

# THE ESSENCE OF PESACH

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**BY: RAV YAAKOV WEINBERG ZT"l**



About Rav Weinberg zt"l

HaRav Yaakov Weinberg, zt"l, was the Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivas Ner Yisrael in Baltimore,

Maryland from 1987 until his petira in 1999. For many decades he was a force for Torah in the Jewish world. He was the ultimate Rebbi, transforming the hearts and minds of thousands of talmidim with his unfaltering adherence to the truth of Torah and the words of Chazal. With his incisive analysis and penetrating insight, he developed generations of outstanding leaders. They follow his example in their understanding of Torah and in their responsibility for its transmission. His talmidim have been instrumental in creating communal organizations including shuls, schools and kiruv centers. Rav Weinberg was a sought-after advisor, involved in hundreds of private and public issues within the Jewish community. He often conducted the question and answer sessions at Torah Umesorah conventions where many benefited from his counsel. Rav Weinberg was married to Rebbetzin Shaina Chana Ruderman, the daughter of Rav Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman, zt"l, the founder of Ner Yisroel. He was the older brother and mentor of Rav Noach Weinberg, zt"l, the founder of Aish HaTorah.



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*The following is an adaption of a shiur that was delivered in Aish HaTorah. The Rosh HaYeshiva had a distinctive and expressive style of speaking. The usual grammatical rules of written text were relaxed in order to capture the force and flavor of the Rosh HaYeshiva's delivery.*

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## The Essence of Pesach

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When we want to discover the essence of any holiday, the place to do that is in our *tefilah* - in the prayers of that holiday. Invariably, the *Chochamim* who composed the prayer inserted into that prayer a phrase that identifies or defines the essence of the holiday.

**When we want to discover the essence of any holiday, the place to do that is in our *tefilah* of that holiday.**

*Pesach* is defined in this prayer as "*zman cheirusanu*" - the time of our freedom. It is the time in which we gained our freedom.

But in this phrase they have made it clear that if one wants to define the essential significance, the meaning of what this *Yom Tov* is to the Jew, it is that it is the time of freedom.

Now, this poses a great many problems. Problems in terms of consistency within the *Torah*

*Pesach* is defined in this prayer as "*zman cheirusanu*" - the time of our freedom. Now, this poses a great many problems! Problems in terms of consistency within the *Torah*, and pragmatic problems.

and pragmatic problems. Let's take the pragmatic problems first.

If the essence of the holiday of *Pesach* is freedom, then all those many centuries during which Jews were anything but free would have been, of

course, a contraindication to the holiday of *Pesach*.

To have celebrated (as so many Jews did!) at the cost of risk of life, and frequently of life itself, *Pesach* in the concentration camp would have been meaningless. How could you have called him free - "*the time of our freedom*" - when he was suffering the pangs of the

**Question #1 - A pragmatic problem: If the essence of the holiday of *Pesach* is freedom, *Pesach* in the concentration camp would have been meaningless!?**

concentration camp? Where they did, in fact, have *matzah*, and they did say the prayers, including the season of our freedom, "*zman cheirusanu*."

If they were celebrating freedom, then the very essence of the holiday was totally missing in their situation, in the circumstance in which they found themselves. And yet, they felt that they were still enjoying and living the consequences of "*zman cheirusanu*." That for them too, it was a time of freedom.

**Question #2 - A consistency problem: The expression within the *Chumash* itself was "*You will become to me a nation and I will become to you your Lord*." There is a special relationship that was established at the exodus from Egypt. The relationship of a nation - of a people, and their Lord. Certainly, this would appear to be by far more significant than the concept of *zman cheirusanu* - the time of our freedom?**

I think this necessitates some reassessment of the meaning of freedom. What do we mean when we use that word? I don't think that we can accept that it means the ordinary sense of not being in prison or of not being enslaved.

Two, all the *miztvos* of the *Torah*, ALL, are a *zecher l'yitziyas mitzrayim* - as a memory of

our being taken out of the bondage of Egypt.

G-d Himself, when He appeared to all the Jews at *Har Sinai* and spoke for the first time and made them all aware of His being says to them not “I am the Lord your G-d *who created the heavens and the earth and all that is.*” But, He says to them “I am the Lord your G-d *who took you out of bondage from the land of Egypt.*” If the essence is freedom, it’s not that I took you out of bondage, not that I took you out of the land of Egypt [meaning, the essence of leaving bondage and

leaving Egypt was not that it lead to freedom, but that it lead to *Har Sinai*].

More, the expression within the *Chumash* itself was “**והייתם לי לעם ואהיה לכם לאלהים...**” - You will become to me a nation and I will become to you your Lord. It’s usually translated “*your G-d*”, the correct meaning is “*your Lord*” – *your master*. There is a special relationship that was established at the exodus from Egypt, the relationship of a nation – of a people – and their Lord.

“...משרשי המצוה, לפי שישראל הוא העם אשר בחר האל מכל שאר העמים לעבודתו ולהכיר שמו, והם אינם תחת ממשלת מזלות אשר חלק יי לכל שאר העמים. אבל הם תחת יד הקדוש ברוך הוא מבלי אמצעות מלאך ומזל, וכמו שכתב [דברים ל"ב, ט'] כי חלק יי עמו יעקוב חבל נחלתו...” [ספר החינוך מצוה שנו].

This concept of Lord is a basic concept. It is that G-d deals with the nation of Israel differently than with any other nation. He deals *directly* as their Lord, whereas to all other nations, although He is their G-d, of

course, He is the G-d of all humans, He is the G-d of all existence, but He is not their Lord directly. He treats them through *surrogates*.

“*I will be your Lord*” means *not* a surrogate, but directly involved in your lives, in your events, in your history, in all that transpires with you.

“...שמע ישראל. התבונן והבן זה: ה'. הנותן מציאות ובורא: אלהינו. הוא נבחר שבנבדלים אצלינו, אשר ממנו נקוה להשיג חפצינו בלי אמצעי...” [ספורנו, פ' ואתחנן, פרק ד, פסוק ד].

And that is what we mean when we say **שמע ישראל**, Hear O Israel, **יהוה אלהינו**, the Lord is our G-d, [meaning] is our *Lord*. [In other words] *Hashem*, G-d, is our

Lord. He is specifically the Lord of the Jews, dealing with them differently than with all other nations. **והיית לי לעם**, you will be to me a people, **ואהיה לכם לאלהים**, and I will be to you the master, the Lord.

So that it is specifically written within the *Chumash* itself that the significance of the exodus from *Mitzrayim* is the fact that we became G-d’s people, He became our Lord. In other words, a very special, particular, unique relationship is being established between Jewry and G-d, the Creator, Himself.

Certainly, this would appear to be by far more significant than the concept of *zman cheirusainu* – the time of our freedom.

**Question #3 – A consistency problem:** “...*Avodoy hem...*” G-d says of the Jews! – “*They are my servants.*” [Leviticus, 25:42]. That’s exchanging one servitude to another. Why is this called freedom? This certainly seems to be a deep paradox!

Thirdly, which might appear to be an even greater contradiction, a paradox of enormous proportions: “*Avodoy hem...*” [Leviticus 25:42] G-d says of the Jews - “...*They are my servants...*!” Why are they my servants? Because I redeemed them from the servitude of Egypt.

In other words, G-d says I didn't give them freedom. I exchanged their servitude to the Egyptians into a servitude to me [ויקרא, כה. מב] - "עבדי הם אשר הוצאתי אתם מארץ מצרים..." - *They are my servants for I redeemed them from the servitude of Egypt.* That's exchanging one servitude to another. Why is this called freedom?

This certainly seems to be a deep paradox!

Therefore, it certainly would appear that the proper designation of this holiday should be *the holiday of our relationship to You, G-d!* The holiday of being the people of G-d. A nation belonging to G-d. A nation with a relationship to G-d. Whichever way you would express it. But why *zman cheirusanu* - the season of our freedom?

I think it follows in there almost inevitably, that the concept of freedom that we're dealing with over here is *THE FREEDOM TO SERVE G-D!*

This is consistent with a major tenet of our *Chochamim* - of our wise men, who say as follows: it says in the *Chumash* חרות על הלוחות - *inscribed on the tablets*. And the *Chochamim* say אל תקרי

"...ואומר, והלוחות מעשה אלהים המה והמכתב מכתב אלהים הוא חרות על הלוחות. אל תקרא חרות אלא חירות. שאין לך בן חורין אלא מי שעוסק בתלמוד תורה..." [אבות, פרק ו, משנה ב]

אל תקרי חרות אלא חירות - don't understand *inscribed* to mean 'inscribed', it means 'to be free'. שאין בן חורין אלא בתורה - freedom can only be found in the *Torah* itself.

Now again, what is that supposed to mean?

Everybody knows that the *Torah* is the last bastion [meaning, most unlikely place] of freedom that you can identify. It is a *Torah* that tells you *what* to do, *when* to do, *how* to do, *why* to do.

Everybody knows that the *Torah* is the last bastion [meaning, most unlikely place] of freedom that you can identify!? It is a *Torah* that tells you *what* to do, *when* to do, *how* to do, *why* to do. This is freedom?

This is freedom? In what sense is this freedom?

Therefore, again it becomes very clear that the concept that we Jews are using here, and which we take as the basis of our understanding of what we stand for and who we are, is a different freedom than the freedom ordinarily meant.

But is it really?

Or will we find that this definition of freedom is the only meaningful definition of freedom and the only universal one?

Well, let's take a look. How are we to understand the word freedom? What is it supposed to mean?

Surely the basic meaning of freedom, all will have to agree, is *my right to do as I choose*. That is the basic freedom.

...Surely the basic meaning of freedom, all will have to agree, is *my right to do as I choose*. My right to do as I choose means that I, and I alone am responsible for me. That means that the true meaning of freedom is *responsibility!* Can it mean anything else?

My right to do as I choose means that I, and I alone, am responsible for me. Because since I can choose to go to the right, if I choose to go to the right, and going to the right results in my getting hit badly, I have no one else to blame. You're the one who decided to do that. If you decide to use drugs and it

smashes and destroys your life, whom are you going to blame? It was your choice. That's what freedom means. You are free to be what you choose.

That means that the true meaning of freedom is *responsibility*! Can it mean anything else?

If what you choose is what you're stuck with, and if, in other words, to be free means that you're responsible for whatever choice you make, then the true meaning of freedom is

"ונמצא בספר התורה...מה שמורה, כי המעשים הנראים מן האדם נתונים ברשותו, והוא בוחר בהם בחפצו, והם היום ברצונו ובחירתו, ועל כן התחייב בגמול וענש על העבודה ועל העברה, והוא מה שאמר הכתוב (דברים, ל, טו): ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת מות ואת הרע, ואמר (דברים, ל, יט): ובחרת בחיים." [חובות הלבבות, שער עבודת-האלהים, פרק ח]

responsibility.

To put it another way that will perhaps be a little more easily understood:

The right to choose between tweedledum and tweedledee is not a right to choose at all!

And if a Henry Ford can say, as he did, "You can choose any color you like, as long as you choose black", he wasn't really giving you a choice at all! If you can choose between black and absence of all color, that's not a choice at all. Black and absence of all color are one in the same. You use different words, but you're choosing the same thing.

**...The right to choose between tweedledum and tweedledee is not a right to choose at all! Which means that freedom is only when what you choose makes a difference!**

Which means that freedom is only when what you choose *makes a difference*! When you have a choice that makes a difference you are free.

A slave could choose whether he's going to eat the slop that they give him for lunch sitting down or standing up, nobody cares. But that's because it makes no difference. A choice between two alternatives that make no difference is not a choice! Choice means it will make a difference! Responsibility - makes a difference.

Therefore, *zman cheirusanu* doesn't simply mean *freedom*, it means *responsibility*.

Responsibility means that what I am going to choose is going to make a difference. Which means I can lead one kind of life or another kind of life. It means that I can lead a life of significance, purpose and accomplishment, or I can lead a life of self-indulgence and meaninglessness.

But this choice cannot be made until I have the opportunity of achieving greatly.

That achievement was [made possible] by becoming G-d's people. The significance of becoming G-d's people is that there is now an enormous difference, a tremendous distinction

**...The significance of becoming G-d's people is that there is now an enormous difference, a tremendous distinction between one kind of a life and another...**

between one kind of a life and another. If I am G-d's people, I can lead a life leading to the highest, the noblest and the deepest of accomplishments. One which I can relate to G-d Himself. One in which I can share the distinction and the absoluteness of the Creator Himself.

Or reject it, and lead a life of total meaninglessness, of no significance, of no accomplishment, of an indulgence of the moment, of a temporal and passing fancy.

This has now become the choice placed before me. This is freedom! This is what is meant by "in the Torah, and in the Torah itself, one can achieve freedom."

Because it is in the *Torah*, and in the *Torah* itself, and only through the *Torah*, that one can achieve meaningful responsibility. That one's choice becomes important, significant.

You can choose between a life of *Torah* and a life that therefore will lead to accomplishment and greatness. Or you can choose between a life of self-indulgence and meaninglessness.

**"There is no freedom except in the *Torah*." [Avos, 6, 2] - There is no freedom until a meaning to life can be found, in which a significance to choice can be discovered. Therefore, only with *Torah* and through *Torah* does true freedom come into existence.**

*"There is no freedom except in the Torah."* [Avos, 6, 2] - There is no freedom until a meaning to life can be found, in which a significance to choice can be discovered. Therefore, only with *Torah* and through *Torah* does true freedom come into existence.

In a sense, one can say it with a bit more depth and put it this way. Without G-d and without *Torah*

there is no freedom! Because one then is a total slave to one's physical needs, to indulgence. What else is there? There is nothing else.

You've got to indulge. You got to deal with that which will give you the most temporary pleasure. You can't even think in terms of ultimate purposes; there are no such things. And therefore, [one begins to think] *"how can I get the most cows to eat?"* When cows to eat become a little bit tiresome and boring, you're going to try to find some exotic food that you can eat so that you can get excited about eating. When you have enough steaks, they're meaningless. A

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person who eats steak once in a while - ah. But if you can eat steak three times a day, every day... how many steaks are you going to eat before it disgusts and nauseates you? It's slavery!

And you only have to take a look to see how absolutely true this is. The man who's become a success, what has he sacrificed to the so-called *"success?"* His very life. His essence. His family. His being. *EVERYTHING*. He's a slave.

He's a slave to the drugs he uses. He's a slave to the alcohol he uses. He's a slave to the need of thrills that he has. You know the fellow who has to go climbing or do his stunts!? They're slaves. They're slaves to the needs of giving titillation to their bodies. He has to find constantly new ways to thrill and excite and give some alleviation to the boredom of existence. He's a slave in the deepest sense of the word.

Whereas, the *shomer mitzvah*, the one who has a *Torah* and has a purpose, has decisions to make. What's the right and the wrong? How to go about it? When? In which way? This is a man of responsibility. This is a man whose decisions are meaningful and who has the freedom to choose. Including to choose *not to choose*. Including to reject existence itself. Including to choose death. But it's a freedom. There are choices, there are differences to be made.

Therefore, *zman cheirusanu* is really the deepest expression of becoming G-d's people. It says what the *significance* of that is.

The significance is that now we matter! That now we have decisions to make. We have responsibilities that have become incumbent upon us.

We are free people.

Free in the fullest sense of the word. That we have what to do or to reject. That we have a life to accept, and live with, and achieve through, and give meaning to. Or we can reject it all for the passing moment and lose everything. We have freedom.

And therefore, this is really the point of becoming G-d's people. Becoming G-d's people is an opportunity, so to speak. It is a way by which we can achieve, but the achievement is up to

**...Some of the significance of that is this most important of all lessons. Namely, that in becoming G-d's people we have not been guaranteed *the who and what* we are. It has merely been opened up to us the possibilities of what to become.**

us. It hasn't guaranteed anything. It hasn't given us anything other than *opportunity* and *responsibility*. So that the true significance of becoming G-d's people is that we are now able to do, to build, to accomplish, or G-d forbid, to destroy. We are free. We have a sense of responsibility; we have a difference to make.

Freedom means that what I do affects reality. What I do makes a difference to the world. What I do creates a whole situation out of which things flow. I make a difference, and my choices make a difference. I am truly a free human being.

Therefore, the proper understanding of the concept of being G-d's unique people is freedom. It is not a sinecure. It is not a simple present and a gift to live with. It is an opportunity to make use of. And it is our responsibility to make that use, or G-d forbid, to lose the opportunity and thereby bring ourselves to the deepest sense of loss imaginable!

Before one has this opportunity, how much could you lose? But, if you have this opportunity your choice becomes awesome! There is so much at stake. It is a meaningful freedom. It is, therefore, *zman cheirusanu*.

But let's see some of the significance of this. Some of the significance of that is this most important of all lessons. Namely, that in becoming G-d's people we have not been guaranteed the who and what we are. It has merely been opened up to us the possibilities of what to become.

Which means that we recognize that the human being is the one who still has to accomplish. Which means that we recognize that our efforts, and our activities, what we do, how we do it, what we say, what we undertake are our responsibility. We can't come to G-d and say, "G-d, I'm going to sit down, feed me!" It's your responsibility. "I'm going to have a family, take care of them." It's your responsibility. The whole concept of the fact that Man has to do is built on this sense of freedom.

But it goes beyond that too!

And here is perhaps the deepest significance of it.

If you speak of freedom and the concept of responsibility that's inherent in freedom, you're also saying that what counts is the *here and the now*! Not the world to come!

We are *not* free in the world to come. In the world to come we no longer have choices. Freedom is in this world alone. And if we designate the *Yom Tov* of *Pesach* as *zman cheirusanu* - the season of our freedom - we are making an enormous statement about how the Jew sees life!

If you speak of freedom, and the concept of responsibility that's inherent in freedom, you're also saying that what counts is the *here and the now!* Not the world to come! We are *not* free in the world to come. In the world to come we no longer have choices. Freedom is in this world alone. Therefore, life is infinitely precious!

That he sees life in terms of the now of this world. It is in this world that what we do matters. It is in this world that we are the creators, the formers, the ones who do, accomplish and make. Not in the world to come. Therefore, life is infinitely precious!

One cannot say that you would really rather be dead because then you will be in the world to come and

everything is fine. On the contrary, "לא המתים יהללו יה..." - *It isn't the dead who can praise G-d*, David says in the Psalms, "ולא כל יורדי דומה" - *and not those who have descended into silence* [Tehilim, 116,17]. Not from them can come an appreciation of the Creator. Not from them can come the service of He who made the world. Not from them can come a relationship.

A relationship can only come as long as we're free. The relationship between Man and G-d is only meaningful because we are free. A relationship which would not have had the freedom is a non-meaningful relationship. It's a relationship in which both are aware of each other,

A unique relationship, "You'll be to me a nation, I'll be to you a G-d," [Vaera, 6, 7] is only if it's a relationship which each maintains. It's got to be free. Freely taken, freely given.

dependent on each other, and awaiting for what's going to happen with each other. That's a relationship! A forced relationship has no meaning.

A unique relationship, "You'll be to me a nation, I'll be to you a G-d", is only if it's a relationship in which each maintains [their ability to choose]. It's got to be free. Freely taken, freely given.

And as a matter of fact, don't we find that when it came to the giving of the *Torah* at *Har Sinai*, G-d first sent *Moshe* to the Jews to present it to them and to ask them are you prepared

...And as a matter of fact, don't we find that when it came to the giving of the *Torah* at *Har Sinia*, G-d first sent *Moshe* to the Jews to present it to them, and to ask them are you prepared to accept it? They were free to say yes or to say no. Without that freedom you can't have a *Torah*.

to accept it? They were free to say yes or to say no. Without that freedom you can't have a *Torah*. The *Torah*, after all, is *not* that of a master to a slave. The *Torah* is that of a covenant. A covenant is a relationship.

We are obligated in *Torah* because of "na'aseh v'nishmah!"

You understand that "*Kafah aleyhem har k'gigis*" has nothing to do with it!

"*Kafah aleyhem har k'gigis*" says that either you do or else, but it has nothing to do with it [i.e., the voluntary acceptance of the *Torah*]. Because the fact is that the *Rbonoy-shel-olum* sent

"...ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר" א"ר אבדימי בר חמא בר חסא מלמד שכפה הקב"ה עליהם את ההר כנגיט, ואמר להם, אם אתם מקבלים התורה מוטב ואם לאו שם תהא קבורתכם... " [שבת, דף פח.]

*Moshe* to ask whether *klal Yisroel* is prepared to accept His *Torah* or not.

That meant that the *Torah* belongs to *klal Yisroel* only if they *freely* enter into a covenant with Him.



Had they said “No,” they wouldn’t have had a *Torah*. “*Kafoh aleyhem har k’gigis*” yes or not, but a *Torah* they wouldn’t have.

Whatever the *pshat* is in “*Kafoh aleyhem har k’gigis*,” it was only after they voluntarily said “*na’aseh v’nishmah!*” [that the *Torah* became binding on them]. And it’s clear in the *Chumash* that that was crucial. There was an offer, and they had to *accept* that offer in order for the *Torah* to be binding on them.

Now let’s see if we can distinguish this a bit more sharply.

Mankind has G-d’s obligations – the seven Noachide *mitzvos* – the seven commandments

which G-d gave to all human beings as human beings.

**Mankind has G-d’s obligations – the seven Noachide *mitzvos*, which G-d gave to all human beings, as human beings. The laws which we as Jews have – the *Taryag Mitzvos* – are specifically to the Jew, and to nobody else.**

All human being are obligated to keep and maintain the seven basic human laws: including the law against blasphemy, the law against idolatry, the law against murder, the law against robbery, the

law against adultery, the law providing for the need to create courts and legislators to lead, guide, and discipline all peoples.

These are basic human laws which G-d gave all mankind.

The laws which we as Jews have – the *Taryag Mitzvos* [613 commandants] – are specifically to the Jews and to nobody else.

”תנו רבנן שבע מצוות נצטוו בני נח דינין וברכת השם ע”ז גילוי עריות ושפיכת דמים וגזל ואבר מן החי.” [סנהדרין, דף נו.]  
דרש רבי שמלאי שש מאות ושלש עשרה מצוות נאמרו לו למשה... [מכות, דף כג:]

The difference between these groups of laws, however, is fundamental. The seven Noachide laws – G-d didn’t discuss with anybody whether you’re going to take it or not. He presented it as the absolute necessity as the basis by which He created the world. He created the

world on the basis that it is going to keep these laws. He created a world in which these laws have to be kept, must be kept.

These are not laws given to free people. These are laws given to slaves so to speak. You’ve got to do it or you’re not going to live. You’re not going to do it? I bring a flood! There is no

relationship posited there. There is no give and take there. This is the king – the master – ordering his subjects. He’s not consulting with them. You belong to me. I’m telling you what you’ve got to do.

**The seven Noachide laws, G-d didn’t discuss with anybody whether you’re going to take it or not. He created a world in which these laws must be kept. It’s altogether different when it comes to the *Torah*! When it comes to the *Torah* he’s not ordering; “*This is what you’ve got to do.*” He’s offering a relationship...”**

It’s altogether different when it comes to the *Torah*!

When it comes to the *Torah*, He’s not ordering, “*This is what you’ve got to do.*” He’s offering a relationship, a covenant, a treaty so to speak, of two sides, each accepting certain obligations as well as privileges.

G-d obligates, *koviyochol* – as it were – Himself, as well as the Jews obligating themselves. Each side has taken obligations and each side has taken privileges. “You owe me something,

I owe you something.” That’s a covenant. We’ve developed a give and take. We’ve developed a relationship. It is a marriage in a sense that takes place. The one thing that a marriage cannot be is forced! Marriage can only be valid if it is freely entered into. If it isn’t freely entered into there is no marriage. So much so that even if she is coerced into it the marriage is not a valid marriage. It’s got to be freely entered into.

The relationship – the covenant between the nation of Israel and G-d - is like a marriage. It is a covenant. It is a relationship entered into, and therefore must be freely entered into.

"אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא אמרו לפני בראש השנה  
מלכיות...מלכיות כדי שתמליכוני עליכם..."  
[ראש השנה, דף טז.]

It is not the king who orders his subject about, but the coronation of a king, "*tamlichuni aleichem*" - we make Him our king.

We accept Him as the king. The acceptance of Him as a king means that the king is a monarch who has to take into consideration the people who *made* Him. You hear that.

If I am a king in charge then *you don't make me your king*. I am your king *whether you like it or not*. However, the minute I'm [i.e., G-d] dependent on you to make me your king, then we

**The acceptance of Him as a king means that the king is a monarch who has to take into consideration the people who *made* Him! You hear that.**

have a covenantal relationship. I've got to take into consideration My subject's needs. Because I am only a king so long as they accept Me. I am only king so long as they believe in it.

A king who is a master - an oriental king who has total, absolute and complete control - is a king who is not accepted by his people. He is their king no matter *what* they want and no matter *when* they want. He imposes his monarchy with his all-powerful army.

A king that is appointed as such, accepted as such *by a people*, enters a relationship with the people.

G-d is the king of His creation and His orders are absolute. But, the King of Israel, He *became*. תמליכוני עליכם\ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים; we had to *accept* the kingship of G-d. It's a covenant. Therefore, it is specifically freedom. The seven Noachide laws are not laws of freedom. The laws of the *Torah* are laws built on freedom. Built on the right to accept or reject.

**Once we've accepted, of course, we have taken the covenant, and we are bound by the covenant. We are bound by the law and can no longer reject it. We have freely accepted the obligation of maintaining it.**

Once we've accepted, of course, we have taken the covenant, and we are bound by the covenant. We are bound by the law and can no longer reject it. But it is a law which we freely and openly accepted. And therefore, it is the

mark of freedom. We have freely accepted the obligation of maintaining it. Therefore, having signed the contract, so to speak, of course, I've obligated myself to keep it. But it is a *self-imposed* obligation, and therefore in perfect consonance with freedom.

This is the freedom of *Yitziyas Mitzrayim*. That we are a nation that relates. A nation that relates means that accepts and is not coerced. That enters into the relationship on a free basis.

Therefore, if we are to define the very meaning of Jewry, the definition is going to be: A *FREELY ACCEPTED RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR CREATOR!* The covenant! *Zman*

*cheirusanu* - it's the time of freedom. That becomes THE expression of what this *Yom Tov* is all about.

So let's take a look at what we've said so far:

[One,] we've said that what we do matters!

That's an enormous statement! It's a statement that goes against the grain of secularism.

"Who are we?" The secularist says. "*Motes of dust. On something that is no more than a mote of dust in a universe that has billions upon billions of planets...?*"

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We say "NO! We matter! What we do makes a difference." That's the first statement that we make. And how do we justify it? With *Pesach!*

With being taken out of the land of Egypt to be made a people, a separate people of G-d. We have been given a meaningful role to play. What we do

and say does literally make a difference. It's a tremendous statement that is made!

Two, we've said that our relationship with G-d is *covenantal*.

But in making that statement we have said something fundamentally important. Namely, that the *mitzvos*, the keeping of the commandments are not ours as *INDIVIDUALS*, but ours as part of a *PEOPLE*.

Because the covenant was not with an individual. The covenant was with a people

"**וְהָיִיתָ לִי לְעָם**" - *You will be My nation* - *My people*, ["**וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים**"] - *and I will be your G-d, your master - your Lord.*

...The covenant was with no individual. The covenant was with a people! "*You will be My nation, (My people) and I will be your G-d, your master - your Lord.*" To whom? To the nation! To the people! Therefore, I am relating to my Creator not in my individual capacity, but as part of belonging to the nation of Israel.

To whom? To the nation, to the people.

Therefore, I am relating to my Creator not in my individual capacity, but as part of belonging to the nation of Israel. It is by being part of the nation of Israel that I can relate to G-d as myself.

Which means that I must understand that my concern can never be in terms of my own spiritual life. My concern must always be for my spiritual life in relation to the spiritual life of the nation of Jewry. Which means all Jews. And that their spiritual wellbeing, just as their physical wellbeing, is of the essence to my existence. Because my whole covenant with G-d is as part of a people.

And it is as a people that we are free. That I am impactful, that I have meaning, that I have justification for existence. And that I have the opportunity for achievement because of a covenant. Which means being part of a people. But that also means that I have to be concerned with all the rest as much I am concerned with myself. That's the inevitable implication.

Therefore, the statement of which is the statement of achieving this covenant with G-d is also a statement of our co-responsibility each to the other. That all Jews are intertwined because all of them are part of this covenant. Therefore, the well-being of every single Jew is of the essence of importance to every other single Jew.

**Implication #1 of (2) above: ...I cannot stand by to see any Jew lose his spiritual existence or his physical well-being without doing my utmost to preserve it. He's part of me, I am part of him. We're all part of the same covenant. This becomes the inevitable implication of *zman cheirusanu* – the time of the season of our freedom.**

I cannot stand by to see any Jew lose his spiritual existence or his physical well-being without doing my utmost to preserve it. It's me. He's part of me, I am part of him. We're all part of the same covenant.

This becomes the inevitable implication of *zman cheirusanu* – the time of the season of our

freedom. 'Our' freedom means the freedom of the people, and therefore, there is the statement of my recognition of myself finding my significance not in myself alone, but in myself as a part of the Jewish people. And it is the peoplehood of the Jews that is of the essence of the Jewish covenant with G-d.

The implication goes very deep again!

It means that the religion of Jewry is not a different religion in the ordinary sense. Our *religion* is the same for all mankind. Namely, to keep the seven *mitzvos*. We have an addition to the religion, a *relationship*.

The *Torah* is not a religion, it is a relationship – it's a covenant, it's a different core.

Therefore, a Jew doesn't say "I'm not interested in proselytizing. I'm not interested in converting gentiles to Jewry." It's absurd! Converting to what?

**Implication #2 of (2) above: Once you recognize that Judaism isn't a religion, but that Judaism is a relationship between the Jew and G-d, built on a covenant between them, then you must to go through a conversion process...Now you see why a reform Rabbi doesn't need conversion!...**

You can convert to a religion, but to a relationship? If they want to relate they've got to freely enter. How do you go out to create proselytize? You follow?

If it were a religion - a faith - which has to be followed by all in order to achieve paradise, then I'd have the obligation to help all human beings do so. But the minute you recognize that it is a specific relationship between Israel and G-d, and it's not a faith at all, but a part of

**...It is true that G-d opened it up to them [i.e., *goyim*]. You can become part of this covenant. That's *geirus* – converting. But that's a fantastically generous and wonderful thing that G-d has granted human beings; the ability to join a covenant *already established*!!**

a covenant, those who are not part of the covenant are not part of the covenant. Why should they keep it?

It is true that G-d opened it up to them. That if they want to become part of the covenant they could enter, which is an enormously generous

thing to do! Even though they are not part of the covenant, G-d says "I'm going to keep it open. You can get into it if you want. If you accept it with all its obligations, privileges, responsibilities and all the rest. You can become part of this covenant." That's *geirus* – converting. But that's a fantastically generous and wonderful thing that G-d has granted human beings; the ability to join a covenant *already established*!!

Obviously, there's going to be a procedure by which you can become a part of the covenant. And obviously, one of the steps of that procedure automatically is going to be that you do, in fact, accept the covenant. Which means that a *ger* - a convert - must accept the *mitzvos* of the *Torah*, otherwise, he's not accepting the covenant. What is he doing? How is he becoming a *ger*?

You follow that once you recognize that Judaism isn't a religion, but that Judaism is a relationship between the Jew and G-d, built on a covenant between them, then you can't change it! You can't make it different! And you can't become a part of that covenant without accepting it!

How can a non-Jew become a Jew without accepting the obligations of the covenant?

You can't define them in your way. A covenant has to be defined *bilaterally*! There's no *unilateral* establishment of the covenant.

Therefore, if there is no covenant, and Judaism is a religion, if you keep the religion you keep it. You don't have to go through a *geirus*. You do keep it, you don't keep it. You believe in it, you don't believe in it [whatever you want].

But if it isn't a religion, [but rather] it's a covenant, it's a state of being and a relationship that exists between us and G-d, then you can't say "I'm going to enter it." What do you mean you're going to enter it? It's a two-way street! You can't say you're going to be my guest. Am I inviting you? Do I want you in my house? You've got to wait for me to say it's okay to come into my house. You can't be my guest any other way, can you?

A covenant requires that the other party to the covenant says, "Okay, you can join, I'm willing to extend it to you as well." So then you need the proper procedure by which you can become. But if there is no covenant, then just by keeping the religion you're keeping a religion. You don't have any *geirus*. You don't have any procedure by which to convert.

Now you see why a reform Rabbi doesn't need conversion? What does he need it for? You're keeping it.

We, however, who believe in a covenant *must* have a proper conversion. Without it you're not part of the covenant. It's a reality, it's not a faith. It's a fact of existence, an existential reality. Therefore, they've got to go through a conversion process. But, automatically the conversion process is going to include that you accept the covenant; otherwise, what have you converted to? Therefore, there really is not much of a choice but to see it this way.

All this is inherent in the words of *zman cheirusanu*. Because *cheirus* means freedom to choose. Which means that the relationship to G-d, which is what *Pesach* is really all about, is the time of a covenant [from that also derives]...the recognition of the meaning of being Jewish. Because after all, that's what *Pesach* was all about. The holiday of *Pesach* is when the Jews became the Jews and they became a Jewish nation. That's what it's all about. The meaning of that is entering freely into a covenant, that's why it is *zman cheirusanu*. Because that's what it means to become G-d's people, to enter into a covenant, which is [an expression of that] freedom. So *zman cheirusanu* is really the statement of what *Pesach* is all about.

**"ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם והייתי לכם לאלהים..." [וארא, ו, ז]**

"אמר החבר:...וכן פתח דבריו אל המון ישראל: "אנכי יי אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים", ולא אמר: "אני בורא העולם ובוראכם" ...אמר הכוזרי: אם כן אני רואה שתורתכם אינה נתונה כי אם לכם, ואין חייב בה זולתכם. אמר החבר: כן הוא...ואילו היה חיוב התורה מפני שבראנו, היה שווה בה כל בני אדם, הלבן והשחור, כי הכל בריאותיו. אך אנו חייבים בה מפני שהוציאנו ממצרים, והתחברות כבודו אלינו, מפני שאנחנו הסגולה מבני אדם."

[כוזרי, מאמר ראשון, אות כה, כו, כז].



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