CHASED BY THE TASTE

by Rabbi Label Lam

Raban Gamliel would say, "Anyone who does not mention these three things has not fulfilled his obligation and these are they: Pesach, Matzah, and Marror!" (Pesachim 116A)

Matzah is the center stage feature on Seder Night! What is the super- significance of this flat unadorned poor-man's bread? Why and how does it signify our ticket to freedom? How did this holiday with the most dietary restrictions come to be known as "the time of our great freedom"? What's so free about not being able to eat what we want?

I once challenged a group of Jewish kids in public junior high school to formulate together as a committee a definition of freedom. I was shocked by their answer as the foreman of the jury read aloud, "Freedom means: Doing whatever you want to whoever you want, whenever you want!" I certainly don't want to be in the direct line of that freedom fire! What they described can be categorized as freedom "from"-freedom from responsibility. What they failed to include was any mention of what in the world freedom is "for"!

Imagine now a budding young pianist practicing laboriously his scales for hours on end while his friends frolic outside. Who seems freer? Years later though, this young fellow, by virtue of having trained his hands to move accordingly, is now able to release the musician within. Expressive emotions flow with seemingly magical ease through his agile fingers.

Even as I write this, many holy women and some good husbands too are on their knees looking for the ultra-contraband we call Chometz so that it should not be seen or found in their possession on Pesach? The primary ingredient for real deal Chometz are the five grains, wheat, oats, spelt, barley, and rye. Once they come into contact with water the eighteen minute clock starts and before you know it skull-cross and bones appear on the container and all are warned to stay away. This stuff is poison on Pesach for the Jewish Soul.

You might think that if Chometz is so ruinous on Pesach then we should beg away from anything associated with those five grains and thereby avoid any possibility of coming into contact with the enemy. Ironically, the one food we are compelled to eat on Pesach is not gefilte fish, no it's Matzah. Matzah can only be made of the same raw ingredients as Chometz; the five grains. What then is the difference between Matzah and Chometz? If the kneading and baking occur within the eighteen minute window then we have qualified and certified Matzah. If that time-line is crossed then the same stuff becomes Chometz. What is Chometz? It is undisciplined Matzah. What is Matzah? It is

disciplined Chometz?

The Sefas Emes, quoting the Zohar, defines the word "PESACH" as a contraction of two words, "Peh"- Mouth/ "Sach"- Speaks- The mouth that speaks! He says that for the Jew the mouth is in exile. We are shy and intimidated to express what is really deep inside. Through the exercise of telling more and more about the Exodus we become more articulate and expressive (with the help of four glasses of wine) until we are singing Hallel with full mouths and hearts.

One of the keys to lasting freedom is self-discipline. We are not avoiding confrontation with negativity in pursuit of freedom. That would be freedom "from" to escape the chains of responsible living. Rather we are compelled through the Mitzvah to eat Matzah to engage in the more refined art of pursuing freedom "for". By arresting our appetites and practicing self-control we can hope to say temporarily "no" to a lower-lesser urge in order to gain the ability to express a higher "yes". Text Copyright &copy 2006 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.