

# United We Stand

4/10/23

Pesach

15-23rd of Nissan, 5783

**Written By Yehuda Dov Reiss, Talmid of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchonon (YU)**

## The Parsha's Paths

When trying to figure out the idea behind any of the *Shalosh Regalim*, one will notice several seemingly disparate themes and elements. Usually, we are commemorating both a historical event as well as a stage in the harvest season. We also are judged, according to the Mishna, for some aspect of agriculture for the coming year, and there is also some offering in the Beis Hamikdash that is completely unique to the holiday, and usually there are also unique mitzvos associated with it.

Pesach, the first in the cycle of Festivals, celebrates both the leaving of Egypt as well as the beginning of the ripening of the new crop. We are judged for the new grain for the coming year, and we bring the Korban Omer, an offering unique in that it is prepared from barley instead of wheat, which serves to allow the new grain to be eaten. We are commanded to eliminate our chametz, eat matza, and tell over the story of the Exodus and imagine as if we left Egypt through the medium of the *Seder*.

In order to fully understand what this Festival is about, then we must ask: what is the connection between all these elements? What is the message that they bring out?

From the Exodus emerged a number of fundamental ideas in Jewish theology: G-d's absolute sovereignty over the world, G-d's acquisition, as it were, of the Jewish people by redeeming them from slavery, and the empowerment or freedom to rise above a life completely enslaved by external forces to serve G-d. These ideas are clearly deeply intertwined; Through our knowledge of G-d's absolute control and the fact that we are His people, we are given the confidence to overcome anything in His service. This message is so fundamental to Jewish identity and continuity that we are commanded to feel the Exodus experience for ourselves and to transmit it to our children through the *Seder*.

Yet in order to imbibe this message, we cannot merely talk about it or even try to "recreate" the experience through whatever rituals we might intuit. To truly believe in G-d and by extension, in ourselves, requires a much broader, profound shift in our way of looking at things. We need to purge our sense of dependency on others or any external factors; most difficult yet most fundamental of all, we must eliminate feelings of dependency on ourselves. We must crush the illusion that our passions and desires are our masters or that our fates are limited by our meager abilities. We must transcend all of it if we are to cling to the recognition that all that matters is G-d's Will.

And so the chametz must be burned. Not a trace of ego can be allowed to inflate or alter our sense of self - in the end, it only makes us vulnerable to the influence of other hot air around us, turning us stale. We must confront our brittleness and embrace our ultimate simplicity.

This is a scary experience. The matza mentality, while one ultimately of freedom, is also a traumatizing confrontation with slavery. Matza is described as "the bread of our affliction"; it was the bread we ate as slaves in Egypt. It represents the lack of freedom, identity, or pride we could have while utterly beholden to a cruel master. Should we not be striving to overcome that by building ourselves up, by embracing the wishes of *our* hearts and eliminate our sense of vulnerability? Should we not seek to inflate ourselves, to embrace the *chametz* mentality which is so alluring and attractive, so strong and free to rise?

This is the great paradox of the matza mentality. It represents slavery and hardship, on the one hand, yet it also represents freedom. When we left Egypt, we left with matza. How? Because true freedom can only emerge from the context of slavery. We can only know what we have once we lose it, and the very definition of freedom requires us to know what we have: A choice. To be enslaved can be a painful and paralyzing experience, but it is only by confronting it and reminding ourselves of it that we

Subscribe or sponsor: [Unityparsha@gmail.com](mailto:Unityparsha@gmail.com)

Visit our 10 Plagues "News" Websites: [TheBloodcrisis.Wordpress.com](http://TheBloodcrisis.Wordpress.com), [TheFrogCrisis.Wordpress.com](http://TheFrogCrisis.Wordpress.com), [TheLiceCrisis.Wordpress.com](http://TheLiceCrisis.Wordpress.com), [TheBeastPlague.home.blog](http://TheBeastPlague.home.blog), [ThePestilencePlague.Wordpress.com](http://ThePestilencePlague.Wordpress.com)

can remember that whatever we have and whatever we are cannot be constrained - except by G-d. Losing our will enables us to recognize that we have it and can use it.

So yes, the *chametz* mentality is desirable - if awareness of G-d is our yeast. But in order to do that, for eight days we have to just take a step back and embrace the *matza* mentality, seeing how brittle we are without Him. All other *chametz* is, in truth, the ultimate bread of slavery.

This is the "beginning of the ripening of the new crop." The first step to growth is self-awareness. Later, as we grow in Torah and mitzvos through our clinging to G-d, the Divine yeast will elevate our souls as we bring the Shte-Halechem offering on Shavuot - one of the only *chametz* offerings in the Beis-Hamikdash. But for now, we will just focus on transcending everything else and recognize our own low lines absent our Creator - as epitomized in the lowly barley offering of the Korban Omer.

The Vilna Gaon and others (as heard from my friend Matan Friedman) explain that grain needs to be replanted year after year, while a fruit tree continues to grow on its own. On Pesach we learn that we are capable of growth and renewal, so we are judged for grain. On Shavuot, when we start allowing the Torah to transform our identity and become fundamentally elevated, we are judged for fruit.

Pesach is not a time to overly focus on *doing more* or *becoming better*, at least with the limited outlook those terms usually connote. Pesach is a time for taking a step back, as individuals and as members of a community and a nation, to renounce all those things that gave us a sense of self, to lay our identities bare. It's a time to reflect on the slaveries in our lives and in our histories, of appreciating what it means to have a choice, to be more than a suffocating spirit in a straight jacket, of what our G-d-given freedom means. Are we embracing that freedom? Do we really feel G-d holding our hand, making the way for us to serve Him in all the ways He really wants? Are we striving to actualize the grandiose vision of our relationship with G-d as captured by *Shir Hashirim*?

Sometimes success can be slavery. We may feel a sense of contentment with the ways things are, or an inability to change the parts we don't like. In a world where the Jewish community is experiencing in some ways an unprecedented flourishing, it is easy for great people to embrace a wonderful communal and personal identity without a sufficient G-d-awareness at its core. Are we truly living and making our decisions with G-d's best interests at heart? The overlap may be

pretty large, but the mentality makes all the difference - and is the only way to identify and overcome those parts that don't overlap. May we learn to identify all the bad yeast in our lives for what it is and recognize the freedom G-d gives each of us to rise above it, and then may we merit the ultimate freedom of the Final Exodus, Bimheira Viyameinu.

## Chol HaMoed Rap

Now Chol HaMoed's here, so it's important to review,  
What's mutar and assur, what you can and can't do.  
Now the things you can do in five groups they can be laid,  
First if there's a loss involved, a.k.a. Davar ha'aveid.  
Second if there's something for Yom Tov that you need,  
Third you can employ someone who needs you to feed,  
Fourth if the rabim need something to get done,  
Fifth if it requires no expert, and can be done by anyone.  
The source for these laws, strange as they may seem,  
Is a principle called mesaran hakasuv le'chachamim.  
The details of Chol HaMoed the Torah did not state,  
Giving the Rabbis permission from scratch to create,  
A system they felt respected the holiness of the days,  
While not causing an undue burden to be raised.  
Now there are rules that follow outside all the categories we said,  
No washing clothes or cutting nails or shaving the head,  
And a Hamotzi meal daily you should have ideally,  
And dress in nice clothing, and don't be too silly.  
There's also lots of caveats to what we said is permitted,  
If it requires great effort, then permission just may be remitted,  
Unless it's for a Yom Tov essential, like preparing what to eat,  
Or you'll suffer a significant loss, but you still should be discreet,  
And if you deliberately left work to do during this time,  
Then you're out of luck, now we're almost done this rhyme.  
Now it can be complex and tricky to apply all these rules,  
Every case is unique and it's hard to have all the tools,  
So when in doubt a Rabbi should always be sought,  
To determine whether you can do that or not.  
If we try our best to navigate these days with care,  
Making sure not to violate the holiness in the air,  
Then may we fully imbibe the Yom Tov spirit,  
And carry it with us to always live it.

## Goal of the week

Reflect on three ways you've felt or can feel restricted/enslaved and how a deeper G-d-awareness can liberate you from that.

**This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for Shaindel Temma bas Rochel Zlotta and Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.**

Chag Kasher ViSameach!

**Our Mission** is to bring the third Beis- Hamikdash by facilitating Jewish unity through Torah.