

CLASS 73 - PESACH

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

Every Jewish child knows why we eat Matzos during Pesach.

On the fifteenth of Nissan, while our ancestors in Egypt were preparing for their departure, Hashem rushed them out quickly, before the dough had time to rise.

What if G-d had not removed them at that particular moment? Could it be that an eternal command is a result of an accident of time, a mere coincidence?

If Mitzvos are perceived as symbolic reminders of events that occurred long ago, perhaps this would be sufficient. But this is not the case. Each Torah precept is our connection to an essential truth, permanent and unchanging.

In other words, we do not eat Matza today because long ago we were released from bondage. Rather, Matza is the ultimate bread of freedom, and our exodus at that precise juncture is a natural expression of this concept.

Let us explain.

1

"This is the poor man's bread that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt"

As opposed to our Matza of flour and water, one cannot fulfill his requirement by consuming Matza Asheira - Egg Matza (lit: rich Matza) with its additional additives.

Shouldn't it be exactly the opposite? Wouldn't wealthy man's bread be a more appropriate symbol of freedom? People pursue wealth because they want the freedom to fulfill their heart's desire. While the lack of money limits one to a lifestyle within his means, the rich man has the capability to do as he pleases.

Apparently, the Torah has a different concept of freedom.

"This is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink water in measure, sleep on the ground, live a life of deprivation - but toil in the Torah!..." (Avos 6, 4)

Yet, our Sages still declare: "There is no free man other than he who is involved with Torah".

Modern man dreams of the ability to do whatever he wants, all of the time. He sees the Torah's commands as obstacles in the way of pleasure, imposing restrictions on the 'good life'. In his view,

the world is full of temptations. Though at times he is prepared to sacrifice, in the hope of heavenly reward, he looks with longing at those who enjoy life's offerings with abandon, anticipating that someday even McDonald's will turn kosher.

It is for this reason that man creates his own pleasures, he wants titillation on demand. He may climb a mountain just for the heck of it, or cross the sea by sail, ignoring easier means of transportation. Why does he do this? He builds artificial barriers, only so that he feel a sense of accomplishment. In his desperate quest for satisfaction, he must travel longer and farther, for yesterday's pleasure has become a bore. As it becomes increasingly difficult to attain the desired level of excitement, he turns to artificial stimulants to simulate the true happiness that eludes him.

We believe precisely the opposite. The Torah is what allows man to be free. Free of worry. Free of temptation. Free of the worldly obstacles that must be overcome in pursuit of one's desires. Whether overcoming business competition or satiating physical urges, the worldly goals of man are not in easy reach.

The Torah allows man to focus his attention on a different dimension.

"Who is the wealthy man? He who is happy with his lot!"

Modern man has become so wrapped up in the physical concept of pleasure that he misunderstands this assertion of the Mishna, taking it as a rejoinder to men of unceasing ambition.

Not true.

Chazal are saying more than 'make do with what you have'.

They are teaching that true happiness is self-contained.

The chase for external means of gratification is therefore doomed to failure, for it will never provide a healthy sense of self.

Happiness lies within. The petty vanities that man collects in pursuit of fame and honor will never substitute for a life of content fulfillment. Man's pure soul is the repository of all he needs, a connection to G-d and the world-to-come.

But to sense the truth, the soul of man must be untainted. Once he has assimilated the values of his surroundings, he is no longer free to clearly see the word of G-d, to study His law.

This is the way of Torah - bread with salt, water in measure. Not that the Torah demands asceticism, or a life devoid of pleasure. But, the Torah itself is removed from worldly dimensions, the man who plumbs its depths can have no other interest or diversions. Only then is he free - with no self-interest or bias, a pure soul with pure faith.

Matzas Mitzva has no additives. This is the bread of affliction, and, at the same time, the bread of our freedom.

Perhaps we can state it this way: Release from slavery is not in order to do what we wish. Rather, it is freedom to do what Hashem wants us to do, fulfilling our obligations honestly and wholeheartedly, faithful servants of our Creator.

2

Redemption from Egypt is unique in Jewish history: "And Hashem took us out of Mitzraim, not by angel, nor by Saraf, or messenger, but rather, HaKadosh Baruch Hu, Himself....."

While the angels control the world of nature, the exodus revealed a deeper dimension, above and beyond the material universe.

The physical world begins with time. Time is the most basic component of creation. It allows for the possibility of apparent cause and effect, the barrier that conceals the Hand of G-d. Of necessity, therefore, the salvation that expresses Divine intervention, freeing His nation from foreign hands, occurs beyond time.

On Pesach night, we strive to attach ourselves to that world, to reflect a dimension of holiness, separate and distinct from the physicality that defines our daily life.

We have no time.

No time for the humdrum patterns of the everyday world, a lifestyle that dulls our senses to any higher existence.

No time to wait, lest the ferment of spiritual decay ravage our homes and families.

No time for the bread to rise.

Chag Kasher V'Sameach

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