



Pesach: The Joy of Liberty

The Torah does not explicitly command us to be happy on Pesach (beyond the general commandment to rejoice on our holidays). Nonetheless, Pesach is the source of joy for the entire year. First, Pesach is the New Year for the three pilgrimage holidays, Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot, which are all celebrated as a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt. Second, Pesach is “the time of our liberty.” Liberty is identified in Kabbalah with the *sefirah* of Understanding, the inner dimension of which is joy. Thus, as our sages direct us to connect between the redemption of Purim and the redemption of Pesach – when Pesach comes, we increase our joy even more.

What is the special joy of Pesach?

The liberty of Pesach is the release from Egypt. Not only from the straits [in Hebrew, *Mitzrayim* (Egypt) also means ‘straits’] of the impure husk, but also from all the constraints and limitations of this world. The world was created in six days, parallel to the six emotions of the heart – the six “edges” - which limit and measure all of reality. “The World of Liberty,” the *sefirah* of Understanding, is the release from all the limitations of reality. It is the exit from the law of gravity that weighs this world down. Within the confines of ordinary reality, happiness depends upon external events or mood. By contrast, the World of Liberty is the world of pure intellect, in which we generate joy by meditation with our faculties of Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge - independent of external circumstances or forces. A fitting *gematria* brings this point home: **תו** (liberty) equals *chochma binah da'at* (wisdom, understanding, knowledge).

From this we can understand why the Torah does not explicitly command us to be joyous on Pesach, the source of joy. The joy of Pesach is not dependent upon a commandment. It is joy that wells up from our liberty and freedom to choose. This inner, independent happiness begins on Pesach and continues on through all the days of the Counting of the Omer. Even though these are days

during which we observe some elements of mourning, a truly free person will maintain his happiness throughout this time.

In the Book of Formation, the special sense of the month of Iyar – the month following Nissan during which we count the *omer* every day and is the main time of mourning during the days of the *omer* – is the sense of thought (the garment of Understanding and the intellect, in general). In the world of thought, the world of Understanding, we are free to rejoice in any reality and any situation. Fittingly, the Hebrew word for ‘thought,’ מחשבה, is an anagram for ‘with joy,’ בשמחה.

Liberty does not mean escaping from our outer reality into the world of intellect and thought. On the contrary. While on Purim, when we remained servants of Ahashverosh, there is an element of escapism in the joy of “not knowing the difference between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai,” – of *ratzo*, a heavenward run outside reality, the ultimate objective of Pesach is the *shov*, return back down to earth – liberation in order to act within reality. Pesach sets the stage for us to dictate reality and not be dictated by it.

Liberty begins with freedom of thought, freedom to see the potential good concealed in every reality and to free it with internal, joyful meditation. This meditation acts on reality: “Think good and it will be good”. The ultimate objective of Pesach (which can be divided into two words: *peh sach*, which means “a mouth that speaks”) is to freely give that meditation verbal shape and form in reality.

The sense of the month of Nissan is the sense of speech, appropriate to the guidance of the sages that the more we tell about the exodus from Egypt, the better. Ultimately, the speech becomes royal leadership that acts in reality and leads it, which befits the month of Nissan, the “new year for the kings of Israel.”