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FREEDOM AND ITS EFFECT ON OUR LIVELIHOOD

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At a time when many are encountering the hardships of an economic downturn, it is helpful to examine the impact of חירות (freedom) - the embodiment of the Pesach spirit - on one's source of livelihood.

When we save half of the middle Matzoh at the Seder for the Afikomen, we are doing so in remembrance of the Korban Pesach. According to the משנה in ע"ו מ"א, the Korban Pesach was a unique sacrifice in that its primary purpose was not to serve as a source of penitence. Rather, the commandment in this case was specifically fulfilled by eating it. This factor has many ramifications in Halocho. Why does the Korban Pesach differ from other Korbonos in this manner?

Perhaps we can answer this by considering Yaakov's request during his journey to the house of Lovon. He paused on his travels to ask Hashem for לחם לאכל ובגד ללבוש (bread to eat and clothing to wear). This seems to indicate that, as he was leaving the security of his parents' home, he was concerned about his future survival: where would he get the sustenance needed to live? The Alshich explains that, in reality, Yaakov was not worried about his future well-being. Like all Tzaddikim, he placed his full trust in Hashem, Whom he naturally recognized as the Source of all food and shelter. However, he was also aware that every nation has its שר - its administrative angel - through whom Hashem channels His largesse for that population. Yaakov was therefore concerned that his direct connection with Hashem was being severed as he left Eretz Yisroel, and that henceforth he would be at the mercy of the שר of his new location. Consequently, he asked Hashem to maintain their earlier relationship, through which Hashem directly guaranteed Yaakov's survival, without the need for any intermediary.

I would like to explain the words of the Alshich with the following Chazal from ברכות דף ד'. We find the statement of רב אבינא that whoever says the prayer of תהלה לדוד three times daily will merit an assured existence in עולם הבא. Among the reasons given for this is that תהלה לדוד contains the all-important Posuk of פותח את ידיו ומשביע לכל חי רצון (You open Your Hands and satisfy the desire of every living being). Thus we see the overwhelming importance of realizing that all sustenance comes from Hashem, a reminder underscored by this Posuk. However, one could ask why the Gemorah chose to stress this Posuk rather than the earlier one of עיני כל אליך ישברו (The eyes of all wait upon You and You give them their food in due season) which essentially carries the same message. (The question is given added weight by the story mentioned in מסכת כתובות ס"ז, which tells of how רבא was approached for charity by a man who had once been wealthy. "All I wish is what I have grown accustomed to: a fattened chicken and a bottle of wine." רבא was at first reluctant to comply, believing that a poor person should not be subsidized for such luxurious tastes. However, when רבא's sister, who had not seen him for 12 years, visited, it was discovered that she had brought him precisely these items: a fattened chicken and a bottle of wine. רבא then understood that these were indeed meant for the poor man, for the Posuk says, "בעתו", not "בעתם". Each should receive in accordance with his need. Why, then, is the Posuk not an alternative source for our message that Hashem provides us with all?

The answer can be found in the מדרש רבה on Parshas Beshalach, which contains the Posuk "הנני ממטיר לכם לחם מן השמים" - Behold, I have caused the bread to rain down on you" (referring to

the מן). This מדרש cites the Posuk of "פּוֹתַח אֶת יָדָיו..." because it specifically demonstrates that the ways of הַקִּב"ה are not like the ways of man. When a person grasps a wet sponge and then opens his hand, nothing happens. It is only when he closes his hand that the water flows. In contrast, when Hashem opens His hand, the water (symbolizing sustenance and livelihood) pours out. It is to emphasize this realization that the Gemoro chose to highlight the Posuk of "פּוֹתַח אֶת יָדָיו".

The means by which Hashem provides this sustenance to humans varies, depending on who is involved. The earlier mention of a שָׂר for each nation can be understood as referring to the national character of that nation, its spirituality and its potential. Hashem gave each nation the necessary natural resources needed to grow the produce it deserves. Each country's achievements would therefore be limited to the bounty of its own unique traits, gained in a natural way. Klal Yisroel, though, represents the model nation for whose sake the world was created. On their behalf, Hashem provides Parnosso in a supernatural, spectacular way, which ensures that (if they deserve it) their needs will always be met, not restricted to the natural environmental limitations. A clear example of this was the granting of the מן in the desert. Thus, when we ask of Hashem "פּוֹתַח אֶת יָדָיו" we are requesting that He provide for us in this special way. This is precisely what Yaakov asked for when he sought help directly from Hashem and not through a שָׂר.

The Zohar Hakodosh noted that the power that the Egyptians held over the Jews was a result of the Jews eating Egyptian bread. One can ask "What else

should the Jews have done?" The answer is that by adapting to the Egyptian way of life, the Jews were abandoning their spiritual identity, and therefore became dependent for their livelihood on the Egyptians with all its limitations. Our existence in Egypt has been compared to that of an unborn child whose sustenance comes to him through his mother. This is what was meant by eating Egyptian bread. It was only at Yetzias Mitzrayim that the Jews regained their spiritual identity; and their livelihood was once again a result of Hashem's benevolence and not Egyptian mastery. To demonstrate this, the Jews were told to sacrifice as their Korban Pesach the very animal - a lamb - which the Egyptians revered as a deity. The Jews will flourish only if they acknowledge that their livelihood and survival come only through Hashem's good graces.

The prayer of Yaakov is one that echoes through all generations of Jews who wander through Golus. We who do so constantly face the danger of relinquishing our special identity and spiritual independence. Yaakov showed us that through devoted Torah observance, we can remain a nation apart and unsullied. If we can follow in his footsteps and retain our unique identity, then we can merit to have our livelihood provided in a special, spectacular manner, as indicated by the Posuk of "פּוֹתַח אֶת יָדָיו".

As we approach the festive days of Pesach and celebrate our חירות, let us remember this link between freedom and livelihood, and strengthen our independent identity and commitment to תורה and מעשים טובים. Then may we be זוכה to receive the aid that Hashem granted our forefathers.