from our lowest point of the soul, all the way to the highest point of our soul] and discover what our habits are leading towards. We need to mark down all our habits that are holy, and all our habits that are unholy, so that we can be ready to the holiest habit of all – to become accustomed to learning the Torah. This is the first step of how we grow from *Yom Tov*.

The Second Step In Growing From Yom Tov: To See Where We Are Going

There is a more inner *avodah* we have on *Yom Tov* as well. This is contained in another term for the word *regel* – the term “*aragah*”, which means “thirsty.” We find this in the *possuk*, “*Just as a deer thirsts over the banks of water, so does my soul thirst for You, G-d.*” The feet of a person lead him toward something he wants and longs for. *Yom Tov*, which is called *regel*, leads a person to what he is thirsty for, to what he has “*aragah*” (thirst) for. *Yom Tov* reveals to a person what his aspirations are. It shows what we really want, what we are really getting pleasure from in life.

So the first part of our *avodah* is that we need to search inside ourselves and discover what our habits are, and after that, we need to discover where we are actually heading towards. If we discover in ourselves that we are heading towards habits that are bad, we need to destroy them.

When we left Egypt, we were “redeemed from a house of slaves”; we were not just redeemed in the physical sense from Egypt, but we were redeemed in our souls. There were “seventy souls” who went down to Egypt, connoting that the exile in Egypt was taking place in our souls as well. The redemption from Egypt was essentially an inner redemption, a redemption from the exile upon our very souls. Hashem took us out from there and instead “brought us closer into His service.” We became close to Hashem because we gained inner clarity within our souls. The redemption showed us what we really wanted and enjoyed and longed for.

Defining The Joy of Yom Tov

The unique *mitzvah* of all three festivals is that we have a *mitzvah* to rejoice on *Yom Tov*. *Chazal* state that the *mitzvah* of *Simchas Yom Tov* (joy on the festival) is fulfilled through meat and wine.³²

Yom Tov is a revelation of our happiness, and it also shows us **what** makes us happy. The meat and wine only satisfies our *nefesh habehaimis*, the lower and animalistic part of our souls, but this is not the entire *simcha* of *Yom Tov*. It is only needed so that we can give something to our *nefesh habehaimis* to satisfy it, because if we don't satisfy it, our *nefesh habehaimis* will rebel and get in the way of our true, inner happiness.

Therefore, if a person thinks that *Simchas Yom Tov* is all about dining on meat and wine, he only satisfies his *nefesh habehaimis*, and he only knows of an external and superficial *Simchas Yom Tov*. Woe is to such a person!

What is the real happiness of *Yom Tov*? The *possuk* says, “*And you shall rejoice in your festival.*” Our true happiness on *Yom Tov* is the happiness we have in *Yom Tov* itself. It is to rejoice with

³² *Pesachim* 109a

Hashem, Whom our soul is thirsty for. It is from this that we derive the depth of our happiness, on *Yom Tov*.

“*The righteous rejoice in Hashem.*” When a person lives a life of truth, when he lives a very internal kind of life, his entire happiness is “in Hashem.” He is happy “in” his feeling of closeness with Hashem and with His Torah – the place where true happiness is derived.

So *Yom Tov*, the time to rejoice, is the time in which we discover the happiness we are used to. It is a time to discover if our main happiness is coming from externalities such as meat and wine (for the men) jewelry and clothing (for the women) and candy (for the children) – or if our happiness is coming from an inner place. It is only inner happiness which satisfies our spiritual needs – our *Nefesh HaElokus* (G-dly soul).

Yom Tov is thus not just the time in which we rejoice, but it is a time in which we clarify to ourselves what our soul is really rejoicing in. On *Yom Tov*, we do not just attempt to ‘connect’ ourselves to happiness, as if happiness is somewhere on the outside of ourselves. The festivals are called *regalim*, which implies that we reveal from within ourselves where we are habitually drawn towards, where we really are.

When a person never makes this internal clarification – when he never bothers to search himself outside, and he never discovers what truly makes him happy – he is like a dove who cannot find any rest. *Yom Tov* to him will feel like a time of confusion; he is like the dove who could not find any rest from the *mabul* (the flood), which is from the word *bilbul*, confusion.

A person should cleanse himself off from the desires for this world’s pleasures and instead reveal his thirst for the true happiness.

Making This Assessment

When *Yom Tov* arrives, the first thing we need to clarify with ourselves is: If *Yom Tov* really makes us happy.

You should know that most people are not really happy on *Yom Tov* – not even for one second do they really experience *Simchas Yom Tov*! [This is not just because the Vilna *Gaon* says that the hardest *mitzvah* to keep is *Simchas Yom Tov*, due to the fact that it is for a 24-hour period lasting for seven days. We are referring to a much more simpler and basic level, which most people do not even reach].

Most people enjoy some moments of relaxation on *Yom Tov*, but they never reach one moment of true *simcha*. If someone experiences even one moment of *Simchas Yom Tov*, he has begun to touch the spiritual light of *Yom Tov*.

In order to reach true *simcha* on *Yom Tov*, we need to remove the various bad habits we have towards the various ambitions we have that are not about holiness. We must remove any “thirsts” we may have for things that are not truthful sources of pleasure. When we begin to feel our souls’ thirst for its source – Hashem – we will find our source of happiness there.

A person needs to discover: “What makes me happy?” If someone’s entire happiness on *Yom Tov* comes from meat and wine, then according to *Halacha* he has fulfilled *Simchas Yom Tov*; he has made his *nefesh hebeheimis* happy, but he did not reach the goal of *Yom Tov*; he did not reach “*And you shall rejoice in your festival.*” He hasn’t even touched upon the real happiness of *Yom Tov*.

The three festivals are called the *regalim*. They have the power to awaken us to spiritual growth, and to know what is making us happy. From knowing that, we are able to continue that very same happiness and extend it into the rest of the year.

A clip taken from 'Getting To Know Your Home' Chapter 11 (Pleasure & Pain In Marriage)

2.2 | From Child To Adult

When it comes the *Seder* on Pesach night, there are some people who were used to a noisier *seder* when they were younger, and when they get older and are now at the age of 20, 25, 30 and beyond, they lose that spark they had as children; they find that they have lost their feelings for the *seder*.

A child can sleep for 2 hours before the *seder*, so he can come into Pesach refreshed and awake, whereas a married adult does not always have this option; he has a family to take care of, in addition to the fact that there's a lot of hard work to be done before Pesach, which does not allow him to rest on *Erev Pesach*. By the time the *seder* arrives, he is fairly exhausted, and he does not feel excitement for the *seder* that he used to have.

He might try to inspire himself by picking up a new sefer about Pesach, or by going to a *shiur* from a speaker that has come to town. But he will find nothing works. The festival of Pesach cannot be felt properly through just hearing a nice '*mussar*' thought which a lecturer has thrown into the audience on the night of Pesach.

What is the mistake that a person makes? It is because excitement works only for a child. When he was a child, as long as he had a new suit, and the table was set nicely, and the *matzah* smelled delicious, he felt Pesach. As an adult, he still retains those feelings, but it doesn't help him feel the *Yom Tov* anymore. He is left without a taste for the *Yom Tov*. When he bites into his *matzah* on Pesach, it feels dry and tasteless, nothing more than the mix of water and flour that it is. That is all he's feeling...

To truly experience *Yom Tov*, the feelings have to come from a whole new source than from until now. It is not about a child's excitement anymore. The adult needs to experience the essence of the *Yom Tov*, and connect to it. There is nothing else for him to connect to.

Within this, there are two parts – there are concepts he can think about which are intellectually stimulating and cause him to think, and there are other parts to the *Yom Tov* which he feels emotionally connected to; but those 'emotional' aspects do not necessarily have to come from 'excitement'.

Singing *Halel* by the *seder* at the top of his lungs, even screaming the words, will still not be enough to satisfy the adult's need to experience the essence of the *Yom Tov*. A person can only connect to the essence of the *Yom Tov* when he can feel it in his soul.

The same is true for all other things as well: A true 'feeling' for something is not an emotionally charged kind of feeling. A true 'feeling' is when it is a feeling of the reality. It is something that can be felt on a daily basis, and throughout any given time of the day.

This doesn't mean of course that a person should analyze the reality all day and write it down into a notebook in his hand. Rather, it just means that a person needs to breathe the reality that's taking place in front of him - to feel it and live it.

2.3 | The 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”.³³ 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 is 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

³³ *Pirkei Avos* 6:2

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.*”³⁴

³⁴ *Rabbeinu Yonah to Berachos 22b*

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.

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.

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.

2.4 | Internalizing Your Knowledge

Leaving Egypt – and then Receiving the Torah

First we left Egypt, and then we came to Har Sinai to receive the Torah.

It is written, “*And you shall know today, and you shall return the matter to your heart.*” Our avodah is always first to know the facts, and then to internalize our mind’s knowledge into our heart.

The Egyptian exile deterred us from receiving the Torah. As long as we were in Egypt, we could not receive the Torah; we have to leave it in order to become purified at Har Sinai and receive the Torah. In Egypt, we would not have been able to internalize the Torah had we received it. In Egypt, there was “bricks and mortar”, and this personified the exile. What exactly are these “bricks and mortar” that held us back from receiving the Torah? It wasn’t just that we had cruel physical labor. It was a spiritual kind of bricks and mortar – a blockage that held us back from receiving the Torah.

There were two layers to the redemption. There was a physical redemption, which took place when we actually left Egypt, in the physical sense. But there was also a spiritual layer to the redemption: the redemption that took place in our souls, enabling us to receive the Torah.

Although the physical redemption happened a long time ago, the spiritual redemption to our souls happens every year. Let us learn how we can merit to have the yearly spiritual redemption during this time – to reach the level of receiving the Torah, the level of internalizing our knowledge.

Removing The “Blockage of the Heart”

In the *Hagadah* we express, “*By your blood shall you live*” – which the Sages explain this to refer to the blood of the *korban pesach* (paschal sacrifice) and the blood of *bris milah* (circumcision) What is the connection between *korbon pesach* and *bris milah*? Simply it is because in order to eat the *korban pesach*, one had to be circumcised, as the *Gemara* says. But the deeper meaning is that one has to circumcise his “*orlas halev*” – the blockage that is on his **heart**.

There exist two kinds of *orlah* (blockages) which we remove – a physical blockage which exists in the part of the body that is circumcised by *bris milah*, and a spiritual kind of blockage, which is

present on the heart. This is called *orlas halev*. When our heart is blocked, the Torah knowledge in our mind isn't able to penetrate into our heart.

On Pesach, we were commanded to become circumcised; the simple meaning of this, as we said, was because we need to undergo *bris milah* in order to eat from the *korbon pesach*. But the deeper meaning is that we had to remove our *orlas halev*, “blockage of our heart” that was on us – as it is written, “*And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your hearts.*”

We must remove the barrier between our mind and heart, so that our mind's knowledge can settle in our heart. And it has to be “*in*” our heart, not just *on* our heart.

In order to eat the *korbon pesach*, we had to have a *bris milah*. As we explained, the deeper meaning of this is that we had to remove our “*orlas halev*” in order to eat the *korban pesach*. In Egypt, we removed some of the blockage as we began to cry out to Hashem from our heart, but this process was not yet complete until we left Egypt, when we actually received *bris milah* – which was not just a physical act of circumcision, but a removal of the blockage on our heart.

How We Can Accomplish Internalization

How do we internalize the knowledge of our mind into our heart? We get to know the Torah by learning it well, but how do we internalize it into our heart? In the works of our Rabbis, there are two general ways described in how we can accomplish it.

The First Way: Da'as

One way is as follows. In our brain, we have three “minds” – three different mental abilities: *chochmah*, *tevunah*, and *daas*. *Chochmah* is what one learns from his teacher. *Tevunah* is when we think on our own, and *daas* is when we connect to our knowledge. *Daas* is when a person is always thinking about Torah, because he connects to the knowledge of his mind. *Daas* is an inner kind of thinking, not a superficial kind of thinking.

When a person merely intellectualizes about his learning, he's either using *chochmah* or *tevunah*, but this isn't yet *daas*. *Daas* is only when a person thinks all the time about his learning because he is truly connected to his learning; from his deep connection to the Torah, he thinks about it as a result.

When a person uses his *daas*, he is connected all the time to his learning as he thinks constantly of Torah – and in this way, his mind's knowledge enters his heart. It is accessed when a person learns Torah along with *emunah* in Hashem in his life. The Torah then penetrates into his heart.

The Second Way: Verbal Repetition

The second method brought by our Rabbis on how we can internalize is by making an direct imprint on our heart, and this is accomplished when we review matters repeatedly using our simple *Emunah*. As it is written in the *posuk*, “*I believed, for I spoke.*” When we constantly repeat a fact, it eventually settles into our heart, where it becomes internalized knowledge.

Pharoah knew that Hashem existed, but he didn’t internalize this information. *Pharoah* means *peh rah*, “evil mouth.” In other words, he didn’t use his mouth in the right way, and thus he didn’t internalize his mind’s knowledge.

So one way to internalize is to use *daas*, which is by learning Torah in a way that we connect to it; and this is accomplished when we learn Torah together with having *emunah* in Hashem. The second method to internalize is to use our power of speech, to affect our heart.

The Third, Deeper Way: Repeating The Facts Of Our Da’as To Our Heart

But there is also a third way, which is deeper than the above two ways, and it combines the two methods together: to *speak* to ourselves facts that we know from our *daas*, with the intention that it should affect our heart.

This is also the deeper meaning behind why we count *Sefiras HaOmer* for 49 days. It is because by repeating to ourselves that today is another day towards Shavuot, it eventually internalizes in our heart; through the power of constant verbal repetition, the facts of our brain settle into our heart and become internalized.

Most people when they learn Torah are only using the lower power of *chochmah*, which is located in the brain. This is mere intellectual knowledge, and it doesn’t always affect a person. But the higher, deeper kind of *chochmah* is called “*chochmas halev*” – the wisdom of the heart – and it is rare. It is accessed when we verbalize our mind’s knowledge to ourselves and we repeat the facts, over and over again, until it penetrates our heart. It then becomes *chochmas halev*.

Feel The Contradiction Between Your Mind and Heart

First we must realize, though, that our mind and heart are in vast contradiction with each other. There are many contradictions going on between our heart and mind, and therefore, our mind and heart are very far from each other. Our heart is full of various desires that are evil, even though our mind knows that it’s wrong.

Desires, jealousy and honor-seeking are negative emotions that are present in our heart. These negative emotions contradict what we know in our mind. Feel the contradiction going on between your mind and heart – and let it bother you! When you feel very bothered by the great contradiction going on between your mind and heart, you can then realize that you must work to internalize your mind’s knowledge into your heart.

It is not enough to simply ignore these negative emotions that pass through us and hope that they will go away on their own. Rather, we should seek the truth, and instead we should seek to change our heart, by repeating our mind’s facts to our heart, through repeated verbalization.

In today’s generation, our heart is for the most part negatively affected, and we often don’t feel at all how it’s affected. But our heart is being affected more and more, for the worse, as our life goes on. If we don’t seek to change our heart, our heart only gets worse and worse as we get older, and we will only continue to get negatively influenced by our surroundings.

In order to survive the dismal situation of today’s times, we must continuously attempt to internalize our mind’s knowledge into our heart. We have to go through a constant purification process within ourselves. Our heart has to literally burn for Torah, for mitzvos, for love and fear of Hashem, for a bond with Him. It has to burn like a fire, or else we get worse and worse as our life goes on. Every Jew needs to have a heart that is *actually burning* for a bond with Hashem and for His Torah and mitzvos.

Unless a person develops a burning desire in his heart to internalize the facts he knows, he will remain his whole life and end it with his initial level of *orlas halev*.

We must bring our life to a halt (at least once) and seek how we can internalize our knowledge, how we can acquire a heart that burns for Hashem. A person might go his whole life and know a lot of Torah, but in his heart, he is a total ignoramus, and not only that, but his heart is evil from his youth. Even if he’s a prominent person when it comes to Torah knowledge – even if he gives *shiurim* and wrote *sefarim* - it doesn’t mean he has internalized the Torah into his heart...

If a person seeks to change his heart constantly, he will be much less affected by society. A person needs to realize that our surroundings place us in grave danger. We can’t become complacent! If we let ourselves become complacent in today’s times, we are in mortal danger.

To summarize: We must each seek to internalize our mind’s knowledge into our hearts – through our *daas*, and through repeating the facts with our mouth. And we must set aside time to reflect about important matters, (as Reb Yisrael Salanter would do, to go over one statement of *Chazal* and repeat it numerous times, passionately). We need to do this all the time, not just once in a while: we must always seek to internalize the facts into our heart, by repeating to ourselves the facts that we know. Hashem created us with a *lev tahor*, a “pure heart” – and when we feel our pure heart, we will feel as if we have just converted anew to Judaism. (Of course, we need a brain too,

and not just a heart. We cannot live with just our mind or just our heart – we need to connect them both together.)

We need to have a life brimming with Torah, *mitzvos* and *emunah*. This is the true redemption from Egypt.

May we merit to leave the blockage on our hearts, and instead come to “know” Hashem – and to internalize the knowledge about Him in our heart.

2.5 | Freedom From The Evil Inclination

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*, [to dedicate ourselves completely and to be willing to sacrifice for it]. 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 had.

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.

2.6 | The Avodah of This Generation

How Will We Get Out Of This Exile?

The purpose of *yetzias Mitzrayim* (leaving Egypt) was not yet complete when they left Egypt. Their *Geulah* wasn't complete yet, because the Egyptians would still chase after them and they knew that they were still in danger. Only later, at *Keriyas Yam Suf* (the splitting of the sea) when the water came crashing down on the Egyptians and killing them, was Egypt finally over for them, and their *Geulah* was now complete.

The *Ohr HaChaim* (*Shemos 14:10*) said that in Egypt, the depravity of the country had reached such a low that the Jewish people were steeped in the “49th gate of impurity”, and had the Jewish people remained even one more moment in Egypt, they would have descended into the “50th gate of impurity” (*shaar haNun d'tumah*) which is impossible to come out of. In the final *Galus*, the Jewish people will enter into the 50th gate of impurity (as we can see before our own eyes today, with the abysmally low spiritual situation of the people today in the final generation). The *Ohr HaChaim* also describes the “50th gate of impurity” is *meenus* and *apikorsus* (beliefs that are heretical to the Torah, and denial of G-d and the Torah).

It is clear that we were able to leave the 49th gate of impurity in Egypt only because we kept three things – we didn't change our names, our style of dress, and our language. However, in order to go free from the 50th gate of impurity in the final days, the *Ohr HaChaim* says that even this isn't enough. The only way, he says, is through the power of the Torah!

Truthfully, this is a very deep matter. What did the *Ohr HaChaim* mean, that only through the power of the Torah we can go out of the 50th gate of impurity? Don't we see (*Rachmana Litzlan*) that people can learn Torah yet still be involved with the 50th gate of impurity at the same time? “The words of Torah do not become *tamei*”, the Torah can never become impure, but this does not mean necessarily that one who just learns Torah will free his soul from the bad influences of today...

We must know that the root of the *Geulah* was told to us at *Keriyas Yam Suf*, when Moshe entreated Hashem about what to do, and Hashem said, “Why do you scream out to me? Now, it is *b'Atika talya milsa*” (Rashi, citing *Zohar Beshalach 52b*) – it now depends on “*Atik*” [we shall soon explain what this is]. That is the inner power that our soul can use to be able to be redeemed from the *shaar haNun* which we are found in today. The Torah has in it 49 reasons to declare something *tahor* (pure) and 49 reasons to make something *tamei* (defiled), as a hint that the Torah takes a

person out of the 49 first levels of *tumah*. But what is the power of Torah that takes a person out of the 50th level of *tumah*, which we are found in today? It is hidden within the depths of the Torah. If a person doesn't reveal it, though, and he lets it stay hidden in him without accessing it, then the 50th level of *tumah* will certainly be in control over him, *Rachmana Litzlan*.

The final generation is not like the previous generations. The *Meor Einayim* (*parshas Chukas*) writes that in the final generations, there will be a more inner revelation of the Torah. It is clear that this is the remedy which Hashem has made available for the spiritual diseases of our times, and only through this, will the Jewish people come out of the 50th level of *tumah* that rules over the entire world today.

Holiness Vs. Impurity Today

What is the difference between the 49 gates of *tumah* that the people sank to in Egypt, with the 50th gate of *tumah* that we are in today? The *Mesillas Yesharim* says that the purpose of our existence is to get close to Hashem and to be *davuk* (attached) in Hashem, to break the barriers in between us and Hashem, until we are drawn after Him like a magnet that is pulled towards an iron stone.

There is a rule of *Zeh l'umas zeh*, that there is an equal counterbalance between *kedushah* (holiness) and *tumah* (impurity). Just as in *kedushah* there exists an ability to be drawn after closeness with Hashem, so is there an ability, *Rachmana Litzlan*, the ability in the side of *tumah* to become attached with evil. As the Gemara (*Avodah Zarah 17a*) says, "Since he is attached (*aduk*) to the sin very much, it is like *meenus* (heresy)."

There are two equally powerful inclinations in our times, a desire for closeness with Hashem like never before as well as a desire to become connected with evil, and the only way to separate from these magnetic attractions towards evil can only be through the power of *mesirus nefesh* (**sacrificing for Hashem**).

The innermost level of the *kelipah* (the power of evil) has such a strong pull that it is naturally impossible to be saved from it! There was a story where Reb Noson went to go see his rebbi Rebbi Nachman of Bresslev, and along the way, Reb Noson saw something indecent. When he came to his rebbi, Rebbi Nachman immediately said to him, "There is a *kelipah* that counters the *kedushah* called *Arich*, and it is the *Arich d'kelipah*, and it is impossible to be saved from it." [Unless a person has *mesirus nefesh*, which will be explained soon].

That is what dominates today – it is all the darkness of the *kelipah*. A person is pulled after this *kelipah* like a magnet. And when a person is being controlled by the *kelipah* after he connects himself to it, his feelings become dulled and he doesn't even feel like he's being pulled after it. The

person has become attached to the *kelipah* [instead of *d'veykus* in Hashem, the person is having *d'veykus* in the *kelipah*], *Rachmana Litzlan*].

But Hashem provided the remedy for this already from before, through the words of the *sefarim hakedoshim* [the *Ohr HaChaim* and *Meohr Einayim* in the name of the Baal Shem Tov] which revealed to us the secret of an inner level of Torah that can take us out from all of this. It is a *pnimiyus*, an inner level of Torah, which is not only for people are on a *high madreigah* (level) but something which is absolutely necessary for anyone today, if he is to survive. This is not something that depends on a person's *madreigah*. Compare this to a person who becomes a *ger* (convert) in between Pesach and Shavuot. Since Shavuot comes after Pesach, does that mean he is not obligated in Shavuot because he didn't have a Pesach yet? Of course not, because it is now the time to observe Shavuot no matter what level he is on right now. The Torah applies to a person no matter what his level is. Since we are in a time where the innermost level of the *kelipah* is out in full force, that means that we also have an equally powerful light of *kedushah* that Hashem has given us which can counter it: The *shaar haNun d'kedushah*, the 50th level of holiness.

Yes, there are different kinds of *yetzer hora* today as we there always was, there are struggles and challenges, and any *oived Hashem* today faces all kinds of hardships today when trying to serve Hashem faithfully. Sometimes there are successes and sometimes there are failures. But that was all the way things looked until now, in which we only had to deal with 49 levels of *tumah*. In the times we are in now, and as time continues, the *tumah* in our world today is a *kelipah* that one cannot naturally be saved from, and there is only one way of advice: to live with the reality of *Hashem Echad* at the forefront of our minds. The *Arizal* said that when saying *Shema*, by the word *Echad*, one should have the intention that he will give up his life for Hashem. The purpose of everything is *Hashem Echad*, and we are now in a time where we must reveal *Hashem Echad*. The *avodah* today is, "The earlier ones were *moser nefesh* (they gave up their lives) *al kiddush Hashem*." (*Berachos 20a*). When the *kelipah* is in control as in today's times, there is no advice other than to live with *Hashem Echad* at all times.

Understanding The Situation

This is not a *vort* (insight) or some nice food for thought. We must know the situation very well. (If someone wants to bake *matzah*, he must know the *halachos* so that he doesn't come turn the *matzah* into *chametz*. But if he is baking the matzos after *chatzos* of Erev Pesach, he has to be so careful not only so that he can make *matzah*, but so that he won't transgress the sin of baking *chametz*. So too, if we want to know how to serve the Creator now, the first thing we must know is the situation we are in, where we are found, and what kind of *kelipah* exists today.)

Maybe a person will ask: But there are no prophets today to tell it to us! But it has already been written in the *sefarim*, and it has been received by all of *Klal Yisrael* in the words of *Raboseinu*. There is nothing new here, it has all been written and even explained already. The words have been written down in the *sefarim* for all the generations to come, and they are in the words of the *Ohr HaChaim* and *Baal Shem Tov*, and other *tzaddikim*. The *kelipah* which we are found in today is the *shaar haNun d'tumah*, and it is clear that from then onward, more than 200 years later, the *kelipah* continues to get stronger, and anyone today can see how far it has reached. But it is also clear that Hashem sent us a *kedushah* in a time where we need it, to counter the evil of the *kelipah* (as the *Meohr Einayim* said in the name of the *Baal Shem*).

It is wonderful to improve our *middos*, our *emunah*, our Torah learning, and anything else that's holy and pure. But for us, who live in the final generation, all of that advice alone will not help us. Only if we have *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem, if we are willing to give up our lives for Hashem, can we come out of the *kelipah* that is the *shaar haNun*. But if not, then *Rachmana Litzlan*, even a *ben aliyah* today faces the *Olam HaTemuros*, the world of exchanges, with all of its tests that are impossible to be saved from – these are not difficult tests, but impossible tests.

Now we will say this in clearer terms. The *kelipah* that is the *shaar haNun d'tumah* is really above logical comprehension. We cannot simply understand it or feel it. A person is drawn after it magnetically, without even being aware of it. There is no one today isn't pulled after it. A person might say, "I checked myself and I don't seem to have the problem." But this is only because he doesn't recognize the pull. The *shaar haNun d'tumah* pulls everyone towards it, unless a person has lives with a very deep attachment to Hashem in his heart. Just as there is a 50th level of *kedushah*, so there is a 50th level of *tumah* to counter it. This is not a question of danger, but a question of death.

The confusion today about basic concepts, as well as the general lack of *ruchniyus* today, has created a big error, in which a person seems to everyone like someone who is "immersed in learning Torah, in *mitzvos*, in *dikduk hadin*, in which he seems to be a *ben aliyah*, a *mevakesh*, an *oved Hashem* (all different important titles), but the truth is that if someone understands the *pnimiyus*, he sees that there is nothing of the sort here. Usually, not only hasn't a person completed his work yet - he hasn't even started, to enter into *pnimiyus*.

The Pnimiyus – Living Simply With Hashem

This *pnimiyus* is: To have a simple bond with Hashem, to live simply with Him. At the *pnimiyus* of everything, we can find Hashem, and to the extent that one leaves his personal Egypt, he will grow closer to Hashem.

Therefore, just externally observing the Torah today, even with good intentions, is not enough today to fight the *tumah* of today. A person has to know the situation he is in, the time period of history he is found in, so that he can be a counterforce to the *tumah* of today. Otherwise, it's like lighting the Menorah on Pesach – the person doesn't know what time he is in, so his intended *mitzvah* is making him stumble into a sin. Or, it's like a person who is trying to fight a desire by using a technique to overcome anger, who will be unsuccessful. We need to know what situation we are in, what's preventing us. Though it's clear that all of the Torah is *kedushah* and it is the medicine to fight against the *yetzer hora*, each problem has its own medicine, to save and heal us from the *kelipah* that is dominating during a specific time.

Being Willing To Leave The World of Falsity

The great pursuit of materialism today has caused two big problems. It has caused people to forget about Hashem – not only that people don't know about Hashem intellectually, but mainly so in that people do not live in their hearts with Hashem. They know about Hashem, but they have forgotten Him from their hearts. “*And your hearts will grow haughty and you will forget Hashem.*” A second problem today is the many different desires of the *yetzer hora* today which people are chasing, which contains all of the world's vanities. These factors pull a person after them, whether a person is aware of it or not. What is the advice to get out of it? It is by being willing, every moment, to leave this world of falsity.

It is like the words of the *sefer Tzettel Kattan*, that a person should always imagine that he is being thrown into a furnace and to sanctify his life in the name of Hashem, rather than commit an *aveirah*. This is the first, basic point which saves a person from this world of falsity. If a person cannot fathom this, it can only be because he is very attached to this world.

With just a little contemplation, anyone can know that the world of truth is certainly better than this world of falsity that we live on. Why, then, do we resist this truth? What is holding back our hearts from immediately leaving behind this world of falsity and cross over into the “world that is entirely good”? This is not an intellectual point to grapple with, it is an inner matter about where our soul is connected to, of its unwillingness to part from the world of falsity. If a person really wants to go free from falsity, he must be very clear of what his obligation on this world is, of what he is doing here and for what purpose he came down onto the world. When one becomes clear that the purpose of him coming to the world was to reach closeness with Hashem, it will be simple and clear to him that he should want to leave this world of falsity at all times!

When one has a desire to remain on this world, this is what's preventing him from a real connection with Hashem. Only with simply recognizing our purpose of coming down here on one hand, along with recognizing that we are on a world of falsity, and being clear that there is only one

true place for us to be in – this is the one single thing that can save us from the *shaar haNun d'tumah*. If a person will say, “But this is such a high level to be on! Where will get such an ability to think like this?” This can only be because he has never truly entered into the inner world yet. There is an illumination of *pnimiyus* that is radiating in our times today, and if one searches for it, he will certainly find it. If he doesn't search for it, though, he will certainly fall - not as a maybe, but as a certainty. For we are facing today the *kelipah* that draws everyone towards it like a magnet.

These words are not *mussar* (rebuke) nor is it *hisorerus* (inspiration), and this is not a *shiur* to prepare 30 days before Pesach so that we can know its *halachos*. This is an issue of our very life, a point which our very life depends on. It is about what situation we are in and where we stand.

The Power of Atik

The *sefarim hakedoshim* said that these words of the Zohar cited by Rashi, “*B'Atika talya milsa*”, is the secret of the final *Geulah*, which reveals “*Atik*”, the deeper purpose of Creation. *Atik* means to copy – to become a copy of the higher world and reflect into our own soul, so that we are no longer ourselves, but a “copy”, a reflection, of the upper world, of the true reality. It is when a person is not thinking about himself and he is not thinking about fulfilling his own desires, but when his thoughts are focused solely on the One Individual Who Is Hashem.

When Nachshon jumped into the sea, this was *mesirus nefesh*, and then the sea was split, leading to the *Shirah* and great revelations where even a person on the lowest level perceived more than Yechezkel HaNavi. It was where Hashem was revealed to them. All of this revelation came from the *mesirus nefesh* of Nachshon when he jumped into the sea, in which he was willing to leave behind this world of falsity. When Nachshon jumped, did he think that he would die and just disappear? *Chas v'shalom!* He knew that he was leaving behind this world and that he would become bound with Hashem, because after a person dies, he sees Hashem.

There is no advice and no logic to get around what Hashem wants from us. We must become clear about what our situation is, and what the advice is. The advice has already been written in the words of *Raboseinu*, and they are clear. It is just that people are used to other kinds of advice which worked in the past, and because people have grown used to it they don't want to hear anything else. Is it for nothing that Hashem has revealed the *pnimiyus* in our times? It is the *pnimiyus* found in front of us which the *Baal Shem* and *Ohr HaChaim* wrote about as being absolutely necessary for anyone's soul survival today. This is not a matter reserved for people on a high *madreigah* or for people who want to become holier (*kadosh*) or for people who are coming to purify themselves (*haba l'taher*). There is no advice today to survive, other than this.

The Power of Torah In The Final Days

And now we can understand the depths of the words of the *Ohr HaChaim* that in the final exile, *Klal Yisrael* will enter into the 50th level of *tumah* but they will go out from it with the power of the Torah. Chazal said that for every word of Torah which the people heard at Har Sinai, their souls flew out of them. This was not by chance, because it is the very way which the Torah has to be received. The simple reason for this is because “Torah does not last with a person unless he kills himself over it.” But there is more to it. Their souls left them for each word of Torah they heard for a deeper reason. The *Ohr HaChaim* (*parshas Shemini*) said that Nadav and Avihu died through “Hashem’s kiss”, meaning that they felt such an intense connection to Hashem and a yearning for Him that their souls left them from the experience, and that is how they died. The 50th level of *kedushah*, which is the inner level of the Torah, is when a person is drawn after it with a very strong pull, to the point that he is willing to give himself up to Hashem for it, just as everyone’s souls flew out of everyone when they heard every word of Torah at Har Sinai. When Hashem came down onto Har Sinai, it was the revelation of Torah which a person is pulled after so strongly that he is willing to die for it.

The words here are really simple and clear, but each person needs to become clear about these words on his own. May Hashem help us that these words should go into the hearts of those who heard it, not just as inspiration which comes and goes. May it become clear to us what test we are facing today, and what one’s personal obligation is in this generation. Through believing completely in the words of *Raboseinu* and using the advice which they have written, with the understanding of the *kelipah* of today and how to come out from it – this can bring the entire world to its complete *Geulah*, may it come quickly.

2.7 | Exile of Past and Present

Visualizing The Exodus: Two Methods

“One is obligated to see himself as if he [himself] had left Egypt.”³⁵ In every generation, on Pesach, we have a *mitzvah* to feel like we are leaving Egypt – today, and now.

When *Chazal* said that we have this obligation, this doesn't mean in the sense that we need to imagine *then* what it must have been like. Rather, the intention of *Chazal* was that we need to imagine *now*, what it was like *then* [to attach the past to the present].

How can a person feel as if he left Egypt, though, when he doesn't remember what it was like? How can a person remember what it was like in his past *gilgul* (soul incarnation) when he left Egypt, if he doesn't remember his previous lifetime?

As time goes on and the generations continue, we are further from that time in history, and it becomes more concealed [and distant from us]. But through study and in-depth analysis of the Egyptian bondage, a person can come to visualize the terrible exile that Egypt was, and this will slowly but surely enable a person to feel, of what it was like to be exiled there - and in turn, what it was like to go free from there.

So by learning the words of *Chazal* in detail about the Egyptian bondage, we enable our mind to visualize what it was like to be there. That gets us to feel that we were actually there, and that draws us closer to feeling the exile that was Egypt. Only through feeling the exile – not simply through knowing about it intellectually – can a person feel what the redemption from it felt like.

This is the first method brought in our *Chazal* of how one can connect himself to the exile and to the redemption of Egypt: studying the words of *Chazal* about the Egyptian bondage. But there is also another method brought in *Chazal*: to connect ourselves with the present state of exile, which can get us to conceptualize what the meaning of exile is, and in turn, what it means to be redeemed from exile.

The gain of the second approach is that whereas we have never seen the past and we do not recognize it, the present is something we all recognize. The past is gone and we have a hard time relating to it, but in the present, we are still in exile, so the present is easier for us to relate to. By

³⁵ As we say in the *Hagaddah shel Pesach*.

becoming aware of the current situation of our exile, that is how we can feel what exile was like in the past – the root of all exiles, which was Egypt.

So we have two methods of how we can visualize leaving Egypt.

The first way is to learn the words of *Chazal* about the Egyptian bondage, which in turn helps us visualize it. That enables us to then picture in our minds of what it was like to have actually been there, and that helps us feel the pain of the Egyptian exile. This causes us to wish to escape it, and to cry out to Hashem to be saved. This method, of visualizing the exile and redemption from Egypt, is an *avodah* on our part, which requires *hisbonenus* (deep reflection); it doesn't come to us so fast.

The second, alternative approach, is to think about the meaning of present exile, which can help us conceptualize exile of the past. By realizing what the current exile is, it can get us to feel pained from the exile we are in, and when we feel the depth of this exile, it is then much easier for us to connect ourselves with the exile of the past.

Reflecting On The Current Exile

Using the second method will require us to think: Which exile are we in? According the first method, all we have to be aware of is the Egyptian exile. According to the second method, we need to think into the current exile.

Here, we will elaborate upon the second method: visualizing the depth of the current exile. The purpose of this is so that we can cause ourselves to cry out to Hashem, from all the pain that we can feel from this exile – and in turn, so that we can connect ourselves to the exile that was in Egypt, the root exile of all exiles to come - including the present one.

The Six Exiles

The roots of these matters are stated in *Chazal*. The Jewish people, ever since becoming a nation, have undergone five exiles, which really end up being six exiles; and in fact, there is a sixth exile³⁶. *Chazal* list four exiles³⁷: 1) Egypt, 2) Bavel (Babylonia), 3) Persia-Media, and 4) The Greek exile, 5) The exile of Edom [Rome].

³⁶ In another *derashah*, the *Rav* mentioned that this really adds up for a total of seven exiles: Egypt, Bavel, Persia-Media, Greece, Edom, Yishmael, and "Erev Rav." See *Chanukah #048 – Greek Exile Today*.

³⁷ *Beraishis Rabbah* 1:1

Within the exile of Edom, there is another exile: the exile of “Yishmael”. (We can all see in front of our eyes that we are in the exile of “Yishmael”; they surround us every day and at all times.)

Those are our exiles, ever since we have become a nation. The current exile we are in, “Edom”, includes in it “Yishmael”. From the exile of Yishmael will sprout the light of the redemption, as our *Chazal* state. *Chazal* said that the nation of Yishmael will cause the nation of Yisrael to greatly suffer, which will cause the nation of Yisrael to cry out to Hashem from all of their suffering; and then Hashem will hear their prayers, and we will be redeemed. It will be “*shama keil*”, “G-d will hear”, which hints to the name of “Yishmael”, for we will cry out to Hashem from the exile of Yishmael, just as we cried out in Egypt to Him, when our prayers were heard and we were redeemed.

We have gone through all the previous exiles. We’ve been through the exile of Egypt, and we’ve been through the exile of Bavel. The exile of Yavan (Greece) is also over, to a certain extent [see footnote]³⁸. The exile of Edom, though, is our current situation, and we have not come out of it yet. And more specifically, we currently face the exile of Yishmael.

Understanding The Depth of the Exile of Yishmael

To understand our current exile with greater clarity: If someone thinks that the exile of Yishmael is referring to the Arabs which surround us, he is mistaken. Although it is certainly true that we are surrounded by Arabs and we suffer from them, this is only the external layer of the exile. It is true that we are totally ‘exiled’ to Yishmael in the external sense, but there is a more inner layer to the exile taking place. The external aspect of the exile of Yishmael is that there is a war of Yishmael against Yisrael, which takes place in *Eretz Yisrael*, concerning the ownership of *Eretz Yisrael*. The nation of Yishmael claims inheritance over *Eretz Yisrael*, for the *Zohar* states that Yishmael has a *zechus* (merit) over *Eretz Yisrael*, due to the *mitzvah* of *Bris Milah* which they keep³⁹. Therefore, they fight Yisrael as they are in *Eretz Yisrael*.

But the inner layer of this exile is of a totally different nature. The Vilna *Gaon*⁴⁰ discusses at length, as well as Reb Elchonon Wasserman *zt”l*⁴¹, that the final exile is called the exile of the “*Erev Rav*”⁴².

³⁸ According to many opinions, we are still within the Greek exile today. See the *derasha* of Chanukah #048 – Greek Exile Today.

³⁹ And it is brought in many places in *Chazal* that there is a connection between *Bris Milah* and *Eretz Yisrael*; hence, the Arabs, who keep *Bris Milah*, have a stronger hold over *Eretz Yisrael*.

⁴⁰ See *Even Shelaimah*, chapter 11: 1-8

⁴¹ In *sefer Kovetz Maamarim*

⁴² “*The Mixed Multitude.*” For more background on the *Erev Rav*, see *Erev Rav_05_Amalek Exposed*.

Erev Rav - Then

When the Jewish people left Egypt, the Torah writes, “And the *Erev Rav* went up with them.” Ever since we became a people, we have had an ‘addition’ that has been following us throughout: the ‘*Erev Rav*’. They are the ones who were responsible for causing the Jewish people to sin. They gave the idea to make the Golden Calf, and they were the ones who kept causing trouble in the desert and influencing the generation to sin. Back then, they were not the heads of the Jewish people, though; they were simply known as the ‘*Erev Rav*’. The leaders then were Moshe and Aharon. It was the *Erev Rav* who convinced everyone that Moshe was dead when he ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah; they thought of the idea to make the Golden Calf and convinced everyone else to do it. The souls of the Jewish people, by themselves, could never have conceived of such a false notion. It was entirely due to the persuasion and influence of the *Erev Rav*.

[Members of the] *Erev Rav* has been escorting us since we left Egypt, all the way until today. We left Egypt, but along with this, came another exile: the exile of the *Erev Rav*. We left Pharaoh, we left the Egyptians, but we weren’t redeemed from the *Erev Rav*. They have been following us since we became a nation, until today.

Erev Rav – Now

However, they have gone through major changes since then. The Vilna *Gaon* writes that in the final generations, the *Erev Rav* are the “heads of the Jewish people, who are the ‘leaders’, and they have control over the “sons of Leah and Rachel”.

They are also called ‘*sapachas*’ by *Chazal* – a kind of leprosy that forms over the skin, embedded into the skin and atop it, but not a part of it. They came with us when we left Egypt and added themselves onto our nation, but they are not a part of our nation; thus they are called a *sapachas*/leprosy - a layer added onto the skin, which is not an actual part of the skin.

In the later generations, and especially in our current generation, the *Erev Rav* are wicked souls who lead the Jewish people towards evil. Their agenda is to lead the Jewish people astray from Torah, from all holiness, from *emunah*, and from *mitzvos*.

It doesn’t matter if he [a member of *Erev Rav*] wears a *kippah* or if he doesn’t have a *kippah*; whether he has a beard or whether he doesn’t have a beard.

This is the exile we are in. The exile we are currently in is the exile of the *Erev Rav* - who exercise 'control' over the Jewish people. The 'heads of the *Erev Rav*' are the souls of Amalek; *Chazal* say that the *Erev Rav* is made up of five kinds of people, and at the head of all of them is Amalek⁴³.

This has been true about our current exile ever since it has begun, but it has particular relevance to today's times. We must understand the situation that we are found in. The exile we are in today is being headed by people who look like Jews - and they look like they are a part of the Jewish people.

This is in vast contrast to the exile of Egypt. In Egypt, when we were exiled by Pharaoh, it was clear to all of us that Pharaoh was not of the Jewish people. But in the current exile, we are exiled under the jurisdiction of people who look like they are one of us. But although they look like Jews, *Chazal* said that their souls are not of the *Bnei Yisrael*.⁴⁴

They do not understand, and they can never understand, what Torah is. They cannot understand what *mitzvos* are. They cannot understand the nature of the true bond that is between the Jewish people and Hashem.

The Government's Decree On Bnei Torah To Join The Army

"In every generation, they [the nations] stand up to destroy us."⁴⁵ We must understand that in the exile we are in, the *Erev Rav* is also trying to destroy us, just as the nations of the past in each generation have sought to destroy us.

If we reflect on the situation, we can see the depth of our exile. In the situation we are in right now, according to the *Halachah*, it is a time of *shmad* (a decree of spiritual genocide)!⁴⁶ If someone thinks that this is just another decree upon us, he doesn't understand! This is not merely another decree. We are in a time of *shmad*! They want to uproot the entire Torah, from the root!

In a time of *shmad*, there are *halachos* that apply. Every Jew must become familiar with the laws of *mesirus nefesh* – to be prepared to give up our life, if we must. There is a *mitzvah* of *kiddush Hashem* during this time. These *halachos* are discussed in Rambam *Hilchos Kiddush Hashem* and *Sefer HaChinuch* by the *mitzvah* of *kiddush Hashem*. There is a *halachah* that during a time of

⁴³ The source for this is *Tikkunei HaZohar* (41), brought in the words the Vilna Gaon in *sefer Even Shelaimah* (11). five groups are termed "Nega Ra" (Evil Affliction): *Nefilim*, *Giborim*, *Anakim*, *Refaim*, and *Amalekim*. Refer to the *Rav's* five original Hebrew classes of "Erev Rav", and to the English adaptation of "Erev Rav_005_Amalek Exposed".

⁴⁴ For further research, see *Tefillah* #109

⁴⁵ *Hagaddah shel Pesach*

⁴⁶ This is in light of the Israeli government's recent announcement to enforce the draft of *yeshivah bochurim* into the army, which our *Gedolim* have declared as an open attempt to wage war against the Torah world; thus it is being seen by our *Gedolim* as a "time of *shmad*" (genocide), in which the *halacha* is, "yahasog v'al yaavor", "be killed rather than transgress."

shmad, one is not allowed to listen to the government even if they tell you to wear a certain kind of shoelace. A Jew has to let himself get killed rather than listen to them!

The Secular Influence On Our Names, Language, and Clothing

Let's think about this for a minute. *Chazal* said that in Egypt, the Jewish people did not change their names, their language, and their clothing. But look at what is going on today [with regards to changes in our names, language, and clothing].

With regards to names, in recent times, what kinds of names are people giving to their children? Are people always naming their children with names like Avraham, Yitzchok, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef, and Dovid? All kinds of 'new names' are becoming popular now, which have entered us from the outside world. We can't even tell if certain names being given today are a boy's names or girl's names!

I was recently in America and I met someone with his little daughter. I asked him, "What's your daughter's name?" He said, "Her name is Eli."

I am not referring to people who don't keep Torah and *mitzvos*; I hope that Hashem merits them to do true *teshuvah*. I am referring even to people who keep Torah and *mitzvos*, who are finding it acceptable to give all kinds of new names to their children.

And what is the language that people speak today? *Lashon HaKodesh* has become a foreign language today. How many words being spoken each day are words that have no root in *Lashon HaKodesh*? How do conversations begin? It used to be that in the average conversation between two *frum* Jews, the conversation began with "*Shalom*" and ended with "*Shalom*." Today, how do conversations usually begin? I don't have to mention examples. You already know.

A person might keep Torah and *mitzvos*, wear a *kippah*, and even have a beard, but the language he speaks is almost exactly like how they talk in the street (except with some minor differences). In Egypt, our people didn't change their style of clothing. But in today's times, we all know that clothing 20 years ago looked very different than today's styles. In Egypt, we didn't change our names, clothing, language. That was then. Today, we are in a different place than Egypt. Today, *frum* Jews are connected with the outside world, and this is has placed us into an exile that is total.

Avoiding Secular Influence

We must know that *Ahavas Yisrael* (love for other Jews) is not the same thing as *chibbur* (connection) to the ways of life all Jews. We must all have *Ahavas Yisrael*; we must burn with a love

for other Jews, to love another Jew as you love yourself. But to become connected to the lifestyles of the secular world, and to what goes on outside the “four cubits of *Halacha*”, is to become connected to a world of heresy.

Now I will ask a very simple question. How could it be that a *frum* person keeps listening to the radio, where he hears and absorbs a secular person’s views, who doesn’t believe in Hashem and who presents opinions which totally contradict the Torah? How can it be that a person keeps turning on the radio, morning afternoon and night, every half hour, to listen to the opinions of anyone who gets onto the radio to talk, to hear what one person says and what another person thinks?

Maybe a person justifies this by saying, “Don’t worry. I can always hold onto my inner fire of holiness. All of these things I’m listening to don’t affect me or influence me.”

We must understand what kind of situation we are in. If we would know, we wouldn’t be in this situation. It seems though that people have gotten used to it and that there’s nothing wrong. It has become acceptable even for *frum* people to be very connected to the world.

A Decree of the ‘Devil’ and Wicked People – Or A Decree of Hashem?

Last week, I met someone who is considered a Torah scholar. He remarked to me, “I just don’t know what Hashem wants from us. Since the times of Moshe, there was never as much Torah learning as there is today. What, then, does Hashem want from us??” He then said to me, “It must all be that it’s all “*maaseh satan*” (the work of the devil), which is trying to bring us down, from of all the increase in Torah and *mitzvos* that it sees, which hasn’t been here since the times of Moshe *Rabbeinu*”.

Such a conclusion shows what kind of deep exile we are in. All of the harsh judgments that are taking place today are not being caused by the ‘judgments’. Hashem is the Judge meting it out; He is behind it all. Yes, Hashem definitely wants something from us, in sending us all of the judgment we see. There are many messengers of Hashem who can mete out His judgment. There are plenty of people who act like scorpions and snakes to us; there is no shortage of them. But they are all messengers of Hashem!

What, indeed, does Hashem want from us? He is not ‘saying’ it to us or ‘telling’ it to us; He is not even yelling it to us anymore. He has given a decree upon us. It is Hashem who is behind the decree! No one else is behind the decree. It is Hashem talking to us, to all of us, to any Jew who has a soul. Hashem is speaking to every Jew who has a soul and sending a message. If someone reacts to the decree by saying, “I’m fine. My children are too young [to get drafted], and I have plenty of money to move to a different place if I want” – he clearly does not realize the danger to his soul in

having such an attitude. How many parents cannot sleep at night because they have children who are of age [to get drafted]! They have no idea what they will do about this!

Hashem is speaking to every Jew now. He is telling each and every one of us, “Enough! Put a stop to the entire way you have been living all these years!” The entire lifestyle that has become acceptable in recent years is a life of total *hefker* (carelessness). It is not a life in which people are seeking to become close to Hashem.

What is Hashem asking from us, in the situation we are in? The *posuk* in the Torah says, “*What does Hashem your G-d ask from you?*” How does this apply today? He is asking of us one thing alone, and it is the internal truth which applies to the soul deep within every Jew. We are in a time of *shmad*, and it means exactly what it means, with all its ramifications.

Living In A Time of ‘Shmad’

The first thing Hashem wants from us is to be willing to give ourselves up for Him. This will require us to learn the *halachos* of *Kiddush Hashem*.

In this time of *shmad* we are in, we must all accept upon ourselves to avoid going to certain places that we were used to going to until now. Each person needs to have the *daas* to realize that he must resolve not to go to certain places that connect him to the outside world, places which he has been used to going to until now. This realization needs to be sealed upon the heart of any *frum* Jew today who fears the word of Hashem.

If someone thinks that this sounds too far-fetched, and that it’s just another aspect of our exile, he is mistaken. They [the *Erev Rav*] make their appearance in several stages. They try to get involved in our Torah learning and make problems there, and at other times, they are behind pushing the seminaries to bring secular material into the Torah world.

The Vizhnitzer Rebbe *zt”l* said that even if they decree that we should learn Tractate *Bava Basra*, nobody should listen to the government and learn *Bava Basra*! This is because Torah cannot be nursed from the *Erev Rav*.

Most people don’t see it this way, and they wonder, “What is so terrible? Most of what they [the government] seek is for our own good, with just a little bit of bad mixed in. It’s mostly good with just a little bit of bad involved. All we have to do is collect a lot of money and pay them off, and then all the problems would go away....”

A person is slowly pulled after them and he becomes connected with them over the years. *Chazal* say that when you listen to the wicked government during a time of *shmad*, today they say “Do

this”, tomorrow they say, “Now do this”, and in the end, they will tell the person to commit idol worship.

If someone doesn't know that he is in a time of *shmad*, he is totally blind!

The Brisker Rav zt”l expressed, “I see today what is going on in today's times, which almost no one else sees.” This was said many years ago. We are in a time in which most people do not even realize that we are in a time of *shmad*! It appears like another decree. People think, “There was a Pharaoh, there was a Nevuchadezzar, and we got past all of them, and we will get by this one too.” I hope we get through it, with Hashem's help; Moshiach should come. But in order to get past this decree we are in, that means we need to be prepared to give up our lives for Hashem!

This is reality now. If someone is clear about it, he can't fall asleep at night. It is hard to concentrate during these days for anyone who is clearly aware of the situation.

Imagine if a murderer is chasing somebody and he wants to follow him into his house so that he can kill him. If we see him running after the person, would we keep our doors open as he's running by our house? Taking this further, would we want to be in the same room with him? Would we be comfortable if he's near us? What if his hand is touching our body? And what if his hands are nearing our heart? What do we do if a murderer is right near our own heart?

If someone tends to live in denial, he will think that this kind of stuff only happens in nightmares, and that it cannot happen in reality. But the decree is pointing right at our heart! Our very heart is in danger, no less than a murderer placing his hand near our heart.

What more does Hashem want us to do, so that we understand that they [the *Erev Rav*] are coming to uproot the entire Torah...?

Pharaoh made a decree to kill all Jewish boys. Lavan tried to destroy us entirely, in the attempt of trying to destroy Yaakov. What exactly did Lavan want to destroy? We will explain it clearly, for anyone who doesn't understand yet at this point:

If a *frum* Jew is drafted into the army these days, is there anyone who thinks that his *Yiras Shomayim* (fear of Heaven) won't be affected? Is he the same afterwards? By putting a *frum* Jew together with those who don't keep Torah and *mitzvos*, who act brazen and improper, will he be able to hold onto his *kedushah* (personal holiness)??

It's Not A Financial Issue of the Government

If someone thinks that they [the government] is trying to help us financially, and that the issue of the army is entirely a financial issue that the government is dealing with – he must know that

this is all the '*Sitra Achara*' (the 'Other Side') being clothed in the garment of certain people who claim that they're out for our best interests.

In fact, those people [who are pushing for the draft] might not even be aware that the '*Sitra Achara*' is controlling them, and they might even be earnest in their intentions. Some of them actually are earnest, and they aren't trying to be wicked. They simply don't understand what they are doing to us.

But this is only concerning a certain amount of them. The rest of them simply have wicked intentions. And even those in the government who have earnest intentions to help us are accomplishing the same purpose as the totally wicked members, in spite of the fact that they don't realize what they are doing: they are coming to uproot all of the Torah!!

'Eemunah' Is Not An Option Now

If we can remember that the government caused the closure of the yeshivah of Volozhin, can't we also understand that now that the government is trying to uproot the entire Torah?!

How can anyone sleep at night? How can anyone be so calm and serene these days? Why aren't we at least we crying out to Hashem to be saved? Instead, there is a false, pseudo '*emunah*' (faith in G-d) that people are having. If someone honestly believes that it's all fine, he would be correct if he indeed had total *emunah*. But the average person does not have such a high level of *emunah*. [If so, we must *daven*.]

Realizing The Situation

Before the Holocaust, the same thing happened. The *tzaddikim* of the generation were telling *Klal Yisrael* that they are seeing "black clouds" descending towards *Klal Yisrael*. There were many who heard their words, but they did not actually believe them. They didn't believe that our enemies would get that close. Nobody dreamed that the government's influence would reach the gates of Jerusalem; nobody believed that the government would make decrees like this on us. Did anyone believe it would come to this?

How much longer can this go on for?? We must all know that Hashem is telling us one thing clearly: It is a time of *shmad*, and we must give up our life for Him; we must not listen to the government no matter what they tell us to do, even if it's something minor, even if it is something permissible. Until we realize that we are actually in a time of *shmad*, we don't realize and deal with the situation properly.

If someone would come and decree on us that we cannot keep the *mitzvos* of the Torah, we would all understand that it is a time of *shmad*. Our situation is a bit different than such a decree, but it is still the ‘Snake’ coming toward us with its ‘cleverness’. It’s the same kind of argument.

These words are not being said so that you should hear them and be inspired. It is so that you understand what is going on.

It is like living in the time of Haman’s decree. It can be said of today that Haman and Achashveirosh are sitting and drinking together, while “the city of Shushan is weeping”. Even if we succeed in removing part of the decrees of the government, we still remain in a time of *shmad*. Haman’s decree was to take effect at a later date, but in the interim, everyone was crying. Just because the decree of the government isn’t taking effect today doesn’t mean we can be calm today.

Every Jew must realize that we are in a time of *shmad*! If the government tells us to do anything, we must be ready to scream back at them, “I am a Jew! I am giving up my soul for my Creator. I believe only in Him!”

These words will eventually become clear to everyone in *Klal Yisrael*. The only question is how much time it will take. But this is our situation, this is reality, this is what we are in now.

How did we get to this point? It was because there were many steps in the process that took place until now. We were not being staunch enough in keeping the Torah until now, and all of this laxity happened slowly and in steps; now we have hit the last straw. This is the exile we are in.

Something To Think About By The Pesach Seder

Every Jew must realize the following. If the current situation does not bother him, he wouldn’t have been bothered either if he would be in Egypt. Had he been in Egypt, he would have said too, “It’s fine. It’ll pass. Pharaoh is killing all the Jewish baby boys? It will all be fine. This decree will pass too.”

If someone does not feel the depth of the current exile, he would have been complacent like this in Egypt as well. It can be said of him, “Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed.”⁴⁷

When a person is sitting at the *seder* this Pesach, and he’s doing his various *minhagim* (each to his own), if he doesn’t feel the situation of the present exile we are in, how can he feel the past?! Hashem has sent us a decree this *Erev* Pesach. But it is really a gift that He has sent us. It enables us to feel the exile. It is easy for a person to sit by the *seder* and imagine the Egyptian exile, using his

⁴⁷ This is said of the “wicked son” in the *Hagaddah shel Pesach*.

power of imagination; and that the present situation we are in is fine. But our inner *avodah* to prepare for the night of Pesach is to realize the current situation of our exile.

If someone isn't feeling sick in his heart over the situation of *Klal Yisrael* now, he must know that his soul is not connected to the situation now. When one has empathy with the pain that the young boys of *Klal Yisrael* now face, this is already enough of a reason to lose sleep at night. We must now join with the pain of others who are facing this predicament [of the government's decree to draft the boys into the army], just as Moshe *Rabbeinu* went out to join with the pain of his brethren.

What Hashem wants from us is not that we merely become inspired! If anyone here thinks that the words being said in this *shiur* are for the purpose of becoming inspired, he has totally missed the point.

Hashem has sent us a decree; this is one side of the coin. But the other side of the coin is that He has sent us a gift. The gift of it is that He is waking us up from our slumber. We are being woken up from the sleep we have been from all these years, having gotten used to a lifestyle that was a spiritual slumber.

Cellphones

I will now ask you a simple question, one of the simplest questions that can be asked in the world. For the last 10 years already, cellphones have been on the market. Is there anyone here who believes that a person can be a real *ben aliyah* (growing, spiritual person) if he has a cellphone and maintain a true kind of life? Did cellphones elevate anyone, or did they only bring people down? Gradually, it has brought a person's spiritual level down.

If you agree that it's bad for your *ruchniyus*, why didn't you get rid of it and throw it in the garbage?

I'm not talking about the "non-kosher" phones. There is actually no such thing as a 'kosher' phone; they are all bad devices. It is just an issue of how much it brings the person down – the non-kosher phones are worse, the kosher phones are not as bad, but they're all detrimental.

Don't we understand that the entire way we are living now is incorrect? How can we just continue peacefully, with all that is going on now? Hashem is coming to each of us and saying, "My son. You are my son, and I am Your Father. I love you, and I desire you. I have pain that your other holy brothers are captured by the materialism of This World, swayed by the *Erev Rav* on This World."

A person might be a *ben Torah* and look *frum*, but when he's walking in the street as he is talking and taking and talking [on a cellphone], this is all a lifestyle that is totally *hefker*.

Hashem is telling each of us, “Enough! You must put a halt to the kind of life you are living!” What should we search for, then, after we realize that? We must *daven* to Hashem and cry out to Him!

Being Prepared To Totally Change

If Moshe *Rabbeinu* would come to us today and tell us that we have to leave our current lifestyle and to go live in tents in the Negev desert, would anyone come with him? Would anyone leave behind his current lifestyle and go join Moshe *Rabbeinu* in the desert? Maybe a person would question if this is the real Moshe *Rabbeinu*, or if he just some impostor, and he would request a sign to see if he is a real prophet....

Hashem said, “*Follow after Me into the desert.*” It is very possible that the recent calling of Hashem is a message only to the holiest Jews, who are prepared to follow Him no matter what. But the truth is that all of us, deep down, want to follow Hashem and do His will. It is just that many of us, even if we would decide to follow Hashem into the desert, would probably get stuck along the way and give up in the middle. Even so, each Jew [no matter what his level is] must be able to put a halt on his current lifestyle.

Obviously, we can't put a stop to our Pesach preparations on *Erev* Pesach, when we are busy. But we must be able to put a stop to our lifestyle and realize that if we are in a time of *shmad*. Hashem is telling us that if we need to change our life entirely.

In Conclusion

There will be those who will hear these words and mock them. Others will say, “It's an opinion of just one person.” Others will say, “It's the truth, but it's too hard for me to accept”. Others, though, after hearing these words, will realize that they need to seek the truth.

The words here were not said, *chas v'shalom*, out of hatred for any Jew. They are being said out of love. The words here were said out of a will that each Jew should search for Hashem, to disconnect from the whole way of life we are in, to leave the 50th Gate of Impurity which we have fallen into, and to reveal the depth of our bond with Hashem, His Torah, and His *Klal Yisrael*.

If we want to have true freedom on Pesach, we must go through a true process of freedom. If Hashem has sent us this decree before Pesach, it is not because we must go free from our enemies, but from the exile that has formed within ourselves, in which we have become enslaved [to the influences of society].

I am certain that all of you who listened to this will think that the words here are strange, and that they lacked *derech eretz*. But my intention here is that I hope, from the depth of my soul, that you understand what kind of situation we are in. Instead of going home after this *shiur* and discussing if I was right or if I was wrong about what I said here, and that even if I am right there's nothing that can be done anyway, you should know that there is one thing you can do for sure: you can begin to learn the *halachos* of *Kiddush Hashem*.

When you learn the *halachos*, realize that they are very applicable now. Rabbi Akiva wondered his whole life if he will ever get to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *kiddush Hashem*, and he awaited it. So too, we must realize that now is a time in which we might have to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *kiddush Hashem*, because we are now in a time of *shmad*.

If one doesn't realize the situation we are in, the words here seemed strange. If one does realize the situation as it is, though, he knows that the words here are actually a softer description of what is really going on.

It is painful for me that the souls of the Jewish people are facing a predicament. I hope that all of us, together, will see the redemption, and to leave the exile with Hashem's wonders, just as when we left Egypt. Then, we can all merit to truly give ourselves up for Hashem, in sanctification of His Name.

Hashem is the One who saved us from the past exile, and Hashem is the One who will save us this time as well. But this time, when He saves us, He will save us with the coming of *Moshiach*, may he come speedily in our days. Amen.

2.8| Surviving The Pressures of Life

The Egyptian Exile

In the Egyptian bondage, our people were afflicted with terrible suffering – as it is written, *“And they embittered their lives with difficult labor.”*

Think about what any Jew must have felt like then. They knew of the prophecy made to Avraham *Avinu* that the Egyptian exile would last for 420 years. How could they take it any longer? How could anyone ever hope to get out of Egypt? Even if anyone there would have ran away from Egypt, they wouldn't be able to escape, because the Egyptians used their magic to hold back anyone from escaping. What did any Jew think back then – how could he cope with such suffering, knowing that it's going to take 420 years to be redeemed??

Imagine we are one of the Jews enslaved in Egypt. What would we do? How would we cope? Would we just give up and say, “Enough of this -- I'm not working?” When the people complained to Moshe of the suffering, Moshe entreated to Hashem, and Hashem told him to tell them, “Just like I was with the forefathers, so will I be with you by the other hard times. This pain is only temporary.”

Hashem was saying, It's true – it really is a very hard time that they are going through, but do not worry – it is only temporary, and I am with you, so don't worry. How are we to understand Hashem's response – “The pain is only temporary”?! How does this help them survive a 420-year exile?

Our Problems

This lesson shows us how we can deal with our own difficulties.

Is there anyone who hasn't gone through difficult times? There is no such person. Every single one of us has gone through hardship. Some of us came out of much of our past hardships, and some of us are still going through hardships. But what we all have in common is that all of us are still going through something hard, and we haven't fully come out of our difficulties. We are all still going through some difficulty in our life, one way or another.

When a person has a big problem, he usually convinces himself that it's the worst problem he ever had. He compares his new problem to his previous problems, and realizes that it's not the same kind of problem he is used to – it's a whole new problem he has never faced, and it doesn't seem to have a solution.

What happens? Eventually, the problem goes away, and he forgets about it. Then a new problem comes, and again the person thinks that this is a problem that has no solution. The cycle repeats itself...

Remember How You Survived Your Past Problems

But what people usually fail to remember is that their previous problems, which didn't seem to have a solution, went away at a certain point. We usually fail to recall all the difficulties that we *did* come out of.

When we're going through a difficult time in our life, we have the ability to calm ourselves down by remembering that just like our previous problem didn't seem to have a solution, yet somehow it went away, so is there is a solution to our current problem, although we don't see how. We can realize that it is only our physical eyes that doesn't see a solution, but that doesn't mean there isn't a solution.

The Ramban says, "*Maaseh Avos Siman Labonim*" – "What happened to our forefathers is a sign for their children." Just like Hashem was with Avraham *Avinu* when he went down to Egypt and he saved him from his problem – this is when *Pharaoh* abducted Sarah, and Avraham *Avinu* had no solution to his predicament – so do we now always have a solution to our problems, even though it seems like there isn't. Although we ourselves don't know how to solve our problems, Hashem can take us out of it – just like He helped Avraham when he didn't have a solution, and just like He redeemed our people from exile when there seemed to be no way out.

This is what Hashem told Moshe to tell the people – "The pain is only temporary – Just like I took Avraham out of Egypt, so am I with you. Just there was no natural solution for Avraham, yet I was with him and took him out of his problem, so will I take you out of your problem even though there is no natural solution."

The Lesson Of Remembering The Exodus From Egypt

Every day we leave Egypt. This is part of what we say every day in *Kerias Shema* – we remember how we were taken out of Egypt. We have many *mitzvos* as well where we remember how we were

taken out of Egypt. On Shabbos and the *Yomim Tovim*, we say many times the words, “*Zecher L’yetzias Mitzrayim*” – a “remembrance” to our redemption from Egypt. Why must we remember the redemption? Is it merely to have a memorial day to remember the miracles of the past?

Many reasons are given for this, but for our discussion, it is relevant to say that the reason why we remember the redemption from Egypt so much is because it serves as the foundation for all our troubles. It shows that there is a way out from all our troubles – just like Hashem was with us then, so is He with us now.

Just like there was a public redemption, so is there a private redemption that can take place in each person’s soul. When a person has a problem and he doesn’t know the solution, yet he has *Eemunah peshutah* (simple faith) in Hashem, he can experience his own personal redemption.

Use Your Experiences In Life To Increase Your Eemunah

The *Gemara* in *Kiddushin* says that there is an obligation to honor the elderly – even to honor an elderly non-Jew. Why? The *Gemara* says because he went through a lot of experiences in his life, and this makes him deserving of respect. Simply speaking, an elderly person is wise from having gone through the experiences of life, and therefore, even an elderly non-Jew is to be honored for his wisdom about life.

But the deeper meaning behind this of is that even a non-Jew has reached a deeper degree of *Eemunah* in his life from all of the experiences he has gone through from many years of life. His *Eemunah* has become stronger because of his difficulties he came out of - and this makes even a non-Jew worthy of honor.

“This Is The Worst Problem I Ever Had”

Most people, whenever they have a problem, think “this is the worst problem I ever had in my life.” A person, let’s say, is in debt, or he is sick, or he needs a *shidduch* – and he always feels like *this* is just the worst possible thing that he has ever gone through.

Let’s say a person can’t find a *shidduch*; he thinks that this is the worst problem he ever had in his life. What happens? He eventually finds his *shidduch* and gets married, and he moves on. He forgets that he ever had a problem finding a *shidduch*. Then he has children, and he goes through hardship with them, thinking that this is the worst problem ever. Life goes on, and then he encounters new kinds of difficulties; his difficulties in *shidduchim* and with his children are a thing of the past. As he encounters new problems, each time he thinks, “*This* is for sure the worst problem I have ever gone

through!” People usually forget that there was a point in their life in which they came out of their previous, “never-ending” problems. A person usually doesn’t look back and see how he overcame difficulty, and he goes through life thinking that every new problem he encounters is the worst problem ever. A person forgets that he ever came out of his previous problems – problems which had once been the “worst” problem ever.

The Person Who Strengthened Himself From His Past Problem

Once I knew someone who became very ill; the surgery he needed to have could have killed him. I knew him throughout the entire situation, and he was calm throughout his entire ordeal. He had to spend Pesach one time in the hospital due to his illness, and I asked him how he is. He told me, “*Baruch Hashem* I can feel like I am a *ben chorin* (a freed person) on Pesach.” This person, who persevered through his *Emunah*, was able to feel like a *ben chorin* in a hospital; the strength he showed was amazing. I asked him, “Is this the first ordeal you have gone through in your life?”

He told me, “When I was a *bachur*, I was having a hard time finding a *shidduch*. I got older and older, I was very disappointed to see all my friends getting married, while I remained alone without a *shidduch*. I went back and back to my *mashgiach* (spiritual mentor) to discuss my problem, and the *mashgiach* told me, “Keep waiting a little longer...it must be that the right one didn’t come yet.” I waited and waited, and it seemed to me like the worst problem of life. Then I realized – Why am I relying on my *mashgiach* for support? Is my *Emunah* in my *mashgiach*?!

“I realized that although I was having a difficulty, I need to realize that Hashem can take me out of my situation. *Baruch Hashem*, after this I found my *shidduch*. And just like I remember how Hashem took me out of my situation, which seemed to have no solution, so will Hashem take me out of my current difficulty.” Because this person remembered how Hashem took him out of his seemingly impossible situation, he was able to face a scary ordeal and even spend Pesach happily in the hospital.

It is only when a person gives up hope that he feels broken from his situation and he will not be able to cope. But when a person is hopeful that he will come out of his situation, he will be able to survive his situation.

Surviving This Long Galus

The *galus* (exile) that we are in is very long. Do we have any hope to be redeemed from it? Is there anyone who really believes it will end?

We say in *Ani Maamim*, “And although Moshiach tarries, I still wait for him.” Anyone who truly feels this way will not give up. Just like there will be a public redemption, so is there a private redemption that can take place in every person’s soul. We can all have hope to our difficulties – that is, *if we remember* the times that we came out of our previous difficulties.

When our people left Egypt, where did they go? They went into a desert for forty years, and they had 42 encampments when they were there. Each of us as well goes through “42 encampments” in our lives (a statement of the Baal Shem Tov). How do we deal with our personal “42 encampments”?

The holy *sefarim* say that a person should deal with this by feeling like he is a “baby in his mother’s lap”, as Dovid *HaMelech* says in *Tehillim*. Just like a child who goes from place to place doesn’t feel like he is going from place to place, because all he feels is his mother’s arms – so can a person go from difficulty to difficulty yet not feel like he is being moved around, because he can feel himself in Hashem’s embrace.

All of us go through a lot of “movements” in our life. Life is shaky and rocky, and the movements throw us around. The question is: Do we have something to hold us up as we are being thrown around?

Developing A Stability For Life

We need to uncover from within ourselves a source of stability to keep us strong when we go through shaky times. Just like a house that is built strong can withstand an earthquake, so do we need to fortify ourselves to withstand life’s pressures.

All of us go through all kinds of emotional earthquakes. How can we survive the shaky situations in life?

There is an inner place in our soul which gives us stability to withstand hardship, and it is accessed if we are connected to our soul.

We need to acquire the power of stability. Many people are always moving from place to place; they never settle down to live in one place for a long time. They are constantly going through changes – and they lack stability in their life. They don’t know how to feel settled.

If a person never tries to change, he is kind of dead. There are people who never move at all and never seek to change. I knew a person who was born on a certain street, got married to a girl who lived on his street, and bought a house on the same street – and he is still living in the same house today. That is one kind of problem, when a person doesn’t move at all.

But the opposite problem of this is when a person is always seeking to change, because he has no stability in his life. We need to change sometimes and seek changes, but we also need to balance ourselves with a kind of stability.

Every person wants his life to work out, but such a life is not a life. What we really is to have an inner stability inside ourselves. This will help us deal with situations we have never been in before. We gain this stability when we are truly connected to Hashem and learning His Torah.

Stability Involves Both Our Mind And Heart

Some people only seek closeness to Hashem, but they are missing Torah in their life. Others only seek Torah, and Hashem isn't in their life. But we need to have both in order to feel stable.

The soul of a person wants to feel free; it wants to overcome its limits and be close to Hashem. But this need also has to be balanced with stability [as we will explain].

There are people who walk the streets at night and scream, “*Shema Yisrael!*” They mean it from the depths of their heart – but is this a good thing or not? (If there would be a group of people together doing this, that would at least open up their hearts a little...)

Such behavior lacks stability; such behavior shows that a person is very emotional, but that's it. It is not enough to be a very “feeling” person – our emotions don't **build** us. People who are overly emotional and feeling kinds of people would become *Gedolim* if only their minds would match their emotions! But because they don't have a balance between their mind and their emotions, they aren't stable, although their feelings come from the depths of their heart.

In order to have stability for life, we need our mind and our heart to be on an equal level with each other. If we only have a very feeling heart but we are far from our minds, this is a lack of stability.

I once asked someone, “How much Torah do you learn?” He answered me, “I learn a lot! When I sit down at the Shabbos table on Friday night, I look at all the *sefarim* on my shelf and feel that I wish I could know all of them.” He has a lot of yearnings for Torah, but he doesn't learn Torah! He is full of feelings, but it isn't balanced with his mind. He lacks stability.

It is only when a person **learns** Torah – and constantly learns it in-depth – that a person's thoughts be immersed in Torah and have stability. When a person is immersed in Torah, it is only then that his heart is stabilized, and he will then be able to find *chizuk* (inspiration) in any situation. Without this stability, the “Torah remains in a corner” – and he always feels that his *chavrusa* (study partner) never works out for him...

Major Questions In Life Come From A Lack Of Stability

In fact, all major questions that people have about life comes from a lack of stability: “Where will I live?”, or “When should I get married?” or “How will I earn a living?” etc.

Marital problems are also because there is no stability in a person. Many times a person gets into problems in his marriage because he thought that it would go as he planned. Such an attitude lacks stability. If he would only have more stability, he would be able to deal with the unexpected scenarios that marriage brings.

Without stability, a person’s life is totally superficial. I know someone who converted to Judaism and became Chassidic. He keeps changing his Chasidic garb, because he has no stability in his life. His whole life is about superficial things, like which type of *levush* (clothes) he should wear.

No one knows what will happen to him in his life. But a person can survive whatever life will bring if he is always connected to his source of stability. A good example of stability is *Daf Yomi*. Every day, no matter what, people learn the same page of *Gemara*. This epitomizes stability.

Many people depend on their friends or surroundings for *chizuk* (inspiration). What happens when, later in life, a person isn’t around his friends anymore, or he is in a different setting that he felt dependent on? He will fall apart. But if he is connected to his inner world, he will have the strength to go on.

Stability In Engagement And Marriage

One of the big problems in a person’s life is *shidduchim* (dating). Eventually, a person went through the anxieties of *shidduchim* and he gets married, his life brings changes, and now he has new problems. How does he deal with his marriage problems? It depends. If he remembers that when he got married, he had no idea that this would be the person he would marry – he will discover that he was only able to come to the decision of getting married, because he had stability. He had stability because he was connected to Hashem when he made his decision; this is what gives a person the strength to decide he will marry this girl whom he doesn’t know.

But if a person thought that his decision to marry this girl only depends on his decision alone, such a person wasn’t connected to Hashem when he made his decision. Such a person, when he encounters marital difficulties, will want to get divorced, because he feels that it’s all up to *him* anyway. He doesn’t have any stability.

No one knows what life will bring. A person shouldn’t even depend on how he sees how others have changed in their life. Just because you saw others change should be a reason for you to change?

Why should your life depend on how other people live their life? We all need to change, and it shouldn't be because we see that others are growing and changing.

When a person looks back at his whole life, he will realize that it was only Hashem who took him out of his situation. When he remembers this, he will be able to go through any situation.

This Is Life Itself!

The words here are not nice “ideas” – rather, it is the meaning of how Torah is our very life. “*Ki heim chayeinu*” – “For the words (of Torah) are our life.” The words here are coming to explain how we can actually make Torah into our life.

I also went through many hardships in my life, and the only thing that kept me going was how I remembered that it was Hashem who took me out of my previous struggles, together with my Emunah in Him and that He can take me out of my new problems. The more a person goes through life, he is able to look back at his previous struggles and see how it was Hashem who helped him out of them.

How To Get Menuchas Hanefesh (Serenity)

One of the *Shabbos Zemiros* is, “*Yonah Motzoh bo manoach*” – “The dove could not find any rest.” It is very painful for people when they don't have any *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity), when they feel that they have no rest from their problems.

Really, there is no *menuchas hanefesh* to be found on the physical world. But on the other hand, there is also no situation in which we cannot find how to have *menuchas hanefesh*. We can always find *menuchas hanefesh*, wherever we may be. How? Because *menuchas hanefesh* is something we can uncover from our inner world, no matter where we are.

Is there anyone who doesn't want *menuchas hanefesh* and who doesn't want to enjoy himself on this world? This is what we do our whole life – looking for peace of mind (*menuchah*), as well as enjoyment (*oneg*). Our entire life is basically a search for peace of mind and enjoyment. But where can we find true peace of mind, and true enjoyment? In our very own soul. The inner kind of peace of mind we want to have isn't close to us, but it is not that far either, because it is found deep within ourselves. The *Gemara* (Berachos 3a) says, “Woe to the children who are exiled from their Father's table.” The depth of this matter is that people are always moving around in life and constantly running about, so they don't have any rest.

The inner kind of life we need to have is found in the depths of our soul. Two people can do the same thing, yet only one of them will truly gain from it – the one who feels the inner world contained in something. Only when we are connected to our inner world can we utilize our inner world. When a person isn't connected to his *pnimiyus* – his inner world – he isn't able to utilize it, because he is only connected to superficiality.

Many times a person wants to express his love to someone, but he doesn't succeed in conveying his full love to the other person. Even if he tells the person "I love you", he still feels that he has not properly expressed his love enough. Why? It is because he isn't connected to his own inner world, so he can't express it. If he would be more connected to his inner world, he would be able to express to someone else about this deep emotion that he is feeling.

How A Person Can Connect To His Inner World

In order to connect to our inner world, we need to know what our strongest point is and then connect to it. This doesn't mean that every person should read *sefer Orchos Tzaddikim* and learn *Shaar HaSimcha*, and attempt to connect to his *simcha*; this does not necessarily work, because if *simcha* (happiness) isn't his strongest point, he won't be able to connect to it. For some people, *simcha* is indeed their strongest point, and they can connect to their *simcha*. But if it isn't a person's strongest point, this is not how he will become connected to his *pnimiyus*.

How can you know what your strongest point is? See which points in your life are already **opened** to you. In order to be connected to our *pnimiyus*, we need to totally be connected to *pnimiyus*; if we try to connect to something that hasn't yet been opened in our own lives, we are only connected to the external layer of the *pnimiyus*, which isn't yet *pnimiyus*.

Once a person realizes what his strongest point is, how does he actually connect to it? The way to do this is to be connected to it totally, with all his soul. This is when a person is clear – both in his **mind** and in his **heart** – of *what he is doing as* he does something. It is when a person does something that is his strongest point, with a **balance** between his mind and his heart – that his heart and mind are on the same page as he does something. There is no one who does not have a strong point already opened to him in his life. All of us have some strong point that is already opened in our life, but we need to **connect** to it, and then **open** it up even more.

In Conclusion

I hope that the words here are not just a nice "*derasha*" to you; I don't want you to just say about this that you heard a nice speech from someone in *Eretz Yisrael* who came to speak here. I hope that

these words not only help each person reach his true potential, but that they should actually help you deal with life: always be connected to Torah and *mitzvos*, and make sure you have a stability in your life – by realizing who helped you get to where you are today: Hashem.

With this, you will find the strength to deal with **any** problem in your life. We should be *zoche* to properly develop our souls.

2.9 | The Inner Redemption

Exile To Our "Da'as"

The holy *sefarim* explain that the Egyptian exile was an exile of our **da'as** (our mind). This we can see from what Hashem told Avraham *Avinu*, that “you will surely know (*“yodua teida”*) that your offspring will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs...”

The Egyptian exile was an exile of our *da'as*, and its redemption was a redemption to our *da'as*. From the double usage of the word *da'as* in the *possuk* (*“yodua teida”*), we can see that there are two kinds of exiles that both involve an exile to our *da'as*. Let us reflect what these two kinds of *da'as* are.

The Baal Shem Tov explains that these two kinds of *da'as* are a “masculine” kind of *da'as* and a “feminine” kind of *da'as*, and that the redemption from Egypt was a “feminine” kind of *da'as*, and the future redemption will be a “masculine” kind of *da'as*. What does he mean?

The way to understand his statement is as follows. In a person, there are two components: feeling and vision. (An example of “vision” is that a person is obligated on the night of Pesach to see himself leaving Egypt”). The “feminine” kind of *da'as* is the feelings, and the “masculine” kind of *da'as* is vision. Egypt was an exile to our feelings – to our feminine aspect of *da'as*. Its redemption was a redemption as well to our feminine *da'as*. But the future redemption will involve our masculine kind of *da'as*, which is our vision. *“For with an eye and an eye we will see the return of Hashem to Zion.”*

It is well-known that the final redemption is also contained in the first redemption. The redemption from Egypt is the root of the final redemption.

In terms of our soul, we must know what these two different kinds of redemption (redemption of masculine *daas* and feminine *daas*) are.

Our Mind Is Still In Exile

There are two “kings” that reside in a person: the mind and the heart. The mind’s vision is limited and we need to learn how to expand it.

The Zohar always uses an expression of *ta chazi*, “come and see”, while the *Gemara* always uses an expression of *ta shema*, “come and hear.” When a person hears, he hears the feelings, but when a person sees, he doesn’t use his feelings, just his limited vision. The abilities of feeling and vision are two distinct forces in the soul, and each of them need to be removed from what’s stuffing them up. Our mind’s vision is prevented by being too narrow-sighted, while our heart’s feelings can be stuffed with *timum halev* (spiritual “blockage”).

In the Egyptian exile, our heart was in exile. There was a redemption to this, so our feelings were redeemed with this. But our mind still hasn’t been totally redeemed. Our feelings of the soul, such as *ahavah* (love), *yirah* (fear), *hispaarus* (pride), etc. were redeemed in Egypt, but our mind’s vision – in other words, our inner vision, the ability to see holiness – is still concealed in an exile.

The *avodah* we had during the Egyptian exile was to recognize Hashem’s goodness and to come to have feelings for Him, such as love and fear of Hashem. But what is the *avodah* of the final exile?

We must expand our minds in order to know this.

The Secret Of The Redemption: “Unity”

In the writings of the Arizal it is brought that on the night of Pesach, it is a time of “*gadlus hamochin*” (a higher state of mind). What is the higher state of mind, and what is the lower state of mind?

Simply speaking, it means that sometimes our mind is more or less clear. But the more truthful outlook is that *gadlus hamochin* is a straight way of thinking – “*G-d made man upright*” (*Koheles 7:29*) – it is a straight kind of vision, and in it lies a person’s mind.

In the redemption of Egypt, anyone who didn’t merit to leave Egypt perished. The wicked perished in the plague of darkness. Everyone else who left Egypt all left as one collective unit – there was *achdus* (unity) of the entire nation at the redemption. At this redemption, the entire Jewish people were united to follow Hashem into the desert, experience the splitting of the sea and the giving of the Torah. At all of these events, all 600,000 souls of the Jewish people were all present.

The inner way to look at reality is to see everything as one. From an inner perspective, a person sees how many details are really all one collective unit. The secret that brings on a redemption is to be united into one unit. For example, the entire Jewish people in Egypt did not change their names, language, or dress.

Thus, the redemption is all about *achdus* – unity. There is a redemption that will take place to the Jewish people as a whole. There is also a personal redemption to each person that will take

place, a redemption to each person's soul. This is to redeem our mind. To redeem our mind, we must acquire an inner perspective on things – a perspective of *achdus*, to be able to see how many details connect and are all one.

Before, we mentioned that we have two different components in us: the feelings, which are in our heart, and our vision, which is in our mind. Our mind, which is otherwise known as the masculine kind of *daas*, has an advantage over the heart in that it can see how many details connect into one. Our mind is capable of seeing *achdus*.

The second *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed because of *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred). The future redemption will be the opposite of this; it will be a unity of the world. The secret to the redemption is *achdus*. When a person acquires the inner perspective – the way to see unity in many details – this is the secret to the redemption.

The secret to the current exile is contained in the Egyptian exile. By understanding what the Egyptian exile was, we can learn about our own redemption from the current exile, because the root of all redemption is the redemption from Egypt.

What Is This "Unity"?

What is this secret of *achdus*/unity of the final redemption, which is contained in the Egyptian exile?

We say in the *Hagadah*, “*And G-d took us out of Egypt, not through an angel or through a seraph or through a messenger, but G-d Himself, in His Honor.*”

There is a concept that everything which takes place in the world also takes place in time, and everything that takes place in time also takes place in our soul. In our own soul, there can be a redemption by Hashem Himself.

On the night of Pesach, there is a revelation of G-dliness in every person's soul! “*Not through an angel or a seraph or a messenger, but G-d himself.*” As long as a person doesn't block this revelation from happening, it becomes revealed in one's soul on the night of Pesach: a personal redemption that takes place in the soul.

When a person still has an egotistical “I”, he is separate from others. But when there is a revelation of G-dliness in the soul, a secret of “oneness” (*rozo d'echad*) is revealed in the soul.

If a person looks at another person according to the other's opinions about life, then he is apart from others. *Chazal* say that “*Just like all faces are different, so are all minds different.*” But when a person looks at another person's soul with a deep perspective, he sees G-dliness in another Jew's soul. He sees “Hashem Himself” that resides in the deepest point in every Jew's soul. (This deepest

point is called “*Yechidah*”).) When a person has this perspective, he has an outlook of *achdus* toward every Jew and he unifies every soul into one unit.

This revelation that takes place in the soul on the night of Pesach is the root of the future redemption. Thus, on the night of Pesach we have an additional *avodah* upon us. Besides for the well-known *avodah* that we must connect ourselves to leaving Egypt now, there is another *avodah* – to reveal the root of the future redemption. We must recognize what the redemption is and connect to it.

The Root Of The Future Redemption – Nullifying Your Ego

The power of the future redemption is essentially the ability to leave the selfish “I” in a person. As long as a person is still egotistical, there is a divide between a person and Hashem. When a person still has his ego, he has only his *daas*, and each person’s *daas* is different...this is the depth of *Chazal* that “Just as all faces are different, so are all minds different.” A person’s self-absorption prevents the revelation of *achdus*.

We need to acquire the higher *daas*. This is called “*Keil de’os* (G-d of knowledge”, an expression used by the *Rambam*). This is not regular *daas* of a person; it is a higher kind of *daas* that is hidden from us. It is the kind of *daas* which unifies the many varying opinions of people, the many different kind of *daas* that everyone has.

In the redemption from Egypt, even though it was a redemption to our *daas*, it was only a redemption to each person’s private *daas*. We are still different toward each other, because we each have our own opinions. It wasn’t yet a total redemption.

There are two ways how we can see this. First of all, Moshe *Rabbeinu* was afraid that the people wouldn’t be worthy of being redeemed, because of the wicked individuals present. This was already a lapse in the unity of the Jewish people. In addition to this, even when they were redeemed, the *Erev Rav* (“Mixed Multitude”, Egyptian non-Jews who escaped Egypt together with the Jewish people) came with them, which affected the unity of the Jewish people.

The future redemption, though, will be a total redemption to our *daas*. It will be a nullification of our *daas* and in its place a revelation of the higher *Daas*, the *Daas* of the Creator. The revelation of Hashem by the redemption will be a revelation of the *achdus* of the Jewish people.

This we have two missions on Pesach: we must feel as if we are leaving Egypt now, to receive a new vitality in our feelings. But this isn’t enough. Even with renewed feelings, our perspective can still be very limited. Feelings without a developed mind can be imbalanced; feelings aren’t everything. Some people are so zealous that they go overboard with their zealousness. We must

realize that our feelings are only a “garment” on our soul. Our feelings alone aren’t everything – they need to be fused with an expanded mind.

For example, the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* is to love wicked people as well. One of the four sons is a wicked son; we must still love him as a son, even though he is wicked. In the future redemption, all the dispersed members of our people will be gathered together, even the wicked members. Although in Egypt, “had the wicked son been there, he wouldn’t have been redeemed”, still, in the future redemption, which is a more complete redemption, the wicked will be included.

This kind of feeling is a feeling expanded by the mind. This is the *gadlus hamochin* contained on Pesach.

“Now We Are Slaves, Next Year We Will Be Free”

We need both kinds of redemption: the past redemption of Egypt (which we already experienced), and the future redemption. These are two different kinds of redemption.

The previous redemption, the redemption from Egypt, is a light that we must return to each year on Pesach. The future redemption is something else: we must draw it closer to us and extend it upon us even now.

In the beginning of the *Hagadah*, we say “Now we are slaves, Next year we will be free.” These are the beginning words of the *Hagadah*, and they are the preface to what is upon us on the night of Pesach.

In these words we mention two things. We mention the “bread of suffering” which our ancestors ate in Egypt, yet we also mention the future redemption – “Next year we will be free.” This is not just a yearning for the redemption (which is also a wonderful thing to aspire to), but it is a connection to the redemption. If we only consider the light of the redemption to be a thing of the past, then the purpose of the festival remains concealed.

The redemption hasn’t yet come; thus, the *avodah* we have on this Pesach is to awaken in us the inner meaning of the redemption – the higher aspect of the redemption, not the lower aspect of the redemption. We need both aspects, but the point is that we need the higher aspect of the redemption as well.

Inspiration Lasts Only If We Expand Our Mind

Upon understanding these words, we can look at the inner depth of the *avodah* upon us, in a new light. There is a deep point hidden here.

Every year, the holy Jewish people want to be awakened and inspired. People hear inspiring lectures – each to his own. Everyone wants to awaken in his soul a feel for the holiness of the *Yom Tov*. But we must know that many times we just have “inspiration” (*hisorerus*) and after some time, our inspiration wanes and we just go back to usual.

What is the mistake that people are making? It has to do with what we have been saying until now: feelings, without the mind to guide them, are only half the equation. Even if we redeem our “feelings” and we are full of renewed feelings for holiness, without expanding our **mind** the feelings won’t last. It’s only “half” the redemption.

If all we do is open up our feelings, without expanding our mind – then we only have the first kind of redemption, a redemption from Egypt. We will be missing our current redemption. With just feelings and no mind, the inspiration we get doesn’t last. We will be able to connect to the redemption from Egypt with our renewed feelings of love and fear of Hashem, but after that our inspiration will go away, and we will just be left with the remaining exiles that came after Egypt....

In order for our inspiration to last, we need an expanded mind. On the night of Pesach, one is obligated to “see” himself as if he’s leaving Egypt. What does it mean to “see” yourself leaving Egypt? Are we supposed to become deluded by our imagination?! We can understand that all our souls were there one time in Egypt, but why must we see ourselves actually leaving Egypt now?

The answer to this is part of our discussion. The other part of our redemption is to redeem our power of vision in the mind. We need to be able to “see.” This *halachah*, that one must see himself leaving Egypt, contains the higher aspect of the redemption: to redeem one’s vision of the mind.

The depth of this is that if a person hasn’t nullified his ego and he doesn’t integrate himself with the Jewish people, then he doesn’t know how to “see.” He doesn’t have a vision of *achdus*. His redemption has nothing to do with Hashem – it’s all about redeeming himself. When a person remains absorbed in himself, he might have wonderful feelings for *Avodas Hashem*, but he actually might be on a very low level. Reb Yisrael Salanter’s words are famous – a person can be so afraid of the *yom hadin* (day of judgment), yet he damages others when they see a scowl on his face.

When a person only seeks to have great feelings in *Avodas Hashem*, it doesn’t mean yet that he is pure. It’s possible that he is self-absorbed in himself as he seeks to gain high levels in *Avodas Hashem*. He is so self-absorbed about his personal growth that he doesn’t even see one person next to him! Even when such a person tells about the story of the exodus to his household, he’s wrapped up in his own self as he seeks high levels to be on. Such a person is sorely mistaken in the purpose of the festival.

When a person doesn’t realize that the main part of the redemption is to be redeemed from one’s selfish ego, he is missing the whole redemption. He might love and fear Hashem and have all the great feelings that one can reach, but it’s all another way of being self-absorbed. This is not a true

redemption. The true redemption to have on Pesach is when one nullifies his self and integrates into the Jewish people, as a part of a whole.

When one considers the redemption of Pesach to be about himself, he only redeems “himself.” We cannot call this a redemption. The purpose of the redemption is that all should recognize Hashem; it is about revealing Hashem, not about revealing one’s “I.”

The way to redeem yourself on Pesach is actually be nullifying yourself. When a person is locked up in a jail, he desires to escape it – he wants his “I” to escape it. His escape from it will just be all about how he worries for himself. But the depth to the redemption is to leave your very self and forget about yourself.

This is really the depth of *Ahavas Yisrael*, which is the secret of the final redemption. *Ahavas Yisrael* is really when your soul has a redemption – when you leave yourself!! In other words, there is a kind of personal redemption in which you leave your inner imprisonment, and then there is another kind of redemption – when you leave your “I”. This is when you leave your ego for the sake of integrating with the rest of the Jewish people.

Thus, the beginning of redemption is to redeem our feelings. We need to first leave the materialism – the “bricks and mortar” – and enter the world of spirituality. The second part of our redemption, which is the purpose, is to reach our masculine kind of *daas* – the revelation of unity on the world; in other words, to nullify our “I.”

Hashem should merit all of the Jewish people that we all integrate with each other and from there, to integrate in unison with the Creator, who is really only One who exists.

2.10 | Dilug – Skipping Levels on Pesach

The Korban Pesach Could Only Be Eaten At Night: In Remembrance of a Miraculous Night

In the times of the *Beis HaMikdash*, there were different *korbanos* (sacrifices) brought throughout the year. Some *korbanos* had holier status than others, but all of the *korbanos* besides for the *korban pesach* could be eaten for a period of one day and one night. The *korban pesach* was different. It could only be offered after midday, and unlike all other *korbanos* which could be offered either at morning or at night. Also, the *korban pesach* could only be eaten at night, unlike other *korbanos* which could be eaten for the following day and night. There was an argument of the Sages whether it had to be eaten before midnight or not, but either way, it had to be eaten at nighttime, and not by day.

What is the root of this difference in the *korban pesach* from all other *korbanos*?

The *korban pesach* is a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt, which was at nighttime. Hashem struck all the firstborns of Egypt at midnight, and skipped over all the Jewish homes, striking only the Egyptian firstborns. In remembrance of this, the *korban pesach* was offered and eaten at night.

The fact that the *korban pesach* is only offered by day and eaten only at nighttime, reveals an additional, inner facet of how to understand the redemption from Egypt.

The Night of Pesach - A Night of Revealed Spiritual Light

The night of Pesach is a night which, as explained in *sefarim hakedoshim*, is a night that contains a certain *ohr* (spiritual light). Unlike a normal day of the year, where there is first night/dark and then day/light, on the night of Pesach there is “light”.

Pesach is termed as לילה כיום יאיר, the “night that shines like the day”. Unlike the first day of Creation, when Hashem removed His light in order to create the mixture of day/light and night/dark, on the night of Pesach, Hashem does not remove His light.

Pesach is called in the Torah as *mimacharas haShabbos*, “from the morrow of the Shabbos” – why is Pesach called “Shabbos” in the Torah, if Pesach is clearly a *Yom Tov*, and not a day of Shabbos? One of the reasons is because on the first Friday night of Creation, when Shabbos first entered,

there was light and darkness; so too, on the night of Pesach, when the night is like the day, it is like Shabbos.

The Torah says that we count *Sefiras Ha'Omer* beginning from “the morrow of the Shabbos”, which is referring to the “morrow” of Pesach. We begin to count the *Omer* at night, for the *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that the *mitzvah* of counting of the *Omer* continues to shine the spiritual light that was revealed on Pesach – where “light” is revealed amidst the night.

From where does this light on Pesach come from? It comes from the light of the first Shabbos. That is why Pesach is called “Shabbos” in the Torah – because the light of Shabbos shines on Pesach. When it comes *Motzei Pesach*, we start counting *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, to continue emanating the light of Pesach.

Sefiras Ha'Omer begins with bringing the *korban Omer*, an offering from grain which is fitting for consumption by animals, and it ends with Shavuos, when we bring a *Korban* made from bread, which is fitting for human consumption. The depth of this is that after the sin of Adam, man is no longer on the level of “man” and now he is in the category of “*they resembled animals*”. Thus, the counting of the *Omer* which begins right after Pesach is when we are first on the level of “*they resembled animals*”, and that is why we first bring the *Korban omer* from grain that is eaten by animals. We continue to count the *Omer* until Shavuos, when we rise to the perfected level of “man”.

It is stated openly by the Sages that on the night of Pesach, there is a spiritual light shining which resembles the original Shabbos of Creation (which would have remained had Adam not sinned).

The Depth of The Light On The Night of Pesach: The Revelation of the Letter Aleph

What is the depth of the light that shines on the night of Pesach?

When Hashem created the world, which was “*Bereishis*”, “in the beginning,” the *Targum Yerushalmi* translates as “*b'chochmah*”, “with His wisdom”.⁴⁸ Thus, Hashem created this world using His *chochmah*/wisdom, and as it is says, “*All of them, You made with wisdom.*” The beginning of Creation, which Hashem began from His *chochmah*/wisdom, is also synonymous with the letter *beis* which Hashem used to create the world with.

The exodus from Egypt was for the purpose of bringing us to Har Sinai to receive the Torah, so that we should “*serve G-d, on this mountain.*” At the giving of the Torah, Hashem revealed “*Anochi*

⁴⁸ Editor's Note: The commentary of “*Peirush Yerushalmi*”, in the *HaMaor* edition of *Chumash Mikraos Gedolos (Beraishis 1:1)*, explains this to mean that Hashem created the word “in His Supernal Wisdom”, an explanation which is also cited in the *Zohar*, in *Rikanati (p.81)* and in *Rabbeinu Bachye*.

Hashem” (“I am Hashem”), which begins with the letter *aleph*. Thus, the Torah begins with the letter *beis*, with the word “*Bereishis*”, whereas the giving of the Torah begins with the letter *aleph*, with “*Anochi Hashem*”.

At the exodus from Egypt, there was also a revelation of “*Anochi Hashem*”, for Hashem said, “*I will go out amongst the land of Egypt*” regarding the smiting of the firstborn. What did this reveal? It revealed the *Alupho shel Olam*, the “Chief of the world”, the revelation of “*Anochi Hashem*”, otherwise known as the letter *aleph* which preceded the *beis*/beginning of Creation. It was this letter “*aleph*” which Hashem revealed, at the exodus from Egypt, on the night of Pesach.

Pesach – Hashem’s Conduct of Dilug (Skipping)

The word “*Pesach*” means to “*skip*”, which is also known as the term *dilug* (skipping). The *gematria* of the words “The One skipped over”, which is דלג אלה , is equal in value to the word פסח /Pesach.⁴⁹

The light on Pesach is essentially the fact that Hashem “skipped” over His normal mode of conduct, which is through using the letter “*beis*”, and He instead used His higher mode of conduct, which is His letter *aleph*.

When Hashem skipped over the Jewish homes, this can be understood on a deeper level because He was “skipping over” His [mode of conduct through the] letter *beis*, and instead revealed His [mode of conduct through the] letter *aleph*.

This was also the same depth behind how Hashem Himself went into Egypt and struck down the firstborns of Egypt, and not the firstborns of the Jewish people. Why were only the firstborns of Egypt struck down, and not the firstborns of the Jewish people? It was because Hashem was using His letter *aleph*, which “skips over”. That was the mode revealed on *Pesach* – for the term *Pesach* corresponds to the term *dilug*/skipping, in that the *dilug* on *Pesach* is when Hashem “skipped over” His normal mode of conduct which is through the letter *beis*.

When one is connected to the higher mode of conduct, which is through the letter *aleph*, he is connected with the *Alupho shel Olam*, and he merits a mode of conduct in which there is *dilug*/skipping over the letter *beis* [which represents Hashem’s normal mode of conduct]. That is the depth of why Hashem skipped over the Jewish homes [for they were connected to the *Alupho shel Olam* (Chief of the world), and therefore they were deserving of this higher mode of conduct which is when Hashem uses the letter *aleph*].

⁴⁹ The word דלג (*dilug*) is $4+30+3$, equal to 37, and the word “*aleph*” is $1+30+80$, which equals 111. The total of $37+111$ is 148. The word פסח *Pesach* is $80+60+8$, which is 148.

Thus, the *dilug*/skipping that Hashem performed on the night of Pesach was that He “skipped” over the letter *beis* and instead revealed His letter *aleph*, corresponding to His mode of conduct in which He is the *Alupho shel Olam*, when He skips.

Hashem Skipped Over Darkness, On The Night of Pesach

There is also an additional facet of understanding to this concept of *dilug*/skipping that Hashem performed on the night of Pesach.

Normally, the *seder* (order) of the day starts firstly with evening and then morning, and together, the night and morning form one day. In the normal order of Creation, there is first darkness and then there is light. Before the creation of the world, there was only the light of Hashem which filled everything. Then Hashem made evening and morning – first He made darkness, also known as His concealment (*hester*) or His *tzimtzum* (contraction), and then He made the morning.

On the night of Pesach, when Hashem “skipped”, He skipped over the normal order in which darkness precedes light. For that reason, there was instead “light” revealed on the night of Pesach. The light, the *ohr*, which begins with the letter *aleph*, “skips over” all darkness. This is the depth of how Pesach night is a night that does not contain any darkness, only Hashem’s light - “a night which shines like the day”, לילה כיום יאיר.

On Pesach, Hashem “skipped” over the normal darkness of nighttime, and instead there was now His light shining at night, just as His light filled everything before Creation. The light which Hashem made after Creation was mixed with darkness, so it was not on the same level of the light that existed before Creation. Only before Creation was there a light of Hashem that was total, which was not mixed with any darkness. On Pesach, when Hashem was “skipping” the order of the normal Creation, He was skipping over the night/darkness and reverting back to the state of Before Creation, when His light filled everything.

The Depth of How Pesach is a Night Protected From Harm

Thus, the night of Pesach reveals *dilug*, a skipping, over the normal darkness of the nighttime.

Pesach night is called “*leil shimurim*”, a night that is protected from any harmful spirits, as *Chazal* state. This does not mean that it is really night and that that we are protected on this night from any harm. Rather, it is a night which is on a level of day, where harmful spirits have no hold. Since Hashem skipped over the night on this night of Pesach, that itself is the reason why we are

protected from harm – it is because Hashem skips over the entire mode of “night” altogether, so this is a night which is on a level of day.

Day and Night In The Soul – Our Times of Ascent and Descent

Let us now try to draw these matters closer to our understanding.

In the normal order of Creation, time consists of night and day. In our own souls, there is also “night” and “day”. We enjoy spiritual ascent (day/light) or times when we face spiritual difficulties, failure, and descent (night/dark). The *Sefer HaYashar*⁵⁰ writes that the times of ascent are called “Days of Love”, where we can more clearly feel Hashem’s love, and our times of descent are called “Days of Hate”, where it is difficult to feel Hashem’s love.

What is the root of these alternating periods in our life? Why is ascent associated with light, and why is descent associated with dark?

The *sefer Derech Hashem* and others explain that the fundamental inner workings of everything in Creation are always based on the four elements – fire, air, water and earth. Descent is associated with the dark, because the element of earth is the darkest of the elements, and when a person descends, he descends towards the earth, the darkest of the elements. Any spiritual descent occurs when he gravitates closer to the element of earth, which darkens his soul. When one rises higher in spiritual growth, due to the rising nature of the element of fire, he will feel more light in his life, for fire is illuminating.

Therefore, light is rooted in the element of fire, and darkness is rooted in the element of earth. In the normal order of Creation, there is first evening/dark and then there is morning/light, which means that normally, there is first earth/dark/night followed by fire/light/day.

What happens when a person skips over something? Without skipping, a person remains on the earth he is standing on, and he can’t go higher. Only when he lifts his foot to skip above the ground, can he go higher. But even when a person moves forward and he progresses, in a time of spiritual growth, he still cannot completely rise, because he is still bound to the earth, which does not allow him to go completely higher. This is symbolized by the fact that even when we take one step forward with our foot, our other foot is still behind us, which doesn’t allow us to go completely forward, because it is on the ground, on the earth.

Thus, even when we are having spiritual progress and we are rising higher – each person on his own level – we always have one foot remaining behind us on the ground, on earth, which doesn’t let us completely rise. But on Pesach, where the power of “skipping” is revealed, we can skip over

⁵⁰ *Sefer HaYashar Rabbeinu Tam*: 6

the “earth” which we normally stand on! We can then go above the curse given to mankind, of “*You are earth, and to earth you shall return*”, and to ‘skip’ above the earth and disconnect ourselves from it.

This is the depth behind the power of “skipping” that is revealed on Pesach.

The Skipping On Pesach Is “From Above To Below”

What is the power to “skip” to a higher level?

Let’s say that we have three levels in front of us – Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3. A person is standing at Level 1 and he wants to skip Level 2, so that he can get to Level 3. From where does he have the power to skip to Level 3? Is it because he has reached Level 1, or is it because there is an existing Level 3 which he wishes to reach?

It is because he is aimed at reaching Level 3.

So he is really “shining” the Level 3 within the Level 2, and that is how he is able to skip over Level 2. When skipping over Level 2, he is not bound to the earth.

How does he have the power to skip over the earth? It is only because he has skipped to the Level 3. If there wouldn’t be a Level 3 for him to jump to, he would fall hard onto the “earth” he is standing on, because when one tries to jump higher, he falls harder if he doesn’t succeed jumping. So it is really the Level 3 which is enabling him to skip higher than where he “standing”.

Whenever a person skips, he is skipping from his current level to a level that is higher than the level directly above his reach. He skips from Level 1 to Level 3, and his power to skip over Level 2 is because he is aware of the Level 3 which is inspiring him to go higher than where he is. This is the normal power of skipping, but on Pesach, there is a deeper power of skipping. As explained earlier, on the night of Pesach, Hashem skipped over the darkness, and instead revealed His light, the light before Creation.

Normally, the concept of “skipping” is when we skip “from below to above” (*m’sata l’eila*) – we started from below, we rise to the next level, and we skip Level 2 while rising to Level 3. However, the “skipping” on the night of Pesach, where Hashem used His original light of before Creation, was “from above to below”. This was the depth of Hashem’s mode of skipping that He used when He redeemed us from Egypt.

What kind of skipping was it? Who is it that skipped? Was it us who skipped towards Hashem (from below to above), or was it the Creator Who skipped over the Jewish homes (which was from above to below)? Clearly, it was not we who skipped, but the Creator Who skipped. The Creator skipped over the Jewish homes in order to strike the firstborns of Egypt, where He “skipped” from

His exalted place above, so to speak, in order to descend into Egypt. This descent was in a manner of “skipping”, so it was a skipping “from above to below”.

What is the difference between these two manners of “skipping” “from above to below” as opposed to skipping “from below to above” [in our own terms]?

When there is skipping from “from below to above”, one skips due to the higher level which he is trying to reach. [This is the normal kind of skipping, in which one skips from Level 1 to Level 3, where he skips over Level 2 because he knows that there is a Level 3 to reach.] Here, the skipping is motivated by the fact that there is a higher level in the future to reach. But when one skips “from above to below”, one is jumping because of his present place [where he spiritually exists].

Skipping On Pesach: Connecting To A Higher Level

The Torah says that Hashem said to Moshe that He will redeem the Jewish people, and that “*I will be as I will be.*” Moshe asked Hashem, “When they ask me what Your Name is, what should I say to them?” Hashem said to Moshe, “[Say to them that] “*I will be as I will be.*”. Say to them that just as I was them in this exile, so will I be with them in all the other exiles.” Moshe said to Hashem, “It is enough that they are worried about this predicament [Rashi explains: “Why mention to them that there will be more exiles, which will only add to their suffering?”]. Hashem then said to Moshe, “Go and tell them that “I will be” the One to send them out.”⁵¹ What is the depth of this?

[It lies in the fact that] the exodus from Egypt contained the following two aspects. As we have explained, the exodus from Egypt was through Hashem’s mode of *dilug*/skipping. This concept is explained by our Sages to refer to an outpouring of Hashem’s love. When there is love, the normal rules are broken. Thus, the revelation of Hashem’s love means that there will be *dilug*, skipping – and, therefore, on the night of Pesach, when Hashem revealed His love, a person has the ability to skip to higher spiritual levels. According to this understanding, one can skip “from below to above” on the night of Pesach, and reach levels that are normally above him – due to the power of *dilug*/skipping on this night.

But there is also a deeper aspect to the exodus from Egypt: [On the night of Pesach], one can connect to the power of “skipping” which is used by the Creator – the power to skip “from above to below.”

The *Gemara* says that in the future, the exodus from Egypt will only be regarded as a secondary aspect. Why will it become only a secondary aspect in the future? Why will the future redemption make the redemption from Egypt only of secondary importance?

⁵¹ *Berachos 9b (cited in Rashi Shemos 3:14)*

[To answer the question we must know something else]. In the redemption from Egypt, there was skipping “from above to below” - but what do we remain with now? What remained with us is the ability to skip “from below to above”, and this is not the state of the future redemption. In the future redemption, there will be a revelation of skipping “from above to below”. The root of this certainly began with the redemption from Egypt, but we did not remain with it. The main revelation which we remain with, from the redemption of Egypt, is the power to skip “from below to above” - but in the future, where the revelations will be permanent, we will skip “from above to below”.

Let us understand this better – in terms that apply to the soul. In our own souls, what is the power to skip “from below to above”, and the power to skip “from above to below”?

When skipping from below to above, a person is found below, but he tries to skip to a higher level. But when a person is standing in a low place and he tries to skip to a higher place, there is no way for him to actually skip to the higher place. He is standing in the low place, and he is trying to skip to a high place. Although it is possible for him to succeed in this way, it is likely that he will stumble and fall. But if his real place is above, and he wants to skip from above to below, he is already beginning from a rectified, completed state, and therefore his skipping is not in any need of repair.

The Light of the Future Redemption – Dilug/Skipping To Higher Levels

We are now in the time of the month of Nissan, close to the festival of Pesach. That is where we are from the perspective of this current year, but from a more inclusive perspective, from the larger perspective our history, we are almost at the very end of this 6,000 year era. Although no one knows when the redemption will be (for “matters of the heart are not revealed by the mouth”⁵²), we are still very close to it, relatively speaking.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* state that there is a “light of the complete redemption” which shines during our period of the End of Days. The redemption from Egypt and the future redemption bear similarities, as well as differences, from each other. We are after the redemption from Egypt and before the future redemption, but the light of the redemption shines even now. So although we haven’t yet merited the future redemption, its light is shining.

When the light of “*dilug*” (skipping) shines, it totally changes the normal *seder* of our *avodah*. Normally, there is a *seder* in our *avodah* of spiritual growth, such as the ladder of growth described by Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair, explained in *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*. These include the steps of *zehirus*

⁵² “*liba l’pumei lo galya*”

all the way until *ruach hakodesh* and *techiyas hameisim*. This is in an orderly progression of levels. Does this *seder* exist on the night of Pesach? Our Sages state explicitly that it does not.

What, then, is revealed on Pesach? On Pesach, we have the revelation of *dilug*, of skipping levels.

If we want to apply this concept practically to our own *avodah*, not just as knowledge but as a practical course of action to take, we must know that **the revelation of *dilug* [on Pesach] changes the entire *seder* of our *avodah*.** It is not just a piece of knowledge to merely “know” about on an intellectual level. **This is a concept to be acted upon**, not just something to know. On Pesach, it is revealed an *avodah* that is not the regular order of things.

Skipping “From Above To Below”:

However, we must know if this “skipping” is “from below to above” (*m’sata l’eila*), or if it is “from above to below” (*m’leila l’sata*). [As will be explained, it only works when we are skipping from above to below, as opposed to from below to above].

If one tries skipping “from below to above”, even if he succeeds, he will usually not remain at the higher level for long. As it is written: “*Who will ascend on the mountain of Hashem, and who can stand in His holy abode?*” It is difficult to stay on a higher spiritual level, after one has quickly ascended to there [i.e. through the holiness of the festival].

We can see this from the fact that Pesach is immediately followed with *Sefiras Ha’Omer*, which is called “after the morrow of the Shabbos”, meaning that the “Shabbos” aspect of Pesach has now ended. This is because the skipping on Pesach is from below to above, and therefore it is hard to stay at the higher level, for the person has skipped levels to get there. Although the festival contains a special ability in which a person can rise to higher spiritual levels, to go beyond his own current level and to go out of the normal routine, this growth usually does not last. Pesach is immediately followed with “from the morrow of Shabbos” – with *Sefiras Ha’Omer*, which does **not** contain the holiness of the *Korban pesach*.

How will the complete redemption happen in the future, which will also be skipping to higher levels? How do we know that we won’t regress back to below, after we have risen higher in the future? It is because in the future redemption, we will be skip “from above to below”, in which the spiritual growth will be permanently lasting.

Where is this power in the soul, of skipping “from above to below”? When we speak of “above” here, we are referring to the place where Hashem Himself is found, in His full revelation. In contrast, “below” is wherever there is a concealment (*hester*) of His Presence. The more and more that we go towards the “above”, the more we uncover His Presence. What is the total level of

“above”? That is where Hashem’s Presence is fully revealed, where there are no barriers that divide a person from Hashem, where there is no *he’elam* (obscurity) and no *hester* (concealment).

That is what it means to be *l’eila*, to go Above. For one to go “from above to below”, **a person must develop a deep place in his soul where he can fully recognize Hashem, and then the person must regularly be in touch with it.** Therefore, in whatever action a person does, a person must learn how to act from this deep place in himself, by **recognizing** the Presence of Hashem.

A person can be in This World, which is a place full of darkness and concealment of Hashem’s Presence, but he can recognize Hashem by starting his actions from an inner place in himself. This is the *seder of avodah* of “*m’leila l’lisata*”, to go “from above to below” – when one begins each action from the innermost place in his soul, which recognizes Hashem.

Practically speaking, before one is about to start *davening*, one can remind himself that he is about to encounter the revelation of G-dliness in his heart, and from this recognition, he should pray and make requests. Before learning Torah, he should connect his heart to the Creator, and from this recognition, he should then begin to study the Torah. And when it comes to all other deeds of service as well, one should begin from a place of recognizing the Creator which is the innermost and highest place in the soul, which is “Above”, where one recognizes the revelation of the Creator.

When one is always beginning from that place, he can skip past many obstacles that exist in This World. There are many accusing angels which seek to prevent a person from rising higher, but a person can get past all of them when he is beginning from “Above” towards below. **He starts from a place of recognizing the Creator, and from that awareness, he begins to learn Torah, daven, and do all other mitzvos and actions.** He will be able to skip past many of the obstacles of This World which prevent a person from spiritual progress. That is what it means to go “from above to below” - *m’leila l’sata*.

But, as explained, if a person is trying to skip “from below to above”, he simply has many great aspirations to go higher, and he wants to skip all of the levels and hopes to succeed in this way, but he will not always be successful when he skips. Even if he does succeed in skipping to higher levels, he won’t be able to last there for long. As we see from Pesach, a person can skip to higher levels on Pesach night for a few moments, but soon after, he is no longer on those higher levels. The growth may last for a day, or a week, or perhaps for two months, but after that, he is back below.

Even if one falls afterwards to the lowest spiritual level, if one begins “from above to below”, then Hashem will raise him back from there, since he started from the place where Hashem is, as opposed to starting from below. Only when one begins each action that he does from a place of recognizing the Creator, will he have this guarantee.

This is the light of the future redemption, which is a higher revelation than the night of Pesach. The exodus from Egypt is certainly the root of this future light, for on Pesach there was a revelation of Hashem's Presence when He took us out from Egypt. But that revelation was not complete, for it can only be received according to the specific spiritual level that one is on. On Pesach, one is given the spiritual power of *dilug*/skipping, to skip to higher spiritual levels, due to the spiritual illumination that shines on Pesach.

But as mentioned before, Pesach is soon followed by *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, which is a spiritual descent from the high level of Pesach (as explained earlier). [That is why we need to access the light of the future redemption which shines currently, in which a person can "skip" to higher spiritual levels "from above to below"].

In Summary: Practically Implementing The Avodah of Dilug/Skipping

To apply these words practically in our life, one must penetrate to the part in his soul where he recognizes the Creator. Certainly, most people do not know what it means to simply recognize the Creator, if they have never worked hard to acquire this recognition.

After one has put in the effort to recognize the Creator, one should then start from this place before he is about to do anything. **The first thought, before doing anything, should always be: "I am doing this, to bond with the Creator."**

Before doing any *mitzvah*, compose your mind a bit and direct your thoughts to a connection with the Creator. That is how the routine of our life should become: every day, every hour, to keep bonding with the Creator. From this awareness, we should begin our work, our actions, our Torah learning and mitzvos.⁵³ In this way, we go "from above to below".

The Baal Shem Tov explained that the statement of our Sages "I have seen those who ascend, but they are few" to mean those who have true spiritual growth are those who mainly dwell above, and they only come down sometimes when they need to take care of something, but then they immediately return to their dwelling above.

We are speaking here of an actual way to live life, practiced by anyone who truly seeks closeness to Hashem. Before we are about to do anything, we should begin with a composed mind and think that "I am doing this act, in order to get closer to Hashem." This inner connection to the Creator is the way we should begin before we do anything, throughout the day. **Before learning Torah, or *davening*, or doing an act of *chessed*, or any other deed – it makes no**

⁵³ Editor's Note: This is the theme that is developed throughout the "*Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*" sefarim – developing an awareness of the Creator and a desire to come closer to Him, throughout each aspect of the day.

difference what – it should be preceded with a composed mind, and with a thought that we are doing this act in order to increase our bond with the Creator.

In Conclusion: Preparing Ourselves For The Light of The Redemption

When one lives this way, **this is the true preparation for the complete redemption**, may it come speedily in our days. Hashem made a promise to us that He will redeem us from this exile, with awesome miracles and wonders, just as He took us out of Egypt with awesome miracles and wonders. We await this redemption and we prepare for it, not just through cleaning and preparing our homes for Pesach, but through **inner preparation, in our own souls - for the light of the redemption** of Pesach that we experienced in the past, and even more so, **for the future redemption** which will be in the month of Nissan, which will be the complete redemption. May it come speedily in our days, *Amen*.

2.11 | A Deeper Understanding Of Maror

“Maror” (Bitter Herbs) – In Remembrance of The Servitude In Egypt

The *maror* (bitter herbs) is eaten at the *seder* to commemorate the bitterness which the Egyptians caused our fathers in Egypt.⁵⁴ It is not counted as a *mitzvah* unto itself⁵⁵, but as part of the *mitzvah* of eating *matzah*⁵⁶; others say that it is part of the *mitzvah* to tell over the story of the exodus⁵⁷. There are five different bitter herbs that can be used for *maror*⁵⁸, parallel to the five times that the Torah writes the words **וימררו את הייהם**, “*And they embittered*”.⁵⁹

Rectifying The Maror

Clearly, the *maror* is in need of a *tikkun* (rectification), for its entire concept is rooted in the damages that came to mankind ever since the first sin.

It is well-known that the *gematria* (numerical value in Hebrew) of the word “*maror*” (מרור) is equal to the word **מות**, “*maves*” (death).⁶⁰ The word *maror*, besides for its simple meaning of “bitterness”, can also mean to “rebel”, as in the term, **ממרים הייתם עם ה'**, “*You acted rebellious, nation of Hashem*”.⁶¹ This is because the entire concept of the “*maror*” is a product of the first sin.

There is an opinion in the Sages that the tree which Adam ate from was a grapevine, and that “these clusters of grapes brought bitterness to the world.”⁶² According to this opinion in the Sages, the eating of this grapevine brought bitterness to the world; thus, all “bitterness” is a result of the sin of Adam.

The *maror* receives a rectification in two ways; let us elaborate each of them.

⁵⁴ *Pesachim* 116a

⁵⁵ *Rambam Sefer HaMitzvos, aseh* 56

⁵⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁷ *Sefer HaChinuch* 21

⁵⁸ *Pesachim* 39a

⁵⁹ *Baal HaTurim*

⁶⁰ *Arizal: Shaar HaKavanos, derush* 12, *Pesach*

⁶¹ *Devarim* 9:7

⁶² *Yalkut Shimeoni Devarim* 32: 946

!st Rectification Of The Maror: Dipping Maror Into The Charoses 'To Remove Poison'

The first *tikkun* for the *maror* is when it is dipped into the *charoses*. The *Gemara* has an argument if the *charoses* is a *mitzvah* or not⁶³, and according to the opinion that it is not a *mitzvah*, the entire purpose of the *charoses* is to eliminate the “*kafa*” [poison] of the “*chazeres*” (the bitter herbs). Both *Rashi* and *Rashbam* translate ‘*kafa*’ as ‘*eres*’, poison.

Clearly, this ‘poison’ is an allusion to the ‘poison’ which the Serpent brought upon mankind, by enticing Adam and Chavah to commit the first sin. This is the ‘death’ contained in the *maror* [which was mentioned earlier]. The very conversation that the Serpent had with Adam and Chavah was already poison, for the *Gemara* says that “the ‘Slanderer’ [the Serpent] has no sensual enjoyment from his evil speech”⁶⁴; it seeks to poison others through speech. Speaking *lashon hora* (slander) about another is a way to attack another from afar, so *lashon hora* is like a poisonous arrow that one shoots at his victim⁶⁵. The Sages say explicitly that *lashon hora* is like shooting a poisonous arrow at another.⁶⁶

Thus, the *maror* needs to be dipped in the *charoses*, so that its poison is removed – and in this way, the ‘poison’ [contained in the bitterness of the *maror*] is rectified.

The Maror In The Charoses Also Rectifies Menstrual Impurity and Wasted Seed

The *Gemara* explains that *maror* is identified by a bitter taste, it has ‘*seraph*’ in it, and eating it causes the face to become ‘shamed’ [reddened]. The *Gemara* also says that if one doesn’t own one of the five bitter herbs listed as “*maror*”, he should use any bitter-tasting herb which has any of the above signs. *Rashi* explains that the ‘*seraph*’ in it is a white syrup which is has a milky-white color; and that the ‘shameful’ look on the face caused by the *maror* means that it is not green-colored like a leek.

It is brought in the *Arizal* in many places [with regards to menstrual blood] that there are five kinds of blood which are rendered pure, and five kinds of blood which are rendered impure. The five kinds of blood which are rendered impure are mentioned in the Talmud in *Tractate Niddah*⁶⁷, and these are parallel to the five times where the Torah mentions “bitterness”, which is the root concept of the *maror* that we are learning about here. Bitterness and menstrual blood are both aftereffects of the first sin; the Sages state that Chavah was punished for the sin with the blood of

⁶³ *Pesachim* 115b

⁶⁴ *Arechin* 15b

⁶⁵ *Yirmiyahu* 9:7

⁶⁶ *Beraishis Rabbah* 98:19

⁶⁷ *Niddah* 19a

menstruation.⁶⁸ There are also five kinds of blood that do not render one impure. The *Gemara* says that the blood produced from child labor turns into a black color, which then becomes milk⁶⁹, for an infant to nurse from. Then the milk returns to its original state (blood) when it turns into blood inside the infant's body, and it becomes absorbed inside the infant's body as purified blood, which gives energy to the infant.⁷⁰

Maror is rectified in the same way that "impure blood" of menstruation becomes rectified and purified, for the *seraph* contained in the *maror* is a milky-white color. A second condition for *maror* is that it is not green like a leek. The Hebrew word for "green", "*yaruk*", is similar to the word "*yerek*", herb. This has the same letters as the word "*keri*" (wasted seed). As is well-known, after the sin, Adam separated from Chavah for 130 years, and during those years of separation, there were drops of *keri* that exited his body; the purpose of the descent to the Egyptian exile was to rectify this spiritual damage. This rectification process is alluded to in the second condition needed for *maror*.

Until now we explained the first rectification of the *maror*, the fact that it is dipped into the *charoses*. There are additional hints as well of how the identifying signs of the *maror* share a parallel to menstrual blood and wasted seed.

The Second Rectification of the Maror: Chewing The Maror – Tasting The Bitterness

Now we will explain the second rectification for the *maror*, which is: through chewing the *maror*.

One does not fulfill the requirement of *maror* if he swallows it without chewing it, because he hasn't tasted the bitterness of the *maror*.⁷¹ The Sages state, "The way of people is to use something sweet in order to heal something bitter, but HaKadosh Baruch Hu heals something bitter through something bitter – as Hashem commanded Moshe to do in *Marah*.⁷²

In Summary of the Two Rectifications for Maror

Thus we find two different rectifications for the *maror*:

(1) Rectifying its bitterness through "sweetness" - which we do through dipping the *maror* into the *charoses*, for the *charoses* is a sweet mixture of wine, apples, and almonds⁷³ [this is the lower

⁶⁸ *Eruvin* 100b

⁶⁹ *Bechoros* 6b

⁷⁰ *Arizal: Shaar HaKavanos, Pesach* 9

⁷¹ *Pesachim* 115b

⁷² *Mechilta Beshalach, "Vayisa", 1*

⁷³ *Pesachim* 116a

form of rectification of the *maror*, for it represents the human understanding of rectification, to heal bitterness through “sweetness”],

(2) Rectifying the bitterness through “bitterness” – through chewing the *maror* in our mouth, which allows us to taste the bitterness [this is the higher rectification of the *maror*, for it represents Hashem’s way of rectification, which is to heal “bitterness” through “bitterness”].

It is simple to understand the first form of rectification, to heal bitterness through sweetness. It is only logical that bitterness is healed by sweetness. What we need to understand is the second form of rectification: how “bitterness” can rectify “bitterness”.

A Disagreement About The Identity Of Maror

The *Gemara* brings that Ravina found Rav Acha bar Rava looking for *maror*. Rashi explains that Rav Acha bar Rava wanted to fulfill the requirement of *maror* through the most bitter-tasting herb described the Sages, which is called “*maror*”; others explain that he was searching for an herb that tasted bitterer than *maror*. Ravina said to him, “Why are you looking for a bitter herb? We are taught in the Mishnah that *maror* is *chazeres* [romaine lettuce]”. The *Gemara* then brings proof that one fulfills the requirement of *maror* through *chazeres*, and in the end, Rav Acha bar Rava retracted his search for a bitter herb.⁷⁴

The *Gemara* then identifies *chazeres* as “*chasah*” [romaine lettuce], for it is a remembrance to how Hashem was “*chas*” (compassionate) on our ancestors in Egypt. The *Gemara* continues that “bitterness” in Egypt is like *maror* \ *chazeres*, which starts out tasting ‘soft’ and ends with a ‘hard’ taste. The *Talmud Yerushalmi* has a slightly different terminology: it starts out with a “sweet” taste and it ends with a “bitter” taste.⁷⁵ In other words, the *chazeres* begins with a sweet taste, which is “soft”, and it ends with a bitter taste, which is “hard”.

Chazeres, which is *chasa*, is identified by what we call today as ‘*chasa*’, [romaine lettuce], which has sweet-tasting leaves, and a spine that tastes bitter, which comes at the end of its consumption.⁷⁶ The *Beis Yosef* and the *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* both rule that we fulfill the requirement of *maror* by eating the leaves [of the romaine lettuce]⁷⁷ – in spite of the fact that the leaves are not bitter at all. However, the *Ridvaz*⁷⁸ disagreed entirely with identifying *maror* as romaine lettuce, for *maror* must be bitter-tasting, unlike romaine lettuce, which has a sweet taste to it. The *Chazon Ish*⁷⁹ takes a

⁷⁴ *Pesachim* 39a

⁷⁵ *Talmud Yerushalmi Pesachim* 18a

⁷⁶ *Mishnah Berurah* 473: 34, in the name of Chavas Yair and Chacham Tzvi

⁷⁷ *Beis Yosef: Orach Chaim* 473; *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* 473:30

⁷⁸ *Ridvaz: Talmud Yerushalmi: Berachos* 43a

⁷⁹ *Chazon Ish Orach Chaim* 124 (*Pesachim* 39a)

similar approach, and is of the view that one must not eat the leaves, and he should only eat the spine, after he has begun to taste its bitterness. The *Mishnah Berurah* writes *maror* was also fulfilled with *tamcha*, horseradish, which is also called *chrein*; for in many countries they weren't able to obtain any other bitter herbs.⁸⁰

Two Aspects of Maror: Sweetness and Bitterness

Thus, there are two aspects to rectifying *maror*. On one hand, its “bitterness” is rectified through “sweetness”. This is reflected in the *halachah* that it is preferable to use *chazeres\chasa* (romaine lettuce) for *maror*, which begins with a sweet taste.⁸¹ On the other hand, the *maror* is also chewed, which is the second rectification of the *maror* - rectifying bitterness through bitterness, which is Hashem's way of rectification. For this reason, Rav Acha bar Rava wanted to use only the most bitter-tasting herb for *maror* (practically speaking, we do not do this, and our requirement is to follow only the first opinion [which is to use an herb that begins with a sweet taste and ends bitter]). It is clear, however, that this aspect of the rectification for *maror* is not so that something bitter will be made into something even bitterer. Rather, it is just that there are two different kinds of bitterness [as will be explained].

First, as an introduction, we need to explain the depth that is behind “bitterness”.

Physical Bitterness (Death) and Inner Bitterness (Jealousy)

At the death of Agag, it was said, “*I have removed this bitterness of death.*”⁸² In Koheles it is written, “*I have found woman to be bitterer than death.*”⁸³ Thus, death is a form of bitterness, and “woman” is worse than death; what kind of ‘woman’ is this referring to? Rashi explains that the term “woman” here is an allegory for heresy. Let us understand the depth of this matter.

There is a verse that says, “*The rotting of the bones, is jealousy.*”⁸⁴ From here we can see that there are two forms of death. There is the simple kind of death, which is when the soul departs from the body, and the body is then buried in the grave. There is also a kind of ‘death’ which destroys the body from within: jealousy, which causes “rotting of the bones.” Jealousy causes the bones to rot, placing the body in a situation where it is devoid of the soul.

⁸⁰ *Mishnah Berurah* 473: 36

⁸¹ (Even according to the *Chazon Ish* that romaine lettuce does contain some bitterness, it is still mainly sweet).

⁸² *Shmuel I*: 15:32

⁸³ *Koheles* 7:26

⁸⁴ *Mishlei* 14:30

Death came as a result from the sin of Adam, which began with jealousy. The Sages say that Adam in Gan Eden was being served meat and wine by the angels, and the Serpent watched all of this taking place and he saw all of the honor that Adam was receiving, and it grew jealous.⁸⁵ This motivated the Serpent to entice Chavah to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas*, which was “*desirous to the eyes*.” Thus, jealousy is the root evil trait, and lustful desire is the branch that stemmed from it.

So there are two kinds of bitterness, which are the two kinds of death. One of them is the punishment of death that came to mankind as a result of eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, which was lustful desire. Another bitterness\death that came to mankind was a result of the jealousy that led to the first sin - “*rotting of the bones, is jealousy*.” The actual sin was a lustful desire, but its deeper root came about through jealousy.

Rectifying Bitterness Through Bitterness: Rectifying Jealousy

Earlier we mentioned that *chazeres* is *chasa*, which starts out soft\sweet and ends with a hard\bitter taste. This also bears a similarity to the *Eitz HaDaas*, which was a grapevine, according to one of the opinions in the Sages; a grape is soft on the outside and it contains hard seeds on its inside [hence it starts with a soft taste and ends with a hard taste]. Eating of the *Eitz HaDaas* was in the category of lustful desire, for its grapes were sweet-tasting. The punishment for partaking of this lustful desire was death, which is a form of “bitterness”. How is this lustful desire rectified? When it is returned to sweetness.

This is the deeper reason of why there is wine in the *charoses*. The sin of Adam and Chavah began with sweet-tasting grapes, which ended in bitterness, for it caused death to come to the world [and it is rectified when we return this bitterness to sweetness, by dipping the *maror* into the sweet-tasting *charoses*]. All of that pertains to the aspect of lustful desire that was contained in the sin, where man was lulled after sweetness.

On the other hand, however, the *Mechilta*⁸⁶ teaches that the most bitter-tasting tree is the olive tree, which Moshe sweetened the water in Marah with, according to one opinion in the Sages. The olive itself is also bitter-tasting, and even after it is prepared for consumption, it still cannot be sweetened. It is ‘rectified’ through extracting its oil, when it is crushed. One of the herbs that were crushed for the *Ketores* was *mor-dror*⁸⁷ [myrrh], a bitter-tasting herb. The Midrash⁸⁸ compares Avraham Avinu to *mor-dror*: just as *mor-dror* is called “the head of all the spices”, so is Avraham Avinu “the head of all *tzaddikim*” ...and just as anyone who gathers this myrrh will have bitter

⁸⁵ *Sanhedrin* 59b

⁸⁶ *Mechilta Beshalach* “*Vayisa*” 1

⁸⁷ *Shemos* 30:23; see *Ramban ibid*

⁸⁸ *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:59

hands, so did Avraham embitter himself and endure suffering.” Avraham Avinu suffered in his life, and this “bitterness” is what rectified “bitterness”; it rectified the jealousy [of the Serpent]. Later we will explain this matter.

“Bitterness” And “Jealousy” In The Torah

Let us reflect on where the concept of “bitterness” is mentioned in the Torah, in order to understand the matter of how “bitterness is rectified through bitterness”.

The first time that the Torah mentions “bitterness” is with regards to Esav. Yaakov used “trickery” to procure the blessings from Yitzchok so that they wouldn’t go to Esav, which the verse calls “*mirmah*”, similar to the word “*merirus*”, bitterness. When Esav realized that the blessings had been given to Yaakov, the verse says: “And he cried out a great and very bitter scream, and he said to his father, “Bless me also, my father.” Esav didn’t just want the blessing; he said “bless me, also”. The word ‘also’ is a hint to his jealousy, which is the root of all ‘bitterness’.

Yaakov and Esav had already been fighting before birth, of who will inherit This World and the Next World. This is the root kind of “jealousy” of the world.

The second time in the Torah where jealousy makes an appearance is by the brothers and Yosef, when the brothers were jealous about Yosef’s dreams. Later, when Yaakov gave the blessings to his sons, he cursed their jealousy. Although Yosef was punished with being ensnared by Potifar’s wife, for indirectly causing his brothers to be jealous of him - which showed that the brothers were justified in their jealousy towards Yosef and that Yosef was getting what he deserved - still, it was the jealousy of the brothers which fueled the jealousy further, and for this they are blamed for their jealousy.

The word “*Yosef*” has the same *gematria* as the word “*kinah*” (jealousy); the bitterness which the brothers felt towards him was due to their jealousy.

The bitterness of Esav towards Yaakov, and the bitterness of the brothers towards Yosef, has not yet been rectified. Esav will be judged in the future⁸⁹. As for the jealousy of the brothers towards Yosef, the Ten Martyrs were killed in order to rectify their sin of jealousy, and in spite of this, the rectification is still not complete yet.⁹⁰

Later, the Torah uses the term “bitterness” with regards to the bondage in Egypt. “*And they embittered their lives, with difficult labor, with mortar and bricks.*”⁹¹ The Jewish people were

⁸⁹ *Ovadyah 1:21*

⁹⁰ *Midrash Mishlei 1:13*

⁹¹ *Shemos 1:14*

‘embittered’ in Egypt. We also know that Miriam spoke disparaging words about Moshe [because deep down she was jealous of his high spiritual level]; let us analyze this.

When the verse says that “*they embittered their lives*”, the *Tosafos* says that this is an allusion to the birth of Miriam, who was born at that time, thus she is called “Miriam”, from the word *merirus*, “bitter.” Miriam spoke disparage about Moshe to Aharon, when she noticed that Moshe had separated from Tziporah. She was really jealous of Moshe, for she said to Aharon, “*Does Hashem only speak with Moshe? He also speaks with us.*” Here is where we see that Miriam had *merirus*, bitterness, for she was jealous of Moshe’s level.

Another place in the Torah where “bitterness” is mentioned is with regards to the *sotah*, the wayward wife who is suspected of adultery, who must drink the “bitter waters”. She must drink these waters due to the “jealousy” that her husband has towards the man whom she was seen acting improper with.

Regarding the episode of the “Bitter Waters” at Marah, the Zohar explains that all of the husbands suspected their wives of adultery in Egypt, thus Hashem commanded Moshe to make all of them drink, both the men and the women, the bitter waters.⁹² Hashem commanded Moshe to take a piece of wood with Hashem’s Name on it, and to throw it into the water, which sweetened the water for them to drink.⁹³ Thus the people “passed a test” in Marah, for they had been cleansed of any suspicion of adultery from Egypt. The test in Marah therefore stemmed from their servitude in Egypt, which had come about through jealousy, for the Egyptians were jealous of the growing population of the Jewish people and thereby wished to get rid of them.

The Three Kinds of Bitterness: Lustful Desire, Jealousy of Another, and Jealous of Hashem

As we explained, the inner implication of “bitterness” is linked with *kinah*, jealousy, as opposed to *taavah*, lustful desire. We began to explain that the root of jealousy began with the Serpent. Chazal explain that the Serpent became jealous of Adam and Chavah when it saw them in marital relations, which in turn caused it to have a lustful desire for Chavah.⁹⁴

There was also another kind of jealousy that the Serpent had, which we mentioned earlier: it was jealous of the honor that was being accorded to Adam, when it saw that Adam was enjoying a feast of meat and wine prepared by the angels.

There was also a third kind of jealousy that it had, which represents the depth of its jealousy: it wanted to be like G-d. The Serpent told Chavah, “*You can become like G-d, and know of good and*

⁹² Zohar Naso 124b

⁹³ Targum Yehonasan Beshalach 15:25

⁹⁴ Beraishis Rabbah 18:6, brought in Rashi

evil.” Here we see that the Serpent was not only desirous of Chavah, and not only was it jealous of Adam – it was jealous of Hashem, so to speak. It was angry that there is only one Creator of the world; it wanted to calm its jealousy that it had towards Hashem, Who is One and Whom there is none other like. It wanted to be comparable to Hashem, to “be like G-d”, and that is why it said to Chavah that “Just as Hashem creates worlds, so can you create worlds.”⁹⁵

The “bitterness” that came to Creation is rooted in the jealousy of the Serpent towards Hashem. All “bitterness” therefore comes from the “Serpent” which has become absorbed into man’s bloodstream ever since the first sin.

Thus, there are several different kind of “bitterness”. One kind of bitterness came about as a result of lustful desire. This kind of bitterness is reflected in the statement that “A person does not leave the world with half of his desires fulfilled.” A second kind of bitterness is jealousy; earlier we brought the verse “*And I have found woman to be worse than death*”, and the connection between woman and death\bitterness is because woman is always jealous that she is not the same level as man, who is more connected to his Root.⁹⁶ The third kind of bitterness is another kind of jealousy: when a created being is jealous that it is not the Creator, so to speak.

The Jealousy of the Lower Waters Towards The Upper Waters

There is an amazing insight of the *Ohr HaChaim*⁹⁷, which was surely said through *ruach hakodesh* (the holy spirit), as follows.

The *Gemara* says that when preparing the bitter waters for the *sotah* to drink, a bitter substance was placed into the water, to give it a bitter taste.⁹⁸ However, the *Yalkut Shimeoni*⁹⁹ brings that it was the paper with an inscription of Hashem’s Name on it which was placed into the water, which made it bitter. The *Ohr HaChaim* explains this as follows:

“It is known from the inner dimension of Torah that every creation yearns and desires to connect to its Creator. The lower waters wept and were bitter over the fact that it was placed at a greater distance from Hashem¹⁰⁰....Hashem desired to place His dwelling on the lower realms¹⁰¹, but the sins of man prevent this. When He will be able to place His dwelling on the lower realms

⁹⁵ *Tanchuma, parshas Tazria, 9*

⁹⁶ *Editor’s Note: It seems that this was Miriam’s jealousy towards Moshe.*

⁹⁷ *Ohr HaChaim, parshas Naso, 5:15*

⁹⁸ *Sotah 20a*

⁹⁹ *Yalkut Shimeoni Bamidbar 5:23*

¹⁰⁰ *Beraishis Rabbah 5:4*

¹⁰¹ *Tanchuma, parshas Naso, 16*

[in the future], there will be no need for Him to dwell above, and the lower waters will no longer need to cry and be jealous that it is not higher.

“When the *sotah* sins, this prevents the *Shechinah* on High from dwelling below. Thus when she drinks, the water feels her sin, and it feels that she [in her sin] has caused it to become distanced from the Creator [for her sins bring destruction to Creation], and its pain is awakened, so it cries. Its bitterness is awakened, and this itself is what causes her stomach to explode and her thigh to fall.”

In other words, the waters are always bitter, for they have been made into the “lower waters” of this world, where they cannot be as close to Hashem.¹⁰² Through the sin of a *sotah*, the *Shechinah* is distanced from this world, and this awakens the bitterness of the lower waters, who are sad that they have become distanced from Hashem. This is the ‘bitterness’ contained in ‘the bitter waters’ that the *sotah* drinks, and this ‘bitterness’ is what kills her [if she is guilty of sin].

The depth of the above words of the *Ohr HaChaim* is not simply that the lower waters are jealous of the upper waters; it is not that they want to be closer to Hashem. Rather, the lower waters have a desire to be *miskalel* (to integrate) with the King, so to speak - meaning, they want to be recognized as the ‘first’ in Creation.¹⁰³

Holy Jealousy: The Desire To Integrate With Hashem

How, indeed, can a person reach *hiskalelus* (integration) in the Creator?

As we have seen, there is an evil side to jealousy, which is the “rotting of the bones, is jealousy”, which is “bitterer than death”, but there is also a holy jealousy. Hashem is called “*Keil Kanei v’Nokem*,” He is an “Almighty Who is zealous and vengeful”. When one returns Creation to the *Ein Sof* (Infinite) of Hashem where it all came from, this is the inner and holy root that is behind the ‘jealousy’ a created being can have towards Hashem.

There is a hint to this from the words of the Sages, that when the dove came back to Noach with an olive leaf, the dove was teaching Noach a lesson, that it prefers to be kept alive through bitter food, where it will be sustained by Hashem, rather than eat sweet foods that are prepared by people.¹⁰⁴ A person sweetens bitterness through sweetening it, but the Creator ‘sweetens’ bitterness

102 *Tikkunei HaZohar* 19b

103 Editor’s Note: This seems to be the concept of “*hiskalelus*” (integrating with the Creator) on the side of evil, for it is not a desire to integrate with Hashem for the purpose of the closeness, but for the purpose of being recognized by all of Creation as the most important. This is also seems to be the evil desire for *kavod* (honor), which was manifest in the Serpent; we also find this with regards to Amalek, who is called “*raishis*”, “the first”, for Amalek wants to be recognized by Creation as the most honored, and therefore they are at war with Hashem, Who is the true First (and with Hashem’s chosen people, the Jewish nation, who are also called the First).

104 *Eruvin* 18b

through bitterness. The olive is bitter, and it is fit for consumption only after it has been crushed, whereupon its bitter taste is removed [when its oil is extracted]. This shows us that the way to rectify “bitterness” which results from lustful desire is through “bitterness” – just as the olive must be crushed in order for it to be fit for consumption.

However, that only concerns bitterness that comes from lustful desire, which came after the sin. The root of the sin began with jealousy, and such “bitterness” is only rectified **through being nullified**. Hashem desires the Jewish people even though they are “small”¹⁰⁵ – and the depth of this is that Hashem desires a Jew especially when he makes himself “small”, when he nullifies himself totally, and then he becomes integrated with the Creator. This is how “bitterness” is rectified through “bitterness.” This was the bitterness that Avraham Avinu had to go through, represented by the spice of myrrh which he is compared to. This is the rectification of the *maror* which is achieved through chewing the *maror*, which essentially nullifies the *maror*. This nullification rectifies jealousy, and it represents the holy jealousy [a desire to integrate with Hashem, which is achieved through self-nullification].

The sin of man was a lustful desire, but the jealousy itself which brought about this desire was not a sin. **Jealousy is rather the very nature that Hashem has designed man with. It is upon a person to use jealousy for holiness, by being ‘jealous’ of the Creator, so to speak – to desire to integrate one’s being with Him, and, through this yearning, to become integrated with the Creator.**

A Deeper Understanding

Going deeper, there are two root sins in Creation. The sin of Adam was a lustful desire, which caused death to come upon mankind. But there was an earlier sin: there were many “kings of Edom” who were all destroyed by Hashem (these kings are mentioned in *Parshas Vayishlach*¹⁰⁶), for they each said, “I will rule.”¹⁰⁷ This was jealousy, and it was the root of all sin.

Holy jealousy is to be jealous of the Creator. It causes one to feel bitter that he is not the Creator – in other words, a bitterness that one isn’t yet integrated with the Creator. This is the depth of the lesson that the dove conveyed to Noach, that it prefers to be sustained through bitterness – it prefers that “bitterness” should be rectified through “bitterness”, which causes one to feel nullified (*bittul*) to Hashem, which in turn can lead one towards integration (*hiskalelus*)

¹⁰⁵ Devarim 7:7

¹⁰⁶ Beraishis 36:31

¹⁰⁷ This is discussed in many Chassidic works; see *Me’ohr Einayim parshas Vayeitzei*

with Hashem. (As a side note, we should know that the traits of jealousy, conceit and anger all bear the same root.¹⁰⁸)

Lustful Desire Vs. Jealousy

When mankind was cursed with death ever since the sin of Adam, this was not simply a death sentence upon Adam; rather, it meant that death would be a slow, drawn-out process.

Until the *Avos*, death happened suddenly, without any warning. The *Midrash* explains that Avraham asked for death to be preceded by aging, Yitzchok asked that death be preceded by suffering, and Yaakov asked that death be preceded by illness.¹⁰⁹ Yaakov *Avinu's* beauty was a resemblance of Adam HaRishon's beauty¹¹⁰, so just as Yaakov revealed illness to the world, so was there a degree of illness by Adam, in the sense that death is called "illness". Death is really a slow process, for even when Adam was cursed with death, he did not die that day. Rather, every day in a person's life is part of the long, drawn-out process of death.

The slow process of death can be compared to when a person has a lust for something; a desire slowly kills a person, with the more he attaches himself to it. "He who wants a hundred, wants two hundred."¹¹¹ A person desires to connect more and more to his desire, and the more he connects himself to desire, the more 'dead' he becomes. Being half-dead is the same as being dead entirely.¹¹²

Thus, Yaakov *Avinu* asked that illness should precede death, which slows down the process of death. This resembles lustful desire, which is a slow and drawn-out process of "death" for a person.

Jealousy, however, is a rapid process. Its destruction is instant. Haman became enraged when Mordechai didn't bow to him. This was anger, and it is brought in our Sages that anger stems from jealousy.¹¹³ Haman said, "All of this is not worth anything to me" – this realization did not come upon him slowly. It was a very quick reaction, and it was a destructive attitude of "Either everything, or nothing."

Thus, desire is a slow process that eventually causes destruction, whereas jealousy is quickly destructive. **The holy use of jealousy, the desire to integrate with the Creator, is also a quick "destruction" [in the positive sense]: it is a complete self-nullification, where man becomes completely integrated with the Infinite.**

¹⁰⁸ *Bamidbar Rabbah* 9:11

¹⁰⁹ *Beraishis Rabbah* 65:9

¹¹⁰ *Bava Metzia* 84a

¹¹¹ *Koheles Rabbah* 1:13

¹¹² *Bava Kamma* 65a

¹¹³ *Rashi in Iyov* 5:2

From The Bitterness of Gehinnom Comes Self-Nullification & Integration With The Creator

Hashem's Reality is broken down into smaller amounts when it comes to the experience of created beings and people. "A day of Hashem lasts 1000 years"; in other words, whatever is "one" for Hashem becomes "a thousand" for a person. **Jealousy, at its root, comes from the "oneness" of Hashem, where there is the all-inclusive unity (*achdus*).** Desires, however, are rooted in disparity, where there is no unity; where there are a myriad of details.

In the future era of *Moshiach*, the "holy jealousy" will be revealed, in which the entire Jewish people will feel a burning love for Hashem. It will be a state of nullification to the Creator. The trait of jealousy that exists in our current era, however, leads a person towards a sense of emptiness. When used for evil, jealousy brings a person into a negative, empty state. The Zohar says that "Marah (which means bitterness) is *Gehinnom*."¹¹⁴ The trait of lustful desire also leads a person into a negative, empty place. But the holy kind of emptiness that a person can reach, through "holy jealousy", is when the jealousy is causing a person to feel the bitterness that is as bitter as *Gehinnom*, and from this emptiness, a person is led to nullify his existence to the Creator, and to become integrated in Him.

When a person is having true *merirus* (bitterness) - which is parallel to the bitterness felt in *Gehinnom* - he can then reach a state of "death" and connect to the One Who rules the world. The word *emes*, truth, is from the letters "*aleph meis*", "one, death", an allusion to how "death" [self-nullification] enables one to reach the "*Aleph*", the One Ruler, Hashem. The word "*mar*", bitter, has the same *gematria* as the word "*Amalek*", who "recognizes His master and intends to rebel against Him." On the other side, on the side of holiness, is the one who recognizes his Creator and he chooses to integrate with Him.

This is the depth of the matter of how "bitterness" that rectifies "bitterness".

In Conclusion

Thus, the complete rectification of "bitterness" is not through dipping the *maror* into the *charoses*, which rectified bitterness with sweetness; but through chewing it with one's teeth - rectifying the bitterness through "bitterness".

The depth of rectifying the "bitterness" of the *maror* is the "holy jealousy", to have a burning love for Hashem, like a rising flame, and to become integrated with the Creator.

2.12 | Shvii Shel Pesach – Self-Nullification At The Sea

Lot [the nephew of Avraham *Avinu*] was saved from the destruction of Sodom only in the merit of Avraham *Avinu* (*Midrash Tanchuma: Vayeira: 9*). This doesn't simply mean that Avraham *Avinu*'s merits saved Lot. Rather, this statement means that the inner recesses of Lot were infused with the inner traits of Avraham *Avinu* who had taught him. It was this inner quality which saved Lot from destruction. What exactly was this inner quality? It was the *mesirus nefesh*, the self-sacrifice which Avraham had in practicing kindness to guests, which was mirrored by the self-sacrifice which Lot showed when he was willing to house guests in Sodom. *Mesirus nefesh* was the only thing which could save him from the immorality [and destruction] of Sodom.

We are living in a generation today which is steeped in *tum'ah* (defilement). The only way to be saved from the strange, unwanted “winds” of immorality that blow through the world is, by having *mesirus nefesh* (to be willing to give up what we want, in order to do Hashem's will). If a person today does not have *mesirus nefesh*, simply speaking, in order to do Hashem's will, he cannot survive our generation. The obligation that is upon us in our times is: to have total *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

Before the event of *kerias Yam Suf* (the splitting of the sea) when the Egyptians were chasing the Jewish people, the Torah says, “*And Hashem said to Moshe, why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the children of Yisrael and journey on.*” Rashi explains that that Moshe was *davening*, and Hashem said to him, “Now is not the time to be lengthy in prayer, when the Jewish people are in a predicament.” This begs a well-known question: If not now, when? Don't the Sages always teach that when a person is found in a predicament, he should grab onto the “art of the forefathers” which we have in our hands, and *daven* to Hashem? Why is it that when they came to the sea, their *avodah* was precisely not to *daven*?!

When a person is *davening*, it is because he wants a certain thing. He may want one thing, or more than one thing, to happen. He is trying to attain his *ratzon* (will), through praying to Hashem to get it. But at the sea, the people had the *avodah* to transcend any of their personal *ratzon*, and to arrive at total self-nullification (*bittul*), of having no personal *ratzon* at all. At the sea, their *avodah*

was to come to the recognition that “I only want what Hashem wants. If Hashem’s will is for me to live, then I want to live. If Hashem wills the opposite, then that is my will also.”

When the Jewish people were leaving Egypt, they had a will to leave it: “*They cried out, and their prayers arose to G-d from all of their difficult labor, and Hashem heard their groans.*” But now when they were standing in front of the sea, they had a loftier *avodah* to do. Now their *avodah* was to have absolute *mesirus nefesh*: to be willing to give up their souls entirely for Hashem, and to accept the will of Hashem wholeheartedly. When that is the case, there is no gain in *davening*, and it would only be detrimental to do so.

2.13 | Vignettes on the Hagaddah¹¹⁵

בלבבי-פסח עמ' רלד – "הא לחמא עניא"

It is well-known that there are several questions on this: how can we say כל דכפין ייתי ויכול, that everyone should come and eat, if we are eating in our homes and no one can hear us? Why don't we instead say this in *shul*, when others will be able to hear us? Also, how can we say ויפסח כל דכפין ייתי - to invite others to come eat the *korbon pesach* - when nowadays we do not have the *korbon pesach*?

The explanation of the matter is based on the concept that everything contains an “inner light” (*ohr pnimi*) as well as a “container” (*kli*) to hold onto the “inner light”. The *korbon pesach* is the “container” for the inner spiritual light, whereas the inner spiritual light itself is the pure spirituality that becomes absorbed by the soul. Now that we are missing the *korbon pesach*, we are missing the “container”. But one who purifies himself is able to draw upon the spiritual light of the *korbon pesach*.

That is also the way to understand the next words we say here, כל דצריך ייתי ויכול, “All those who need, should come and eat”. We are referring to a spiritual kind of ‘eating’: a heavenly spiritual light which settles upon this evening. Hence, הא לחמא עניא is not an invitation for others to dine in our homes in the simple sense [but an invitation for a spiritual meal]. Therefore, even in our own times, it is possible for us to partake of the *korbon pesach* [on a spiritual level].

בלבבי-פסח עמ' רכא – "הא לחמא עניא"

What is the connection between the first part, הא לחמא עניא, where we declare an invitation to the poor to come eat at our seder, with the last words, השתא הכא לשנה הבא בארעא דישראל, where we declare that next year we will be in Yerushalayim?

The Sages state that Hashem showed Moshe all of the spiritual treasures in Heaven and who would merit them. Finally, Hashem Moshe the “*otzar shel matnas chinam*”, the “treasury of free gifts”, for those who do not have enough merits and who are thus in need of receiving “free gifts” from Heaven. Based upon this, we can understand that when we say הא לחמא עניא, on a deeper level,

¹¹⁵ ספר בלבבי משכן אבנה פסח "רמזים על הגדה של פסח" עמ' רכא- רלו

we are really saying that even the bread we own is in the category of a “poor man, who has nothing of his own”, one who receives everything not as a result of his actions [and is entirely dependent on others for sustenance]. A poor man understands well that he should give to others, because he feels that he is not any more deserving than others.

This understanding leads us to say **לשנה הבא**, that next year we will be in Yerushalayim, in the same way that Hashem will grant us the *otzar shel matnas chinam*, the “treasury of free gifts”, and redeem us from exile. We are not worthy of Redemption due to any of our actions - we will only receive the Redemption due to the “treasury of free gifts” which Hashem bestows upon even the undeserving.

בלבבי-פסח עמ' רכא – "מעשה בר"א וכו'"

When these Sages were discussing the wondrous events that Hashem wrought on the night of Pesach, they came to a very high level of love (*ahavah*) for Hashem. At that time, they were functioning on a level of *ahavah* (love), as opposed to *yirah* (fear). That is why they forgot that it was time to recite the *Shema*, which is all about accepting the yoke of Heaven, which is a form of *yirah* (fear) that contradicted their *ahavah* which they felt for Hashem at this time. Their students, however, were in the midst of observing the *halachah* that “it is prohibited to lean in front of a master (Torah mentor)”, so they were constantly in a state of *yirah*, and that is how they were able to remind themselves that it came the time to recite *Shema* and accept the yoke of Heaven.

בלבבי-פסח עמ' רכז – "ענין שמתו רשעים"

The *rasha* (wicked son), had he remained in Egypt, would not have merited redemption. The Sages state that four-fifths of the Jewish people at the time were *reshaim* (in the category of wicked), who all perished during the plague of darkness. Perhaps their deaths were not caused by their wickedness, but as a kindness of Hashem to them so that they wouldn't become even worse and thereby fall into the “50th level of defilement” (the *shaar hanun d'tumah*), which is impossible to be redeemed from.

בלבבי-פסח עמ' רכה – "חכם מה הוא אומר"

The *chacham* (wise son) is asking about the laws that Hashem has commanded us with. What he is really asking is, "What is the purpose of the *mitzvos*?" He really has a deeper question. What is bothering him is that a person does a *mitzvah* and a moment later, the action can no longer be seen. Therefore, he is asking, what is the purpose of doing the *mitzvos*? We answer him that there is a halachah that nothing is eaten after the *afikoman*. After the *afikoman*, nothing may be eaten because the taste of the *mitzvos* should linger for a long time in one's mouth. Meaning, we need to let the good taste that we receive from doing the *mitzvah* to linger with us long after we have done the *mitzvah*.

בלבבי-פסח עמ' רלג – "בקש לעקור את הכל"

Lavan tried to uproot the entire Jewish people. How do we see this? By exchanging Leah for Rachel in marriage to Yaakov Avinu, he was tampering with the awesome *kedushah* (holiness) of Yaakov Avinu. When Yaakov Avinu thought he was marrying Rachel, he was really marrying Leah, and this was a degree of improper thoughts, for he was thinking of a different woman at the time of the union. Hence, Lavan's devious scheme was actually an attempt to cause some damage to the *kedushah* of Yaakov and hence the entire *kedushah* of the Jewish people. In that way, Lavan was trying to uproot the entire Jewish people.

בלבבי-פסח עמ' רלד – "ברוך המקום ברוך הוא"

Why do we say twice ברוך הוא, that Hashem is blessed? The understanding of this is because the word הוא ("hu") is a term of concealment, for it is in the third-person. That is why HaKadosh Baruch Hu is always called הוא, "Hu", in the third-person, and not in the first-person, for it is impossible to comprehend the essence of His infiniteness (the *EinSof*). At the giving of the Torah, the Sages state that Hashem tore open all the heavens and showed everyone *Ain Od Milvado*, that there is nothing besides for Him. So there may have been room for people to make the mistake, *chas v'shalom*, that after the Torah was given to the Jewish people and they beheld the revelation of *Ain Od Milvado*, that perhaps they had indeed comprehended the very essence of His infiniteness (the *EinSof*). That is why the Hagaddah emphasizes, ברוך הוא, the word "Hu", implying that even after the people stood at Sinai and they witnessed the revelations, Hashem still remains to us as

“*Hu*”, concealed. For, ultimately, the essence of His infiniteness cannot be comprehended by anyone [even we witnessed the revelation of “*Ain Od Milvado*”].

בלבבי-פסח עמ' רכג – "עד שבאו תלמידיהם"

The Sages perceived such a high level of spiritual illumination on the night of Pesach that the evening appeared as bright as daytime. Therefore, they did not sense that the daytime had now arrived. This is because it said of the night of Pesach that it is a “night which shines like the day.”

בלבבי-פסח עמ' רכח

The depth behind the *mitzvah* of the night of Pesach to tell over the story of the exodus to our children is, because Pharaoh decreed death on all Jewish baby boys, and therefore we have a corresponding *mitzvah* to tell Jewish boys about the exodus.

2:14 | Afikomen: Havaya and Emunah

Afikoman – The Hidden Light That Is Stored Away For The Future

When there was a *Beis HaMikdash*, we ate the *korbon pesach* after we were satisfied from the *Seder* meal. Now that we don't have the *Beis HaMikdash*, we eat the *afikoman*, a piece of *matzah*, in memory of the *korbon pesach*, at the end of *Seder* when we are satisfied and full.

One whole piece of *matzah* is broken into two pieces. The smaller piece remains on the *K'arah* (the *Seder* plate), and the larger piece of *matzah* is for put away for *Tzafun*, to be eaten as *afikoman*. The *afikoman* is called *Tzafun* because it is like the *ohr hatzafun*, the hidden light, which has been stored away for the *tzaddikim* in the future. On a similar note, the wine of the 4 cups is like the wine that has been squeezed from the grapes of the first days of creation (the *yayin ha-meshumar*), which has been stored away for the *tzaddikim* in the future.

Divided Matzah: The Division of Hashem's Name of Havayah¹¹⁶

Let us explore the depth behind the division of the *matzah* into two parts.

Matzah is from the word *matzah*, to fight, and this is because the *matzah* is broken up and divided into pieces, just as a fight creates division. But the word *matzah* is also from the word *metzius*, hinting to the One *Metzius*, the One Reality, Who is Hashem, Whom there is none other besides Him. That is the inner implication of the word *matzah*.

The *metzius* of Hashem is represented by Hashem's name of *havayah*, which is divided on some level. *Chazal* explain that the letter *heh* of Hashem's Name is broken up into 2 letters, the letter *daled* and the letter *vov*, and so is the *afikoman* divided into two parts. The letter *daled* of Hashem's name of *havayah* is represented by the smaller

¹¹⁶ (lit. "being"); the Tetragrammaton, G d's Divine Name of the four Hebrew letters yud-hei-vav-hei, expressing His transcendence of time and space

half of *matzah*, eaten at the beginning of the *Seder*, and this is because the letter *daled* hints to *dal*, a poor person, who has nothing of his own.

The beginning of the *Seder* focuses on the poor person, on inviting all the poor to the *Seder*, and on how the *matzah* is *lechem oni*, the poor man's food. The smaller half of *matzah* which is placed on the *K'arah* is the *lechem oni* aspect of the *matzah*. In contrast to this, the larger half of *matzah*, represented by the letter *vov* of Hashem's name of *havayah*, is stored away to be eaten for the end of the *Seder*, for it represents the *ohr hatzafun*, the light that is hidden away for the *tzaddikim*.

Matzah Reveals Havayah and Emunah

Going deeper, *matzah* is from the word *metzius*. We recognize the reality of Hashem through recognizing His *havayah*, through His name of *havayah*. There are four letters of Hashem's Name, and in the soul as well, the *havayah* of Hashem filters down into our soul. This is the deepest faculty of our soul, known as *havayah*. It is explained as *nitzotz Borei b'nivra*, "The spark of the Creator, within the created being," the part of our soul that recognizes Hashem Himself, so to speak. Hashem revealed His very *havayah* (His very reality) in Egypt, so to speak, when He said, "I, Hashem, am going out in Egypt." Hashem was revealing His very *havayah*, as it were, amidst depraved Egypt, to herald our redemption from Egypt.

Below the point of *havayah* (reality) is the point of *emunah* (belief), the power to believe in reality – the power to have *emunah* in Hashem. *Matzah* is called "food of faith". Thus, besides for being associated with *havayah*, the *matzah* is also associated with *emunah*. Thus, *matzah* is a portal to *emunah* since it reveals *emunah*.

Afikoman – The Emunah Revealed By The Matzah

Emunah in Hashem, revealed by the *matzah*, is particularly revealed by the kind of *matzah* that is the *afikoman*. The word *afikoman* is from the words *afi* and *mekoman*, and the word *afi* has the *gematria* of the name of *havayah* and the name of *adnus* together, and the word *mekoman* has the *gematria* of *Yam Suf*, alluding to the splitting of the sea which was on the seventh day of Pesach, where there was a revelation of *emunah*: "And they believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant." This insight is from

the *sefer Bris Kehunas Olam*. But the *emunah* that was shown at the *Yam Suf* is rooted in the *emunah* revealed by the *afikoman*.

The *matzah* is first divided and scattered into pieces, at the *Seder* meal. The word for “scattered” is *pizur*, equal numerically to 287, equal to the word *Pur* (the lots which Haman cast on *Purim*), which had 2 sides to it. Haman, who was Amalek, is the concept of *safek* (doubt), where there are 2 sides, 2 options, the opposite of the concept of *emunah* where there is only 1 option (the reality of Hashem). The Torah says that when Moshe’s hands were raised with *emunah* in Hashem, Amalek lost its power, because *emunah* is the power that counters Amalek.

Chazal state “Who is wise? One who can see what will happen.” A wise person can see the end already at the beginning. At the beginning of the *Hagaddah*, we speak about the questions of the 4 sons and what we answer them. What do we tell the wise son? We tell him about the *afikoman*- that we don’t eat anything after the *afikoman*. We are telling him at the beginning of the *Seder* about the end of the *Seder*, which is the *afikoman*. Why is this so important? The *afikoman* is not simply about eating the other and bigger half that was put away for the end of the *Seder*. Rather, the *afikoman* is the other half of the whole- it completes the first act of eating at the beginning of the *Seder*. In other words, the *afikoman* shows us that what seemed at the beginning of the night as just a broken piece of *matzah* was actually part of a greater whole. The *afikoman* connects together the two pieces of *matzah* into one act of eating, revealing how both pieces of *matzah* are part of one *havayah*, two halves of the same whole.

Eating the *afikoman* is the part of the *Seder* that is called *Tzafun*, which means hidden. This is not simply because the *afikoman* was hidden for the end of the *Seder*, but because the *afikoman* represents the *ohr hatzafun*, the hidden light that is stored away for the *tzaddikim* in the future. At the end of the night of Pesach, this hidden light is shining. The hidden light is also shining strongly during the End of Days, where “the *tzaddik* shall live by his *emunah*,” as the *navi* Habakkuk said (*Gemara Makkos 24a*). The prophet said that the inner essence behind the *matzah*: is all about revealing *emunah*. For when we are at the end (and when we are in the final generations), that is precisely where we reveal *emunah*.

Hagaddah – Beginning With Division and Ending With Oneness

There are two different words in *Lashon HaKodesh* that mean telling over a story: *Agadah*, and *Hagaddah*.

The word *agadah* is from the word *igud* or *agudah*, to unite. The story told over in an *Agaddah* (such as *Agadta* stories found in the *Gemara*) will unite together many details and parts of a story in order to bring out one point. This is because *Agadah* begins with the letter *aleph*, which is equal to one, symbolizing unity. Hence, an *agaddah* is when a story is unified in its details.

The story of a *Hagaddah*, however, is a story that begins with the letter *hey*. The letter *hey* implies division. As mentioned earlier, the letter *hey* is really a divided letter, with the letter *daled* and a broken letter *vov*. Thus, the letter *hey* implies division. We can also see this idea of division within a story in the *Hagaddah* that we recite on Pesach night. We start off the *Hagaddah* with division: The *matzos* are divided into 2 parts, and then we divide the 2 even further by dividing it into 4, with the 4 questions, the 4 sons, the 4 cups, etc. The *Maharal* explains that the number 4 represents the very idea of division, because there are 4 corners of the earth which distances all inhabitants of the world. Four is the idea of division, and the number 4 is the ongoing theme of the beginning of the Seder.

But as we get closer to the end of the Seder, the details of the *Hagaddah*'s story begin to combine together more and more, slowly unifying into one unit that expresses our *emunah* in Hashem. The division begins with 2 pieces of broken *matzos*, then 4 questions, 4 sons, etc. and eventually the story emerges as one single theme: *emunah*. The division becomes unified. In the *Hagaddah*, we start with division, and we end with oneness, with unity. With the 5th cup of the *Seder*, we unify all the details together, for the role of the number 5 is to unify everything into one.¹¹⁷

Chazal said that one should speak about the story of the *Hagadah* all night (until he falls asleep). What is the depth of this? It is because *Pesach* is the words *peh sach*, the "mouth shall speak," it is a night of revealing our true speech, to speak about *emunah*, and therefore it is the root of speech. The *Seder* night on Pesach is all about talking,

¹¹⁷ Editor's Note: For example, the first 4 layers of our soul are divided from each other, but when we reach our 5th and deepest level of the soul, the *Yechidah*, our entire soul is unified under one unit.

and what kind of talking? To talk about that which reveals *emunah* in Hashem. It is the root of our speech.

The Two Levels of Matzah

The *Gemara* says *matzah* is called *lechem oni* for two reasons. Firstly, it is *lechem* that we talk a lot over (*onin alav devarim harbeh*), we say a lot of words over this *matzah* [through reciting the *Hagaddah*]. Secondly, it is called *lechem oni* because it is a poor man's bread, since it was eaten in haste, with no time for the dough to rise. On an inner level, the *matzah* is really both, and we fulfill both of these aspects of *matzah* at the *Seder*, as follows.

The *matzah* we eat at the *Seder* is broken into 2 pieces. We eat the smaller part of the *matzah* at the beginning of the *Seder*, and this *matzah* is the *lechem oni* aspect of the *matzah*. The *Shelah* explains that the larger piece of *matzah* eaten at the end, which is eaten when we are satisfied, is like a wealthy man's bread, which is not eaten out of hunger but precisely after one is satisfied. A wealthy person eats after being satisfied, whereas a poor person eats out of hunger.

Thus, there are two levels of *matzah* we eat at the *Seder*. There is *matzah* of *lechem oni*, which we eat at the beginning of the *Seder*. This is *matzah* eaten out of hunger, a poor man's bread, implying the lower level of *matzah*, where we are eating because something is missing and we need to satiate that hunger. This *matzah* is also eaten together with the *maror*, which is bitter, because the *matzah* eaten at the beginning of the *Seder* is the poor man's bread, which is eaten amidst a state of deficiency and bitterness. The later act of *matzah* - the *afikoman* - is eaten precisely after we are satisfied, when we are no longer hungry. This is the higher level of *matzah*, which is not the poor man's bread, but "the bread which we talk a lot over" where we discuss words of *emunah*. This is *afikoman*, the aspect of *matzah* that represents the essence of Pesach, *peh sach*, to talk words of *emunah*. This is the level of *matzah* that is called the "bread of faith."

We eat the *afikoman* precisely before *chatzos* (midnight), before the time when the *Geulah* happened. The depth of this is because when the *Geulah* is about to be revealed, Hashem says "I, Hashem, am going out in Egypt," He reveals Himself at the darkest and lowest point of our exile, before He takes us out. The word *afikoman*

contains the word *man*, the manna, because it is like the eating the manna. The words *afiko man* mean, “to eat manna as we are on the way out.”

Since the *afikoman* is eaten right before the time when Hashem took us out of Egypt, where Hashem revealed His *havayah* (so to speak), it is the level of *matzah* which reveals *havayah*. When we had the *Beis haMikdash* and we had the *korbon pesach*, we would taste *havayah*. Nowadays, instead of eating the *korbon pesach*, we eat the *matzah* of the *afikoman*. We are tasting the *emunah* of the *havayah*, but we are not tasting *havayah* itself. Therefore, today's *matzah* at the highest level can only be the *emunah* of *havayah*. The *afikoman* is therefore stressing the concept of *havayah* unlike in the times of the *Beis HaMikdash* when we had the *korbon pesach*.

Afikoman Is Like Eating From The Eitz HaChaim

Let us explore the aspect of the *afikoman* being eaten precisely at the end of the Seder, when we are satisfied and no longer hungry. Until we eat the *afikoman*, all of our eating is on the level of eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, where we are eating like a poor man: “A poor man is only poor in his *daas*.” When we eat out of hunger, we are eating to satisfy ourselves, so it is self-serving. But at the end of the *Seder*, where we eat *afikoman*, we are eating after being satisfied, meaning that we not lacking anything and we are eating on a higher level, not for our own purposes. Such eating is like eating from the *Eitz haChaim*.

“*The tzaddik shall live by his emunah.*” We reveal the essence of Pesach at the end of the *Seder* of *peh sach* (the mouth that talks), which is equal in *gematria* to the word *chaim*, a hint to the *Eitz HaChaim*. The eating from the *Eitz haDaas* was an act of *taavah*, as the Torah says, “It was desirable to the eyes.” It was eating for self-serving reasons. The eating on the level of the *Eitz HaChaim*, by contrast, is when one does not eat to satisfy their hunger, but to eat from a place of satisfaction of not lacking anything. Thus, eating the *afikoman* when we are full and satisfied resembles eating from the *eitz haChaim*.

The depth of all eating on the night of Pesach is to arrive at this final meal, the *afikoman*, where we are not eating because we are missing something. What is at the depth of this? When we talk about the *matzah* during the Seder throughout the *Hagaddah*, we are really speaking about the “word of Hashem” that is in the *matzah*.

We are releasing the hidden potential found in this *matzah*! It looks simply like broken pieces of *matzah*, but when we speak about the *matzah* we are increasing our *emunah* and we reveal the word of Hashem contained in this *matzah*.

This is why the *afikomen* (the light of the future) is *tzafun*, it is hidden for the *tzaddikim* in the future. In the future, there are no *mitzvos*, because the world of action will cease. Today we have all the *mitzvos*, because we are living in a world of action, and even our Torah today is on the level of action. In the future, the world of action ceases and we remain with the level beyond action, which is speech – with the “word of Hashem” that is found in everything. That is what is hidden for the future. Thus we hide the *afikoman* to reveal that there’s a part of the *matzah* which is hidden: the word of Hashem that’s found in the *matzah*. When we reveal it and we eat it, we are eating from the “word of Hashem,” thus it is like eating the *Eitz haChaim*.

The Taste That Remains With Us: The Word of Hashem

There are two abilities in our mouth: the ability of taste, and the ability of speech. Normally, when we are eating, we cannot talk, and vice versa. When we taste food and then chew it and swallow it, the taste is gone a moment later. As is known, we must not eat anything after the *afikomen*, so that its taste will remain with us afterwards. The depth of this is really because the *afikoman* is like eating from the *manna*, where the taste lingered in our mouth long after we ate it.

On a deeper level, we are eating from the “word of Hashem” that is found in the *afikoman* and that is why its taste remains with us. Eating the *afikoman* infuses us with the “word of Hashem” that we absorb into our system. We reveal the root of speech which enables our sense of taste to stay with us, where our speech and taste become fused together. By not eating anything afterwards, we reveal how the word of Hashem remains with us, with nothing else but this “taste” – to show that there is nothing else besides for Hashem’s word.

We can taste a semblance of the *Eitz HaChaim* by tasting the hidden “word of Hashem” that is found in each thing. The taste of the *afikoman* remains with us because it is a taste that continues longer after it is experienced. It is a taste that is continuous and keeps going and doesn’t end. This is also known as *taamei Torah*, the secrets of Torah, or the “taste” of Torah. This is also the depth of why “The Torah was

only given to those who eat the *manna*” – it is because the Torah is revealed to us only when we “taste” the secrets of Torah which have been hidden away for the future.

On a related note, the depth of the *afikoman* is “*afiko man*,” to “bring out” the potential of this food which is compared to the *manna*. What is the potential that lays inside the *afikoman*, which we are bringing out? It is essentially the *emunah* that is found in this *matzah*, the *afikoman* which is compared to the *manna*. In that way, we are tasting the “word of Hashem” that is found in it, and this is the meaning of how *matzah* is the “food of our faith,” מיכליה דמהמנותא.

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