

The Song of Pesach

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I am writing this on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, grateful to have arrived at the month of geulah—both for the past and, hopefully, for the present as well.

Just as the month was about to begin, Klal Yisroel suffered a devastating tragedy, losing a mother and her two precious children on Shabbos afternoon. At their levayah on Sunday, there was an overwhelming outpouring of grief.

Also on Shabbos, a beloved mechanech and builder of Torah in Monsey passed away. Rav Moshe Schwab blazed a trail of Torah, establishing a yeshiva where each talmid was treated like a diamond, polished to sparkle and shine. He was one of the good people of Monsey, whose efforts helped make the town the special place it is today.

These tragedies, along with so many others that befall us—the wars in Eretz Yisroel between Jews and Arabs, as well as between Jews themselves; the strife, the poverty, and the many challenges we refer to as “crises”—are all symptoms of golus.

We yearn for the geulah because we long for the return of the Shechinah to the Bais Hamikdosh and for the return of all Jews to Eretz Yisroel. We pray to be in Yerushalayim this Yom Tov, partaking in the Korban Pesach. We hope for the healing of the sick, the repair of our divisions, and the return of our departed loved ones, together with all the great souls of generations past.

The Vilna Gaon writes (Even Sheleimah 11:1) that the geulah will begin on Pesach and will unfold in four stages. May it begin this Pesach.

But what can we do to help bring it about?

The Jewish people have been in golus since the destruction of the second Bais Hamikdosh and our dispersion among the nations. That Bais Hamikdosh was destroyed due to the sins of lashon hara and sinas chinom. It was because of our addiction to these sins that we were exiled, and it follows that to merit the geulah, we must eliminate these aveiros from our lives and our world. Despite the efforts of many generations, we still haven't succeeded. It's easier said than done.

To understand why these two aveiros are so difficult to overcome, we need to examine their roots. We've made significant progress in eradicating many other sins, but these two remain deeply entrenched, despite intense efforts, especially since the time of the Chofetz Chaim.

Our tradition teaches that the roots of lashon hara and sinas chinom trace back to the negative influence of the Eirev Rav, who joined our nation as we left Mitzrayim and have caused great harm ever since. Their impact still lingers in the form of what our holy sages call klipos.

To rid ourselves of these impure forces, we must eliminate the klipas Eirev Rav that fuels them, enabling them to penetrate hearts and stir up conflict, division, and hatred.

But how?

Rav Yitzchok Eizik Chover writes (Ohr Torah 27) that the sins of lashon hara and sinas chinom stem from bittul Torah. The solution, as the posuk in Mishlei (15:4) teaches, is “marpeh lashon eitz chaim.” The cure for harmful speech is Torah, the Tree of Life. Torah purifies the soul and removes the negative inclinations rooted in flawed middos, which in turn are influenced by the klipah of the Eirev Rav.

People speak ill of others and harbor resentment against good people for seemingly no reason. This pattern has persisted since the time of the second Bais Hamikdosh and we have yet to break it. In fact, it seems that in our era, the final phase of exile known as ikvesa d'Meshicha, these elements have grown even more intense. Lashon hara and baseless hatred have become particularly severe.

They are fed by the Eirev Rav. They are fed by bittul Torah. As helpful as programs and educational efforts about lashon hara and sinas chinom may be, if we don't address the root cause, the problem will continue.

As spring nears, gardening services start promoting the need to destroy weeds at their roots to prevent regrowth. Simply mowing the lawn makes everything appear neat and green for a short time, but unless the weeds are pulled out from the roots, they will quickly return. And worse, they will rob the lawn of vital nutrients and weaken its vitality. No amount of fertilizer or watering will help unless the weeds are uprooted.

Lashon hara and sinas chinom are the weeds that choke our people and obstruct our path to geulah.

When we speak about geulah during Nissan, the chodesh hageulah, it implies that something in this month catalyzes limud haTorah, which in turn weakens the grip of the klipah of the Eirev Rav. But what is that force?

Rav Tzadok Hakohein (Pri Tzaddik, Rosh Chodesh Nissan) explains that Moshe Rabbeinu expressed hesitation in confronting Paroh, saying, “V'aich yishmo'eini Pharoh,” because “va'ani aral sefosoyim.” He doubted his ability to be heard due to his speech impediment.

Hashem, the One who grants speech, assured Moshe that He would repair his speech and that Paroh would listen. However, Moshe's real concern, “va'ani aral sefosoyim,” alluded to the klipah of impurity in the hearts of the Jewish people, which created a disconnect from Torah and made them unable to heed his words.

This is what he meant when he said, “Hein Bnei Yisroel lo shomu eilay, ve'aich yishmo'eini Pharoh, va'ani aral sefosoyim.” The term orlah refers to the yeitzer hara. Moshe was saying that the yeitzer hara was blocking the people from hearing his message.

When Hashem told Moshe, “Hachodesh hazeh lochem,” He gave the Jewish people the power to infuse this month with extra kedusha. With this added holiness, the Jews were able to overcome their areilus, their yeitzer hara. They returned to Torah study, and the impediment in Moshe's

speech, which had been tied to their spiritual weakness, was lifted. He could now speak to Paroh. The areilus that had blocked his words was gone. Geulah was now within reach.

Even though everything Moshe said was Torah, commanded directly by Hashem, his words could not be accepted by the Jewish people, without the added kedusha brought by the month of Nissan.

It seems, then, that what transformed Nissan into a month of redemption was this infusion of extra kedusha, which neutralized the areilus that had caused a lapse in Torah study.

Nissan, the month of geulah, includes the mitzvah of biur chometz, the removal of chometz from our homes. We search for it in every crack and crevice, ensuring that not a trace remains.

Chometz is allegorically compared to the yeitzer hara, which blocks us from teshuvah and from proper behavior. Chometz is dough that has risen. Matzah is dough that has not. Chometz represents arrogance. Matzah represents humility. A humble person doesn't engage in lashon hara or sinas chinom. He doesn't harbor hate. He learns sifrei mussar, such as Mesilas Yeshorim, is content with what he has, learns Torah, and works on his middos.

During this month of geulah, removing chometz from our homes mirrors the need to remove chometz from our souls. To merit geulah, we must search within and cleanse ourselves of the se'or shebe'isah—the yeitzer hara that holds us back from self-improvement and spiritual growth.

Since, as Rav Yitzchok Eizik Chover taught, geulah is dependent on Torah, we are strengthened by the knowledge that this month brings added kedusha. It gives us the spiritual energy to overcome the yeitzer hara and forces of tumah. We are empowered to search for the remnants of tumah within ourselves, knowing that we can uproot them and return to lives free of chet, lashon hara, and bittul Torah.

When we rid our homes and hearts of chometz, we don't just prepare for the heightened kedusha Nissan offers. We prepare ourselves to help usher in the geulah that this month is destined to bring.

The Arizal taught that the name of the Yom Tov, Pesach, hints at the power of speech, as it can be read as “peh soch—the mouth speaks.”

With the added kedusha of this time and the preparations for geulah, our mouths are cleansed of lashon hara and sinas chinom. We become capable of speaking with love—about our fellow Jew and about Hashem. We learn to use the gift of speech for good.

That's why, at the Seder, we say, “Vechol hamarbeh lesaper b'Yetzias Mitzrayim harei zeh meshubach”—the more we speak about the Exodus, the more praiseworthy we are. Through this, we demonstrate our ability to use the peh soch—our speech—the way it was intended: to elevate, to inspire, and to bring kedusha into the world through words and Torah.

Imagine a young musician blessed with the ability to bring music to life at the piano, but due to poverty, he becomes a plumber. Even if he becomes the most successful plumber in town, part of him remains dormant. The song inside him goes unsung. As he fixes pipes and clears drains, he

dreams of music. No one may notice this about him, but that's only because they don't truly know him.

So too, when Klal Yisroel was enslaved in Mitzrayim, we were a nation with a song trapped inside us. We couldn't express it. We were weighed down, unable to soar, bound by slavery and tumah.

But when we were redeemed, the gift of speech returned. Holiness burst forth from our mouths, along with deep wells of spiritual expression.

"Vechol hamarbeh lesaper b'Yetzias Mitzrayim harei zeh meshubach." The more we speak of our redemption, the greater we become. The Seder is an experience of expression: Torah, Hallel, and mitzvos, all flowing from mouths that have been spiritually redeemed and elevated.

The night of peh soch.

On Pesach, we became who we were meant to be. Our song—the essence of our soul—was finally released.

We now have the power to achieve greatness through our words. And we've been encouraged by the Master of the World Himself, who says, "Harchev picha—Open your mouth wide!"

The Jews weren't just physically enslaved in Mizrayim. Their thoughts, souls, and speech were shackled too. They were heirs to greatness, but they were caked in mud, buried under the weight of servitude. Holy children of Hashem, they had become defiled and unrecognizable. That's what golus can do.

But at the destined hour, Hashem lifted them out of the swamp, allowing them to rise again.

In our times, Hashem leaves the task to us. He gives us the tools to rise above the spiritual darkness. He enables us to rid our lives of chometz, to return, to pursue holiness and goodness.

He tells us: "If you want to be redeemed, you must do teshuvah. You must correct your sins—the very sins that delay the coming of Moshiach and the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdosh."

Through the Moshe Rabbeinus of every generation, Hashem sends us reminders year after year:

"Rachtzu, hizaku, hosiru ro'ah ma'alileichem mineged einai, chidlu harei'a." They call out to us, as the novi Yeshayahu did, quoting pesukim, invoking Chazal, drawing from seforim, and speaking in their own words, telling us that to merit the geulah, we must separate from the misguided, abandon sin, and return to our true selves. Then the darkness will lift, the golus will end, and the geulah will usher in a new era.

We are living in the final stages of the final golus. We stand at the threshold of the moment we've awaited for thousands of years. It is up to us to make it a reality.

We can do it.

All it takes is a little more love, a little more compassion. Positive thoughts. Positive speech. A thorough internal cleaning and spiritual polishing that restores our brilliance and clarity.

May we all merit to be as pure and radiant as our Pesach homes. And may our actions, words, and deeds help bring the geulah soon.