



REAL FREEDOM



פרשת ויקרא פרשת החודש

In this week's *parsha*, we are introduced to the *korbon mincha* - the "meal" offering. The *korbon mincha* usually contained flour, oil and some water, but the Torah forbids us to let it rise so that it should not become *chometz*. *Rabbeinu Bachya* gives a logical explanation for this year-round restriction, based upon a *gemara*.

The *gemara* (brachos 17a) tells us that at the end of his davening, Rav Alexandrie would implore Hashem to understand that the will of each Jew is really to do His will. It is however, the "yeast in the dough" - *שְׂעֵיטָה* that interferes.

Rashi explains that he was referring to the *yetzer hara*. The evil inclination is compared to leaven which causes the dough to rise and become *chometz*. So too, the *yetzer hara* will "raise" a person's ego, producing haughtiness and providing a false license to sin (*Sefer Hachinuch*). The function of most *korbanos* is to help atone for sin. Therefore, it stands to reason, explains *Rabbeinu Bachya*, that *chometz*, which symbolizes the *yetzer hara*, has no place on the *mizbeach*. We are looking to rectify sin, not to exacerbate it. With this understanding, we could perhaps appreciate why the prohibition against *chometz* is so extensive and severe on Pesach. The freedom which we celebrate on Pesach is the free-will which we exercise to be "עֲבָדֵי ה'" (servants of Hashem), rather than to be slaves to Pharaoh. We are not celebrating the freedom to live without divine limits or to be enslaved to our own temptations. Thus the Torah demands that we not own, eat or benefit from *chometz* throughout Pesach. We are not to confuse real freedom with the masquerade of the *yetzer hara*. Thus chazal declare "אֵין לָךְ בָּי" - "חורין אֶלָּא מִי שְׂעוּסָק בַּתּוֹרָה" - the only free person is he who is busy with Torah. Torah is the vehicle which Hashem has bestowed upon His people to escape the clutches of the *yetzer hara*. Only Torah can maintain us as a truly free people.

A parable is given of two leaves on a tree who were bemoaning their lot in life; anchored to a branch, "deprived of freedom". One day a strong wind blew one leaf off. As the falling leaf was happily "gaining his freedom", the remaining leaf jealously looked on. However, two days later, the tables were turned. The fallen leaf began to shrivel, while the leaf attached to the branch was robust with life.

"עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה", *Torah* is a tree of life to those who grasp onto it.



It is now five years that my dear father-in-law, Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Weinberger, זצ"ל, returned his precious *neschama* to its Maker. For most of his life, he taught small children in Toras Emes Kamenetz in Brooklyn, New York. He loved people, and he especially loved children. His beginnings were very difficult. He was raised in Vienna, Austria and at the tender age of nine his father died of pneumonia. Four years later his mother was deported to Riga where she was killed by the Nazis, י"מ. His life was spared by the Kindertransport (children's train) in 1938, through the herculean efforts of Rabbi Dr. Solomon Schoenfeld and Mr. Julius Steinfeld. This took him as a child of 13 to Cardiff, South Wales, where he lived for four years before going to the famous Gateshead Yeshiva in England.

He would often tell us about his years in Cardiff. One particular episode depicts the freedom which he experienced, yet the self-control which he exhibited. In South Wales he went to public school where he learned English and other secular studies. In addition, he learned Torah with a *talmid chochom* by the name of Rabbi Rogosnitsky, of whom he was very fond. In the public school he was very well-liked and respected by his teachers. A certain non-Jewish teacher, Mr. Crowther, invited my father-in-law to his home after school one day. It appeared that he wanted to show off his prized student to his friends. Once my father-in-law realized the purpose of this visit, he felt acutely embarrassed and self-conscious. He knew that his every act was being closely scrutinized. Mr. Crowther then asked him to partake of the food which he had prepared for his guests. Although my father-in-law realized that he might be jeopardizing his good standing, he nevertheless responded, "I am sorry I cannot eat anything. I am Jewish and this is not kosher." The words that Mr. Crowther then uttered stayed with my father-in-law for the rest of his life. He shared them with us, for he obviously realized their critical implication for his children. He said, "I did not know this, but had I known this and you would have eaten, I would have lost all my respect for you."

My father-in-law, even as a teenager, was a בן חורין - choosing to be truly free to serve Hashem without bowing to external pressures. Throughout his life he was connected to our Torah - his tree of life.

"יהי זכרו ברוך"

Living without limits is detachment from the tree, once a leaf falls and shrivels we see the price to be "free".
-Frayda Grunberger (née Storch)

Point of Discussion
What strategies work against your yetzer hara?