

PARSHA

PESACH

APRIL 4TH, 2015
NISAN 15TH 5775

590



THE TIME OF OUR FREEDOM FOR THE ENTIRE YEAR

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

In the prayers that we recite during Pesach (specifically, in the Amidah), we say: "And You, Hashem our G-d, have given us in love festivals for rejoicing, holidays and seasons for gladness, this day of the Festival of Matzot, the season of our freedom, a holy assembly commemorating the exodus from Egypt."

These words seem contradictory, for at first we say "this day of the Festival of Matzot, the season of our freedom" as if to thank G-d for the freedom that we currently enjoy. Yet we continue by saying, "commemorating the exodus from Egypt," which signifies that the entire festival of Pesach is but a memorial to the deliverance of our ancestors, not a memorial to freedom. Furthermore, our Sages have declared that every individual must consider himself as having personally left Egypt. This seems difficult to understand, for how can a Jew be asked to sense the freedom of having just left Egypt, since he was never enslaved there?

Let us try to explain this. The only way to acquire faith that is stable, to attain a spiritual level that enables us to realize that we and our children would still be slaves in Egypt if G-d had not freed our fathers from Egypt, is to pray in abundance. Likewise, it is incumbent upon us to instill in our children a concrete faith from their earliest years. Hence on this night we must describe in detail the account of the exodus from Egypt, in order to instill a sincere faith in G-d within the hearts of our children, a faith that is devoid of doubt.

As I was writing this article on the day after Pesach, my young son asked me: "Why do we only eat matzah on Pesach, but on the rest of the year chametz and matzah are allowed?" I said to him, "You already asked me this question on the night of the Seder when you sang, 'Why is this night different from all other nights [Ma nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol haleilot]?' and I gave you the answer!" However he responded, "The answers that you gave me weren't enough," so I began to explain it to him once more.

After seeing that he was still skeptical, I finally said: "This is what G-d commanded." He then shot back, "But that's what you always say when you don't answer my questions!" I smiled and answered, "You're right. Give me some time to consult some books, and I'll give you an answer."

Thus if we allow a child to have doubts, G-d forbid, he will certainly grow up with these doubts, and perhaps with even more, and he will not sense the miracles and extraordinary things that G-d performed for our fathers in bringing them out of Egypt. Then when he reaches the age of marriage and establishes a family, he will celebrate the Seder at home with his family and he will read the Haggadah as a simple story. He will not have a deep-rooted feeling

that if Hashem, in His mercy, had not delivered our forefathers from Egypt, he himself would still be enslaved there.

By meditating upon and connecting ourselves to the past, to a time when the Children of Israel were oppressed in Egypt and suffered tremendous hardship, by sensing their pain and recognizing the miracles and wonders that were done for them, as well as the great plagues that struck the Egyptians, and by rejoicing for our ancestors, we can personally sense this journey to freedom. However if the distress of our ancestors has not affected us, and if we fail to rejoice in their deliverance, then it becomes impossible to recognize the miracles that were done for them and for us, and we will not experience any sense of freedom.

It is precisely for this reason that the festival of Pesach is truly the time of our freedom, for if our ancestors had not been delivered from Egypt, a deliverance that took place amid great and awesome wonders, we would not be free today. In fact when G-d carried out those miracles for our ancestors, He did so in such a way that their impact and the forces of holiness that were drawn to the earth would continue in the following generations, which would receive the immense and infinite light of the first festival and the wonders that were performed at that time. By arousing ourselves with great joy in the service of Hashem, we will definitely sense the same joy of freedom that our ancestors felt during the exodus from Egypt.

To illustrate this idea, let me tell you something that happened to me on the day after Pesach, during our meal. I noticed that one of my guests, who was seated at the table, seemed to be very concerned with something. I said to him, "Tzion, why do you look worried? Today is the day after the festival [issru chag], and we must rejoice. As I explained yesterday, we must prolong the sanctity of the festival of Pesach, which means 'to stride across,' to extricate ourselves from our problems and to have faith in G-d alone! Have you forgotten that Pesach alludes to cleaving to Hashem, to cleaving to the past to such an extent that we sense the suffering, as well as the joy, of our ancestors in Egypt when they were liberated? Have you forgotten that it is a Pesach for Hashem, when He brought them out of Egypt, and that without it you would still be enslaved there? Have you forgotten that Pesach represents a cleaving to the mitzvot, which are compared to matzot, which are hard? They are not easy to fulfill correctly, and we must put an effort into fulfilling them by submitting ourselves entirely to G-d's will. For what reason do we eat matzot for seven days? It parallels the 70 years of man's life, during which time we must put an effort into serving Hashem, not receiving a reward in this world, for the wages of a mitzvah are not given in this world."

Tzion replied, "That's precisely why I'm worried.

Publication of
HEVRAT PINTO

Under the Direction of
**Rabbi David Hanania
Pinto Shlita**

CHEVRAT PINTO

207 West 78th Street
New York - NY 10024
Tel: 1 212 721 0230
www.hevratpinto.org
hevratpinto@aol.com

Editor-in-Chief:
Hanania Soussan

The spiritual elevation that I experienced on Pesach is now gone, and I feel a little tired.”

When I heard that, I said: “It’s the work of the Satan, who wants to infuse you with hopelessness ‘for the sake of Heaven’! Such hopelessness tarnishes your faith in G-d with doubt. It makes you fall into the hands of the Satan, to lose all the faith that you acquired during the festival, and it destroys all your gains through sadness. G-d knows that the holiness of Pesach is great, and that the power of its light is so immense that it

can cause us to descend a little when it ends. He therefore gave us, right after the festival, the mitzvah to count the Omer in order to extend our connection with Him from Pesach to Shavuot, the time of the giving of the Torah, which was the goal of the exodus from Egypt. Hence Hashem asks us to continue sensing the light of the festival by means of counting the Omer until Shavuot, which is the time of the giving of our Torah. As such, through our own efforts we can achieve the goal of our creation: To fulfill the will of G-d.”

The Words of the Sages

Ridding Ourselves of Suffering in this Bitter Exile

What follows is a striking account found in the book *Meir Einei Israel* by Rav Zelig Guelz, a student from the Radin Yeshiva who had the merit of spending the Seder with the Kohen Gadol, Rabbi Israel Meir HaKohen, better known as the Chafetz Chaim.

Located on a narrow street near the synagogue courtyard was a small and unassuming house, the tiny home of the Chafetz Chaim. Its small windows spread light upon a radiant background through white curtains that had been washed in honor of Pesach. Holiday candles illuminated the dark street and guided the faithful, who hurried home to perform the Seder as required.

The Chafetz Chaim did not linger on that night either. As soon as Arvit was completed, he asked those in charge of the *Kimcha DePischa* if they hadn’t forgotten any of the poor when they distributed their goods. Imagine his joy on his way home when he encountered two people whom he could invite to his table! Thus the *Kol Dichfin* (“Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat...”) would not be said in vain!

Inside, everything was prepared for the holiday. An oil lamp was hanging from the ceiling, as well as holiday candles that lightly illuminated the white tablecloth, which was embroidered with flowers. It was a basic arrangement that reflected the characteristic simplicity of the tzaddik’s lifestyle. All around the Seder table were chairs for all the members of the household. The tzaddik himself decided to sit in between two of his guests. Next to him were his three grandsons, disciplined yet possessing childlike modesty and filled with the grace of purity. They now forgot that they were children, having abandoned their toys. They were ready to sing *Ma Nishtana* and listen to what their famous grandfather had to say.

It was amid deep silence that pearls of deep wisdom emerged, words that clearly illuminated the essential meaning and goal behind the exodus from Egypt, words accompanied by allusions on their current exile.

And in the middle of it all, amid a somber atmosphere, an intense light began to burn in the midst of the darkness: “*Mashiach...deliverance...liberty...now is clearly the most appropriate time for this!*” explained the Chafetz Chaim. “Don’t you sense it?” he asked those present.

He then continued: “According to an opinion in the Gemara, there are six millennia of Torah, two of which represent the era of *Mashiach*. Today we are in the last millennia. Let go, let go,” the tzaddik said insistently, “why do we still hold on to our doubts? It’s certain, it’s certain! He will come! Only one thing is lacking, just a shred of repentance. Oy! Oy! What foolishness! A small bit of teshuvah and we’re all delivered! ‘Today, if you would but heed His voice...’”

A profound silence once again filled the small room. Each of the guests was alert and pensive, ready to hear and absorb the great and sincere words spoken by the tzaddik. With a look of contemplation, they dream and think of liberty and the deliverance of Israel. Even the children seem to be deep in thought. Their breathing stops as they look with eyes wide open at the splendor that is radiating from their grandfather.

They avidly drink in his every word and parable. They seem to be deeply infused with the joy of childhood, with all the beautiful and exciting descriptions of the coming deliverance from their grandfather. Slowly the hours pass amid a festive atmosphere. A small clock announces the time, as if chiming a melody that rejoices in the time that has elapsed and which moves towards eternity. The tzaddik seems to be retrained by the Halachah: “Go on, go on,” he says to the guests, “it’s already late. Soon it will be *chatzot*.” The members of the household, those close to him, remain seated around the table, drinking in his every word. Their eyes gaze upon each expression, every crease in the forehead of the one recounting the exodus from Egypt.

When everything had immersed into deep silence, a knock at the door was suddenly heard. On the doorstep was the postman, who was carrying a telegram from Chicago. A very sick man, Shlomo ben Miriam, was in need of great mercy. Silence descended upon the room that had been filled with the atmosphere of the holiday, a silence broken by the Chafetz Chaim himself. He whispers, as if for himself, a few words that grow louder, words spoken with a trembling voice: “Ah, a sick man whose life is in danger. What is the remedy for the Jewish people? Only a prayer for mercy. It will certainly come...our promised deliverance will arrive, but why must we suffer?”

“Why all these misfortunes? In the meantime, we must wait until we are sent a free deliverance from Above, the ‘bread of shame.’ A deliverance that we deserve is preferable still, freedom that we merit, for which we have worked! What is written in the Gemara [Sanhedrin 98a]? There are two possible conditions for the deliverance: One is ‘in its time’ and the other is ‘I will hasten it.’ If the Children of Israel merit it, ‘I will hasten it.’ Otherwise, it will come ‘in its time.’ This means that if we are worthy, we won’t need to wait. Therefore why are we as stubborn as children, waiting precisely for the last possible moment, for ‘in its time’? Two words emerge,” concluded the tzaddik: “Repentance and repentance. Do you hear me, my friends? The only way to rid ourselves of the suffering and dangerous illnesses of this bitter exile is none other than repentance and repentance. A little teshuvah, a drop of enthusiastic faith, of simple faith.”

The candles have already gone out, and in the darkness the Chafetz Chaim carefully goes up the small, winding steps that lead to the attic so as to be alone. “Shlomo ben Miriam needs great compassion. Please, Sovereign of the universe, waiting until the ‘fixed time’ isn’t worth it for You, and even less for us. Why prolong our trial? Yet before the ‘fixed time’ arrives, there is another way: ‘I will hasten it.’ Let it be that way!”

It was as such, with deep and sincere faith, that the tzaddik lived the night of the Seder and prepared himself, filled with hope and longing, his eyes riveted on deliverance and the coming of *Mashiach*. And my heart was beating as if we had already reached that moment, the time of our genuine and eternal deliverance.

A Song that Breaks All Barriers

The custom in every Jewish community is to recite Shirat Hayam (the Song by the Sea) each day after the Pesukei D'Zimra in Shacharit. We do this to praise and glorify the Creator for all the kindnesses, miracles and wonders that He performed for us and our fathers. During this time of the year, as we are celebrating Pesach, the festival of Israel's deliverance, as we sing before G-d and thank Him for all the extraordinary kindnesses that He bestowed upon our ancestors in Egypt and at the Sea of Reeds, we should reflect upon and recognize the value of this song, which we recite before Him each day.

Already in ancient times, some Jewish communities had the custom of reading the passage of the Song by the Sea as an expression of gratitude towards G-d for a particular miracle or deliverance that a person experienced. This is also what appears in a response written by the gaon Rabbi Mordechai Karmi, one of the great rabbis of the Maghreb, in his book Ma'amar Mordechai: "In earlier times, when a miracle occurred on a certain day, people would usually establish that date as a holiday in order to thank and praise Hashem. They would read from the Torah, along with the blessings, the passage of the Song by the Sea. If that date was a Monday or Thursday, the reading of the weekly parsha was moved ahead and the Song by the Sea was read first. This custom is established on foundations of holiness, and our ancestors knew exactly on what to establish it."

The holy Zohar explicitly mentions the importance of reciting the Song by the Sea each day: "We have been taught that every person who sings this song daily with true devotion will be worthy of singing it at the Final Redemption that will take place, for it refers both to the past world and to the future world; it contains confirmations of faith and mysteries relating to the days of Mashiach. The Shechinah will sing this song to Hashem, for the King will receive her with a radiant countenance" (Zohar II:54b).

The book Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah states the following in this regard: "The honor that the Zohar bestows upon a person who sings this song does not refer to someone who just recites its words without any special intention on thanking and praising G-d. On the contrary, this description refers to someone who is constantly recalling the greatness of His power and the wonders that He performed for the Jewish people in Egypt and by the sea."

With Great Joy

In regards to reciting this song each day with great joy, the Shelach wrote (tractate Yoma): "We must recite the Song by the Sea each day in a loud voice and with great joy, as if we were leaving Egypt at that very moment. G-d has commanded us to recite this text each day, as it is written: 'And they spoke, saying.' From here Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai deduced that we must recite it each day with great joy, as when it first occurred. Thus the impact of reciting it will be similar to when it was first recited."

Reading it Standing

In the book Ketzot HaShulchan, the author justifies the fact that some people stand while reading this song. The Mishnah in Sotah

27b explains that when Moshe sang this song, the Jewish people responded as if he was reading Hallel. Now it is clear that Hallel is read while standing. Hence the proof that this song should also be read while standing.

As If He Was Standing on Dry Land

Joyously reciting the word Vayosha ("He saved") allows sins to be forgiven without hardship. Indeed, we must sing the word Vayosha. The book Charedim lists the ten things that allow sin to be forgiven without hardship or suffering. Among these is the singing of Vayosha with joy, just as the Children of Israel did when the sea split. "That is why I have accustomed myself to reciting it with the punctuation signs, like one who reads from the Torah" (Yosef Ometz).

In his work Avodat HaKodesh, the Chida mentions another beneficial practice to adopt: "We should imagine ourselves standing on dry land in the middle of the sea, the only one saved, among the Egyptians who have drowned."

This Rav also states, "Whoever recites the Song by the Sea with joy, as if he himself had just been saved while Pharaoh and his army drowned, all his sins are forgiven" (Sefer Hanhagot Tzaddikim 47a).

Mazal

It is written, "Az yashir Moshe u'venei Israel et hashira hazot [Then Moshe and the Children of Israel sang this song]" (Shemot 15:1).

The initials of the Hebrew words in this phrase have a combined value of 78, which is equal to the numerical value of the term mazal ("destiny").

As mentioned in our holy books, the Song by the Sea brings children, life, a comfortable livelihood, the spoils of the sea, and all deliverances. And all these things depend on destiny.

– Chaim VeShalom

I Want to Pray More

Rabbi Mordechai Zatzal said, "Since there is a bird that sings the praises of G-d until its stomach breaks, and yet I pray and remain in good health, just how important is my prayer?"

One day, he prepared himself for a long time before starting to pray. When he came to the passage of the Song by the Sea, he damaged his lungs because of the enthusiasm and the power of his prayer. Doctors in Lemberg lost all hope of healing him. The Rav therefore prayed to G-d and said, "Do I only want to pray like this once? I want to pray more!"

Therefore G-d helped him to recover.

Afterwards, Rabbi Mordechai was in Lemberg, where numerous chassidim came to find him. A doctor was passing by at the time, and upon seeing people come running from every direction, he asked what was going on. He was told that Rabbi Mordechai was here. Stunned, the doctor exclaimed: "Is he still alive?" He had been convinced that if the Rav were still alive, it was obvious that he was missing a lung.

– Sifran Shel Chassidim

The Reward for a Mitzvah

The book *Korban Asher* explains why it is precisely the Pesach offering and circumcision that earned the Children of Israel the reward of the exodus from Egypt. According to the Sages, "There is no reward for mitzvot in this world" (*Kiddushin* 39b). The *Tevuot Shor* writes that it is only in times of divine anger that neglecting positive mitzvot brings punishment. Hence conversely, even when we fulfill a positive mitzvah, it is impossible to bestow a reward for it.

The only exceptions are the Pesach offering and circumcision, positive mitzvot whose negligence brings about excision. Since we are punished for not having fulfilled them, we are also rewarded in this world when we fulfill them. Now since the Children of Israel had no mitzvot and needed a reward in order to be delivered from Egypt, they received the mitzvot of the Pesach offering and circumcision, whose reward is granted in this world.

The Merit of the Fathers

It is written, "Then we cried out to Hashem, the G-d of our fathers, and Hashem heard our voice" (*Devarim* 26:7).

Why isn't it written: "and Hashem, the G-d of our fathers, heard our voice," as the beginning of the verse states?

The *Avnei Nezer* of Sochatchov replies by citing the Sages: "If a man makes his supplication depend on his own merit, Heaven makes it depend on the merit of others. If he makes it depend on the merit of others, Heaven makes it depend on his own merit" (*Berachot* 10b). Because "we cried out to Hashem, the G-d of our fathers" – because we made our supplication depend on the merit of others – therefore "Hashem heard our voice." That is, He helped us on account of our own merit.

The "Labor" of Learning Torah

It is written, "Then we cried out to Hashem, the G-d of our fathers, and Hashem heard our voice, and looked upon our affliction, and our labor, and our oppression" (*Devarim* 26:7).

The Sages say that the expression "our labor" refers to children. From where do we learn that this is the case? Did the Children of Israel not labor in Egypt from morning till night carrying out forced work for the Egyptians? Perhaps that is the "labor" to which the verse is alluding?

However Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *Zatzal* states that the term *amal* ("labor") designates work that we do voluntarily, of our own free will, as it is written: "Happy is he whose labor is in Torah," as well as, "We labor and receive a reward."

As a result, here the term *amal* cannot refer to the enslavement and forced work of the Jewish people in Egypt. Rather, it can only refer to children, which are our "labor," and who were taken from us!

We Shall Do and We Shall Hear

In the *Haggadah* we read, "This matzah that we eat, what is the reason for it?"

We don't ask "why do we eat it," but rather "what is the reason for it."

The *Maharam* of Lublin cites his brother-in-law in writing the following: The answer is that we fulfill the mitzvah in any case, whether we know the reason for it or not. It is only afterwards that we try to determine "the reason for it."

More Bitter than Death

It is written, "They made their lives bitter with hard labor" (*Shemot* 1:14).

The author of *Kli Chemda*, Rabbi Shmuel Laniado, writes that it is human nature to greatly fear death, which is called "very bitter," as it is written: "The bitterness of death is past" and "their end is a bitter day." Yet in the exile of Egypt, our fathers suffered so greatly that death did not seem bitter at all; in fact it seemed preferable to life.

This is the meaning of the verse, "They made their lives bitter" – the Egyptians transformed the lives of the Children of Israel into bitterness, to the point that death appeared sweet, until finally the Holy One, blessed be He, had compassion on them and delivered them from death towards a pleasant life.

Hashem's Kindness is Awakened during the Festivals

It is written, "Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: Hashem's appointed festivals that you are to designate as holy convocations – these are My appointed festivals" (*Vayikra* 23:2).

The Sages have said, "Shabbat and the festivals were only given in order to study Torah" (*Yerushalmi*, *Shabbat* 15:3). When we study Torah during the festivals, without losing time by going for walks and engaging in meaningless conversations, we immediately merit to rejoice in the light of Torah and we receive an additional soul. In fact the Torah is called light, as it is written: "For a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light" (*Mishlei* 6:23). Furthermore, the soul is called a lamp, as it is written: "A man's soul is the lamp of Hashem" (*ibid.* 20:27). When a man studies Torah, he cleaves to its words and thereby merits a new soul, one created by the merit of the Torah that he studied during the festivals, which comes from the sanctity of the festivals themselves. And when an individual engages in Torah study while most people are outside chatting, thus demonstrating their contempt for the festival, he thereby demonstrates a true love of Heaven and merits an additional soul for the Torah that he studied during the festival, since the Holy One, blessed be He, is even closer to an individual during the festivals than on ordinary days.

We may therefore say that the additional soul of the festival is not similar to the additional soul of Shabbat. The latter is given to a person even if he does not merit it. If he fails to study, however, he will not merit the additional soul of the festival. Hence we do not recite a blessing on fragrant herbs at the end of a festival. In fact the additional soul whose departure can be sensed is not given to everyone, but only to those who study Torah for the sake of Heaven.

I believe that this is why Scripture juxtaposed the exodus of Egypt with the festivals: It tells us that the Holy One, blessed be He, only brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt so they could take upon themselves the study of Torah and performance of mitzvot. And when they study Torah during the festivals and honor the festivals, they will be the festivals of Hashem, not their own festivals – so much so, in fact, that they will certainly merit the *Shechinah* dwelling among them. However if they waste time on the festivals without studying, these will no longer be "holy convocations," but rather "profane convocations." They will no longer be the festivals of Hashem, but rather "your festivals, which I abhor." Hence the Torah twice says, "These are My appointed festivals." When will I be sanctified among the Children of Israel? When the festivals will be My festivals and not your festivals. "Your festivals" represent just a family reunion for you, a time to eat and drink and enjoy yourselves, while making some allusions that evoke the true festival, that of Hashem. Hence the exodus from Egypt appears next to the festivals, hinting to us that during the exodus from Egypt, the *Shechinah* rested upon the Children of Israel because they took upon themselves the Torah and had already started to receive the festival of Pesach for all the generations. As a result, even when they were about to receive Hashem's other festivals, the *Shechinah* rested upon them. I thought that the reason why the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted the Children of Israel to celebrate the festivals and call them "the festivals of Hashem" is that the nations of the world devote their festivals to idolatry, as we read in regards to Pharaoh when he celebrated his birthday, which was clearly associated with idolatry. Hence Hashem wanted the Children of Israel to celebrate festivals that contained beneficial memorials for them, in order for them to recognize Hashem's kindnesses to them during those times.

In fact if the festivals were called "their festivals" and were simply a commemoration of all that happened to them, they would only be filled with useless, mundane pursuits. Yet since they are called the "festivals of Hashem," it is clear that men will not treat them with contempt, for they are holy convocations.