

This week's translation is dedicated in honor of my wife, Devorah, who continuously teaches our children (and me) the true path of *emuna* in everyday life.

פסח

Based on Harav Menachem Azolai's
"Ohr Ha'Emunah"

Pesach night is the greatest night of the year. The long weeks of preparation to greet this holy and wondrous holiday are about to concluded. All of the practical *mitzvos* of *Erev Pesach*, all of the stressful tasks, the cleaning, the shopping, the baking of the *Matzos* are all about be transformed into great tools for absorbing the great light. The preparation makes the *mitzvah*. Moreover, the preparation is the essence of the *mitzvah*. The preparation creates vessels for the coming light. The light is great and powerful. It is the light of Hashem Himself - as Hashem promised: "I and not a *seraph*, I and not an angel." The very same divine enlightenment that the Jewish people merited on the very first *Pesach*, the *Pesach* of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, returns and reveals itself again every year with the sanctification of the holiday. It is the divine illumination that turns night into day. The sanctification of the night of *Pesach* is so elevated, like the morning sun that illuminates the house after the darkness of night, we simply need to open the blinds.

זמן חרותנו

The *Pesach Seder* awakens within us many hopes and expectations. *Chazal* say that a Jew can accomplish more on this night more than he can accomplish during the rest of the year. *Chazal* revealed to us that we can escape all of our vices and negative character traits. We need only have *emuna* and be happy. We must believe that even the most wicked person can be transformed into a complete righteous person on this night.

Is there anything that we desire more than to finish, once and for all, with our *chametz*? To finally triumph over our passion for food and to begin to live as free men, free and released from our strong bonds to food and all matter of delicious enticements? To finally triumph over anger and to commit that we are done - never again will I allow another to have the power to control me - because when another person is successful in igniting the foreign fire of anger within me, I am not a free man, I am under his rule - consequently, I am far from being connected to Hashem.

We are still in Egypt, in great distress. We are confused, not knowing what to do. It is difficult for us, it is bad for us. Then, suddenly, we feel connected to something real, something good within our souls, within our hearts. We feel as if we we've left Egypt.

We are constantly leaving Egypt. Exodus from Egypt accompanies a person throughout his life. Each person, with his own challenges, struggles to obtain *emuna*, to realize *bitachon*, to have peace in his home, to raise his children properly, to earn a living. Each person contends with the challenges of pride, anger, passion for food, other lusts, improper thoughts, etc. But, we are not alone. Hashem promises us, "you must know that life is not easy. There are difficulties. But I stand behind these difficulties, I am the guarantor of these difficulties, I am found within them, I am Hashem, I am there. I will have mercy on you. I see you and I will not let you fall. I will help you wherever you are, in the most oppressive situations. Just do not forget the most important thing. You have the power of your desire. Your desire is your greatest strength. There are so many fights, wars and struggles. You fall among the Egyptians, but you leave them, you escape. Then, you fall again and you attempt to get up again."

What remains for us is the unbelievable virtue that we refuse to give up. We don't always succeed, we've suffered insults and humiliations, but we hold onto the power of our desire. The "Egyptians" in our lives are when we become dejected and begin to despair, when we suddenly, G-d forbid, lose our desire. Our desire is the greatest power in all of creation, it is the magnificence of creation. If a person desires, he can begin anew at any moment.

We are never discouraged. We are willing to weather everything, so long as we are rewarded with intimacy with Hashem, because Hashem is our life, our joy, our strength, our hope and our consolation. הַיּוֹם אַתֶּם יֹצְאִים בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב (שמות יג, ד) - "Today you are going out, in the month of the spring." Spring is the opposite of despair. Spring is renewal, new poetry, new life. *Pesach* night raises us up a bit to where there is space, where there is room for everyone, not crowded like it is here. In that place it is possible to view everything from an elevated outlook and to understand that rather than being busy with matters of purpose, as we should be, we are generally occupied with other things, chasing money, pursuing honor, acquiring food and drink and even our spiritual pursuits are often erroneous. This night is our time of emancipation. Freedom from all of the confusion, all of the deceptions, all of the mistakes. This night elevates and encourages clearer thinking - that there is only Hashem in the world, there is nothing aside from Hashem.

Who knows One? I know One. With the beginning of the *Yom Tov*, multitudes of Jewish people are elevated and are lifted a handbreadth off the ground, from the vain constrictions of time, from Pharaoh's labor, from the dust of the *chametz*, from the material and unremarkable weekdays of the entire year and experience a closeness to Hashem, in the shelter of a Father who carries them on the wings of eagles to heights that they cannot achieve all year.

Pesach is the beginning of *Yiddishkeit*. On *Pesach* a Jew begins to be a Jew. The entire year begins afresh. Rav Shach zt"l once asked why we bless Hashem for not making us non-Jews (שלא עשני גוי) rather than blessing Hashem for making us Jews (שעשני ישראל). He answered that Hashem arranged for us not to be non-Jews, it is up to us to fashion the Jew within each of us. *Pesach* is the time that all of the Jewish people become Jews, even those who are very distant.

Pesach is a celebration of birth, on this day we became a nation. On this day we received liberty. We must help ourselves experience this freedom. Freedom from lusts and evil inclinations, freedom from the emptiness of this world. We leap over all of the obstacles. We seek only to run, wake up, not to think twice, not to ask questions - when we overthink, it is called *chametz*. The entire *Pesach* is about escaping this world, receiving new souls, reaching a new way of thinking, a new mindset. This is what Rebbe Nachman meant when he once said, "When we grasp the *matzos* in our hand, we are grasping G-dliness in our hands." Via the *matzah* we receive a new mindset. On *Pesach*, the light of freedom and the light of redemption penetrate into all corners of the soul. We must connect, to the greatest extent possible, to the amazing term: זמן תורתנו.

פה-סח

On *Pesach* the mouth (פה) talks (סח). It talks and retells the wonders of Hashem. Hashem did so many miracles for the Jewish people when they left Egypt that we are commanded to tell, praise and extol, to the point that the more one engages in this the more praiseworthy he is considered. When we speak to Hashem, we must remember Him. When we communicate with Hashem, we form a personal bond that is the essence of *teshuvah*. Speaking with Hashem is the endless sources of happiness and liveliness.

When a person tells Hashem what is happening in his life, how difficult things are, he immediately feels relief. Hashem immediately connects to him. When a person does something forbidden, he breaks away from that, he falls into depression. If he just does *teshuva*, even without articulating anything, just by thinking thoughts of repentance, he turns reality on its head. When he speaks, when he expresses remorse and seeks forgiveness and begs that these things should not occur to him again that he should not fail again, he suddenly receives a divine light that is indescribable. His expression is connection and the connection is essentially the only thing that we truly desire in this world. Rebbe Nachman taught that speech has great power to remind a person of Hashem and to give the person constant strength, even in places that are very distant from holiness, because speech does not allow us to forget Hashem. When we accustom ourselves to speak to Hashem, it becomes impossible to stop. It becomes our oxygen, our balm, the sweetest thing in our lives.

How many great things can we accomplish with the power of speech? Say something nice to a friend, express admiration for a spouse, encourage a child who returned from school a bit despondent by the rebuke of others, bless another Jew from the depths of our hearts and bring him joy, strengthen and be strengthened in our service of Hashem. Above all, with the power of speech we express thanks. Every person can say thank you. This is the greatest potential that a person has. We are fortunate to receive so many kindnesses each hour, each moment, both physically and spiritually that one need not exert too much energy to thank Hashem. "Thank you Father. You are so good to me that words cannot express." And, if I find myself in a difficult situation, G-d forbid, how can I voice my gratitude? That is our entire endeavor in this world. To fully comprehend that there is nothing aside from Hashem and everything is from Him and everything is for the best. There is no bad.

When we thank Hashem for the favors that He does for us, it is an expression of the trait of humility because we understand that without Hashem we are nothing, everything is from Him. When we are grateful for even those things that we don't want, the misfortunes that we face, we reach an expression of complete subjugation to Hashem's handling of things. When a person accepts events with love he upholds the *halacha* that one is obligated to wholeheartedly and willingly and bless Hashem for the bad just as he blesses for good. When we attain this level of submission to Hashem, all harsh judgments are sweetened.

In *modim of shemona esrei* we say "for your wonders and bounty at all times, evening, morning and noon." In every single minute there is cause to thank Hashem. When a person habituates himself to thank Hashem for every detail, even the smallest particulars, literally at every moment, he will feel the taste of *gan eden* during this lifetime.

So much good can be done with our mouths. Rav Chaim of Sanz zy"va was well known for the stringencies that were his custom on *seder night*. At the conclusion of the *seder* he would lean weakly in his chair from having exhausted all of his strength. One year after the *seder*, as he was leaning in his chair breathing deeply from his great exertion at the *seder* his door opened and the town water carrier entered his home. Despite the very late hour and being very tired, the Sanzer Rav enthusiastically stood up and grasped the man's hand with a hearty "good *yom tov*" and warmly asked him, "tell me my dear friend, how was the *seder* in your house?" The water carrier replied, "I'm sorry to tell you *Rebbe* but I did not have a *seder* and I did not perform any of the *mitzvos* of *Pesach* because I don't know how and I had no one to show me." The Rebbe responded, "it would be my great pleasure to sit with you right now and show you how to conduct a *seder*." Despite the late hour and his utter exhaustion, he sat the water carrier down and reset the *seder* plate and began to perform the entire *seder* from the beginning **with great joy.**

בני בכרי ישראל

Hashem refers to the Jewish people as His firstborn son. There is so much love in this term. The bond between Hashem and the Jewish people is one of love. Our *davening*, especially on *Yom Tov*, is replete with references to this love.

With everlasting love you have have loved us, Hashem, our G-d
 You chose us from among all of the nations
 You loved us an took pleasure in us

אהבת עולם אהבתנו ד' אלוקינו
 אתה בחרתנו מכל העמים
 אהבת אותנו ורצית בנו

All of *Yiddishkeit* is love. That is the power of the bond we have with Hashem. It is natural. Just as trimming a tree helps it grow anew, the more care and attention paid, the better it grows. Just as an eagle stirs up her nest, hovering over her young, so is Hashem towards us. Everything is with compassion, mercy, concern and love. The splendid tune that is played throughout the world [DE Note: I think he means this metaphorically] during the days of *Pesach* reveals to every Jewish soul the love of Hashem and the gratification that Hashem has in each of us. Hashem turned to the Jewish people with several expressions of of love:

לֵכֶן אָמַר לְבְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי יְהוָה וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סְבִלַת מִצְרַיִם וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעַבְדֹתָם וְנִאֲלַתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּיָרוּעַ נְטוּלָה וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים: וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהֵייתִי לְכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים וַיִּדְעוּתָם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סְבִלֹת מִצְרַיִם: וְהִבַּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל-הָאָרֶץ (שמות ו, ו-ח)

“Therefore, say to the Jewish people, I am Hashem, **and I will bring you** out from under the burdens of Egypt, and **I will deliver you** from their bondage, and **I will redeem you** with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments. And **I will take you to Me as a people**, and I will be to you a G-d, and you shall know that I am Hashem, your G-d, who brought you out from under the burdens of Egypt. And **I will bring you to the land...**”

אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם וְאֵשָׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל-כַּנְפֵי נְשָׂרִים וַאֲבֵא אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי: (שמות יט, ד)

“You have seen what I did to Egypt and how **I bore you on eagles’ wings** and **brought you to Myself.**”

If we arrive at the *seder* with *emuna* that that love that flowed upon us in the days of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* still exists and is lasting, we are assured that we too will see wonders, just as we did at *Yetzias Mitzrayim*.

Have an awesome, uplifting and inspiring *Pesach*,

Dov

NOTICE: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the parsha sheet disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai Shlita and should not necessarily be viewed as an exact translation of the sheet or even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented. The sheet is published in Hebrew; in translation, accuracy is always compromised. Rav Azolai has not reviewed this material and is not even aware of its existence. Any inaccuracies, omissions, or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy it.

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