



Volume 4. Issue 48

Freedom

As we approach *seder* night, focusing on a *Mishnah* learnt this week (6:2) seem highly appropriate:

Rav Yehoshua ben Levi says... And it says “And the tablets were made by *Hashem*, and the writing was the writing of *Hashem* engraved on the tablets.” (*Shmot* 32:16) Do not read “*charut*” (engraved), but “*cheirut*” (freedom), for man is only free if he is involved in *Torah* study...

The *Mishnah* teaches that involvement in *Torah* sets a persons free.

While people feel that they have an intuitive understanding of the concept of freedom, the *Midrash* is not satisfied. The *Midrash Raba* (*Metzora* 18:3, *Ki Tisa* 41:7) effectively asks “free from what?” Three opinions are brought¹: freedom from the *Malach Ha'Mavet*, freedom from exile/government and freedom from afflictions (*issurim*). The *Midrash* and *Gemara* (*Eiruv* 72a) take some of these understandings quite literally. At *Har Sinai*, it is explained that we were indeed returned to the state of *Adam Ha'Rishon* prior to his sin and quite literally free from the *Malach Ha'Mavet*. The sin that immediately followed, however reverted them back to their original state. Also, the *Gemara* explains, had the *luchot* not been smashed, then no nation would have been able to rule over *Am Yisrael*.

The *Mishnah* however suggests that *Torah* can liberate us even now. Therefore we shall attempt to briefly offer different explanations of the three opinions mentioned in the *Midrash*.

Chazal teach us that the *Malach Ha'Mavet* is also synonymous with the *Yetzer Ha'Rah*. The *Meiri* explains that engagement in *Torah* results in a person no longer being subjected to the whims of his bodily desires. Ordinarily a person is driven by instinct and his mind already decided by his cravings. While this may have the appearance of freedom in contrast to a slave, actions are in reality predetermined. *Torah* frees us from that overpowering influence while introducing a gamut of real choices and, with reward and punishment delayed, we are free to choose.

Freedom from government may be readily understood for the explanation of *R' Chaim Volozhiner* (*Ruach HaChaim*). He explains that Man is born to work (*Sanhedrin* 99b). This is a metaphysical reality. His shoulders must always bare a yoke. We learnt earlier (3:6) “Whoever throws off the yoke of *Torah*, they place upon him the yoke of government and yoke of sustenance.” The reverse is also true, as the *Mishnah* taught, that one who does bare the yoke of *Torah* and in his efforts demonstrates it is such, then other yokes will be removed. With this understanding, *Torah* quite literally liberates one for other worldly burdens.

Freedom from afflictions at first may be a little more difficult to understand. According to the *Midrash Shmuel* this cannot be understood literally, for he notes, the it is clear to all that the righteous too have their fair share of troubles. Instead, he explains that while they may experience these afflictions, they will not be subjugated by them. Their worldly perspective, fashioned by their persistent learning, result in their enduring such experiences with an acceptance and even good countenance.² The *Midrash Shmuel* uses this to explain the beginning half of our *Mishnah*. It is usually, read and translated as follows:

R' Yehoshua ben Levi said: every day a heavenly voice calls from *Har Chorev* and announces saying, “Woe to people because of their insult to *Torah*...”

According to the *Midrash Shmuel* the end of the above quote should be understood as meaning: the exclamation of “woe” called out by one suffering an affliction is a result of their insult to *Torah*, for had they been immersed in *Torah*, they would have endured the affliction in a very different way.

The *Midrash*, in covering the three types of freedom, also highlights the three types of slavery. The external or social (government/exile), personal (afflictions) and the more subtle internal (evil inclination). *Pesach* is closely tied to *Shavuot* and *Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu* made it clear that the liberation from Egypt was to bring them to *Har Sinai* and accept the *Torah*. During *Zman Cheiruteinu*, a period where we celebrate freedom, we must remember all these forms of slavery both the obvious and subtle, and the means with which we are to liberate ourselves.

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¹ In different *Midrashim* the opinions are brought in different names and therefore the names have not been included.

² See the *Midrash Shmuel* for a fuller treatment of this concept and the world perspective of the righteous.

Revision Questions

אבות ו' א'-ג"א

- According to *R' Meir*, regarding one that engages in *Torah*: (א': ה')
 - What does he merit?
 - What does it “cloth” him in?
 - What four things does it enable him to be?
 - What four things do people benefit from him?
 - What three things are given to him?
 - What is revealed to him?
 - In comparison to things in nature, what does he become?
 - What three traits characterise him?
- According to *R' Yehoshua ben Levi*: (ב': ה')
 - What does the heavenly voice announce on a daily basis and from where does it originate?
 - Who is truly free?
 - What happens to one that is constantly engaged in *Torah*?
- From where does the *Tana* learn that even if one learns one letter of *Torah* from another does he need to treat him with *kavod*? (ג': ה')
- What is “the way of *Torah*”? (ד': ה')
- What should be in excess of one’s learning? (ד': ה')
- What two reasons are given for why one should not desire the “table of Kings”? (ד': ה')
- Through how many qualities is Kingship acquired? (ה': ה')
- Through how many qualities is *Torah* acquired? (Can you list them?) (ה': ה'-ו')
- What is an effect if one says something in the name of the person who originally said it? (ו': ה')
- What reason is give for why *Torah* is “great”? (ו': ה')
- According to *R' Shimon ben Menasya* what seven things are fitting for *tzadikim* and who had all seven? (ז': ח')
- What was *R' Yosi ben Kisma*’s response when he was offered a large some of money to relocate? (ז': ט')
- What are the five *kinyanim* that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* has the world? (ז': י')
- For what purpose was everything created? (ז': י"א)

הוריות א' א'-ג'

- If one acted in according to the mistaken ruling of *Beit Din*, what is the general rule regarding when he is obligated to bring a *korban chatat* and when he is exempt? (א': א')
- What are the two opinions regarding a person who acted according to a mistaken ruling of *Beit Din* but was unaware that *Beit Din* actually retracted that ruling? (א': ב')
- When is *Beit Din* obligated to bring a *par he'lem davar shel tzibur*? (א': ג')

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Next Week's Mishnayot...

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | שבת קודש |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 20 th April ט"ו ניסן | 21 st April ט"ז ניסן | 22 nd April י"ז ניסן | 23 rd April י"ח ניסן | 24 th April י"ט ניסן | 25 th April כ' ניסן | 26 th April כ"א ניסן |
| Horayot 1:4-5 | Horayot 2:1-2 | Horayot 2:3-4 | Horayot 2:5-6 | Horayot 2:7-3:1 | Horayot 3:2-3 | Horayot 3:4-5 |

