



Likkutei Sichos

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The Three Names of Pesach

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1.

THREE NAMES

The holiday of Pesach is called by three names (epithets): a) Scripture¹ calls it “**Chag Hamatzos** {Festival of *Matzos*}”; b) in the prayer liturgy, the given term is (“this Festival of *Matzos*...”) *Zman Cheruseinu* {Season of **Our Freedom**}”; c) the Rabbis called all seven (or eight)² days “**Chag Pesach**” (and this is how it is also commonly called).

The general point and fundamental message of this festival has three parts, which are conveyed by these three names.

The order in Torah is “also Torah”³ — a directive and lesson; consequently, the three names (and what they symbolize and teach us) appear in the order of their respective importance.

First is the message of *Chag Hamatzos*, the name given in **Torah Shebichsav** {Scripture}.⁴ Second is the message of the “Season of Our Freedom,” wording established by the Sages of the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah*⁵ to be recited in our prayers. Finally, “*Chag Hapesach*,” which is the name of the festival commonly used by the Rabbis (and common folk).

¹ *Shemos* 23:15; *Shemos* 34:18; *Vayikra* 23:6; *Devarim* 16:16.

² {In Israel, the festival spans seven days whereas in the diaspora the festival spans eight days.}

³ {The word, “Torah,” is etymologically related to the word, “*hora’ah*,” meaning directive or lesson.}

⁴ {Lit. “The Written Torah,” otherwise known as “*Chumash*,” “*Tanach*,” or “The Pentateuch.”}

⁵ *Berachos* 33a. {The *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah*, lit., “Men of the Great Assembly,” a group of Sages who assumed religious leadership of the Jewish people between 410 BCE and 310 BCE. Realizing that the Jewish people were growing weaker spiritually, a group of wise leaders came together with a special aim of strengthening Judaism. Initially convened by Ezra, among them were the last of the prophets Chaggai, Zechariah and Malachi, as well as the sage Mordechai, (of the Purim story), and many others. One of their most notable accomplishments was the composition of a fixed prayer liturgy.}

2.

BIRTH = RENEWAL = A NEW BEING

As explained in the Prophecy of Yechezkel,⁶ the exodus from Egypt marked the **birth** of the Jewish nation. It is called the “birth” not only because the Jewish people became a nation at that time, a sort of birth that is common to other nations, as well. Rather, when the Jewish people became a nation,⁷ they were transformed into “a new entity.”⁸

The objective, purpose (and fulfillment) of the Exodus was *Matan Torah*.⁹ As the verse states,¹⁰ “When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve Hashem on this mountain.”

[This is one of the reasons why the day on which we celebrate the festival of Shavuot — the time of the Giving of the Torah — is determined by (counting seven weeks from the second day of) Pesach. This indicates that Shavuot (*Matan Torah*) is a continuation of the process of Exodus, the birth of the Jewish nation.]

Meaning, the birth of the Jewish nation corresponds to their becoming a **Torah** nation.¹¹ The entire essential-character of the Jews (also as individuals) is Torah.

[The Jewish people became a “new entity” not only because they had reached such a lowly state in Egypt that they were *unfit* to receive the Torah, but moreover, since they were in the forty-nine gates of impurity,¹² their state was *inimical* to Torah (and holiness).

⁶ Ch. 16. See the commentators there.

⁷ Already in Egypt, the Jews were “a great, powerful, and populous nation.” [*Devarim* 26:5.]

⁸ The Exodus was the beginning of the Jewish people’s conversion process which was completed on Shavuot. [*Yevamos* 46a, *Krisus* 9a]; and “a convert is like a new born baby.” [*Yevamos* 22a.]

⁹ {The Giving of the Torah.}

¹⁰ *Shemos* 3:12.

¹¹ As the Rabbi Saadia Gaon writes, “Our nation is only joined together as a nation by Torah.” [*Sefer Ha’emunot V’hade’os* 3:7.]

¹² *Zohar Chadash*, beg. of *parshas Yisro*. {The *Zohar* describes how the Jewish people’s spiritual state was at an all time low before the Exodus. They had sunk down to the lowest level of impurity, and, as some authorities write, had they descended even one step lower, to the 50th “gate,” they never would have returned.}

Rather, **more importantly**, Torah is Hashem's "protégé... His delight...",¹³ "a hidden treasure that was concealed for **You**."¹⁴ Torah is entirely beyond the realm of created beings. Thus, for the Jews (as people living down here in this world, and how much moreso, living in Egypt) the Torah was too sublime {to relate to}, something radically new {compared to their level} outside their purview.]

On this basis, we can explain the three names, "*Chag Hamatzos*," "*Zman Cheiruseinu*," and "*Chag Hapesach*." They exemplify three steps (in **this** specific order) that allowed the Jews to become a new entity.

3.

THREE STEP LEARNING

We can clarify the above by way of an analogy to a teacher who imparts to his student a concept that the student, utilizing **his own** intellectual abilities, could not fathom. For the student, this idea from his teacher is a total **novelty**. (This is not because the student had been unfamiliar with the idea, but rather, because the idea was beyond the student's intellectual **capabilities**.)

In order to grasp the concept, a student must first bring himself to a state of "*bittul* {surrender}."¹⁵ As our Sages said concerning "a Torah scholar who sits before his teacher,"¹⁶ "his lips must drip with myrrh {*mor*}" (i.e., "bitterness {*merirus*} out of a sense of reverence"¹⁷).

[For just by employing **his own** abilities and intellect, this student would be unable to grasp the novel thought being explained, for it is beyond him.

¹³ *Mishlei* 8:30.

¹⁴ *Shabbos* 88b. {The full context of this quote is as follows: When Moshe ascended on High to receive the Torah, the ministering angels complained to Hashem: Master of the Universe, what is one born of a woman doing here among us? Hashem replied: He came to receive the Torah. The angels asked: The Torah is a hidden treasure that was concealed by You for nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the creation of the world, and You seek to give it to flesh and blood?}

¹⁵ {In the Hebrew original "*Bittul*" – *Bittul* connotes self-nullification, humility, and the negation of ego. It is the antithesis of *yeshus*.}

¹⁶ *Shabbos* 30b; *Pesachim* 117a.

¹⁷ *Rashi, Shabbos* ibid, s.v., "*notfos*."

Specifically, by undergoing *bittul*, i.e., by **negating** his sense of self, he can become a fitting “vessel” to receive the concept. As the Sages put it,¹⁸ “An **empty** vessel holds {what is placed in it}.”]

However, afterward, the student must {push forward and} exert himself to **grasp** the concept. At this stage, he must now utilize his **intellect** (his sense of self).¹⁹

[For although it is the “**empty** vessel holds {what is placed in it},” the student still must be a “vessel” — and a **complete** one at that (without a leak that renders it non-functional). Thus, the student cannot be satisfied with his *bittul* alone; he must open and prepare his mind to comprehend the lesson, making himself into a vessel that holds and retains what is placed in it.]

The goal of studying {this lesson} is that eventually,²⁰ “the student fully appreciates²¹ his teacher’s thinking.” Consequently, although the student, as he stands **now**, cannot even begin to understand, “his teacher’s thinking,” his teacher must condense and simplify the lesson in accordance with the student’s intellect. (Still the full depth of the lesson, as it conceived in the teacher’s mind, remains **concealed** within the condensed version of the idea that the teacher imparts.)²²

At any rate, the student must constantly try to **break out** of the constraints and limitations of **his** intellect, elevating his intellect to that of his teacher’s. Specifically in this way a student will eventually be able to “fully grasp his teacher’s thinking” (an entirely higher sort of intellect than his own).

¹⁸ *Berachos* 40a.

¹⁹ {“*Metzius*,” in the Hebrew original.}

²⁰ *Avodah Zarah* 5b.

²¹ {In the Hebrew original, “*ka’im inish ada’atei derabbei*,” lit., “a person will know the mind of his teacher.” *Chassidus* describes this state where the student has absorbed the teacher’s wisdom to such a degree that he begins to think like his teacher. Not only does he understand the teacher’s opinions, but his way of thinking has been so formed that he begins to think that way.}

²² See *Sefer Hamaamorim* 5657, s.v., “*Veyadaata*.”

4.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS AND THEN STEP ONE

We might question the order [that **first**, “the lips of a Torah scholar who sits before his teacher must drip with myrrh” (i.e., *bittul*), and **afterwards** he should forge himself into a **vessel** (an entity) {in order to grasp what he has learned}.

The Talmud relates:²³

Before Rabbah began his lecture to the rabbinic students, he would offer humorous remarks, cheering his students. **Afterward**, he sat in serious earnestness²⁴ and began his discourse.

This illustrates that “the students’ hearts must be opened”²⁵ first (meaning, they must be made into vessels capable of understanding the teachings). Only afterward did they sit “in **serious earnestness**” (reverence and *bittul*)!²⁶

The explanation: Rabbah’s humorous remarks **before** he began to teach only prepared his students for study, but it was not **part** of the lesson or the study itself.

In other words: Rabbah did not engage in humor in order to enable his students to grasp the instruction. Rather, he did so in order to arouse their **desire** to absorb his teachings, i.e., to attune their intellects to receive instruction.

However, the relationship and (relative) nexus between a teacher and his student, which enable the teacher to **relate** intellectually with a student are brought about only when the student “sits in serious earnestness” (and then the teacher could “begin teaching”).

²³ *Shabbos* 30b, *Pesachim* 117a.

²⁴ {In the original Hebrew, “*morah*”; lit., “reverence,” or “fear.”}

²⁵ Rashi’s commentary on *Shabbos*, loc. cit., s.v. “*Ubadchei*.”

²⁶ {Mirroring the serious earnestness of Rabbah once his formal teaching began.}

5.

RIGHT OR LEFT FIRST

Based on this interpretation, we can also understand the order in the dictum of the Sages:²⁷ “Always let the left hand push away and the right hand draw near.” The order in this statement implies that **first**, “the left hand push away,” and **then**, “the right hand draw near.”

[In this statement, the Sages wished to emphasize only that {should a person need to push individuals away, e.g., chastise them, then} the person should push others away only with his **left, weaker** hand, and draw them near with his **right** hand.]

We can ask the same question here, as above: How does this order conform with the order in the above quote that “**Before** Rabbah began teaching... he would offer humorous remarks (an act of ‘drawing near)’; afterward, he sat in serious earnestness (the opposite approach)?

Additionally, as a general rule {in Jewish practice},²⁸ the right is given precedence to the left. Why, here, does the left **precede** the right?

Even more difficult: Following the statement, “Always let the left hand ...,” the Talmud writes, “{when dealing with} the inclination {toward procreation}, or a child, or a woman, the left hand should push away and the right hand should draw near.” Indeed, a teacher encourages a child to study “with age-appropriate items, which a child appreciates.... A teacher tells the child, ‘Read and I will give you nuts, etc.’” (as Rambam describes **at length** in *Peirush HaMishnayos*).²⁹

This indicates that regarding a child, the “right hand draws near” needs to come **before** “the left pushes away.” [As we know anecdotally, if the **first** approach with a child is that “the left pushes away,” the child may become entirely averse to studying.]

²⁷ *Sotah* 47a.

²⁸ Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 2, par. 4.

²⁹ *Sanhedrin*, ch. “*Chelek*,” s.v. *Vehakas Hachamishis*.

Based on the answer above (in section 4) we can explain: The aphorism, “Always, let the left hand push...” refers only to the recommended order in **actually** influencing another person. [In this regard, “the left pushes away” before “the right draws near” (as mentioned above in sections 3 and 4).]

This statement does not deal with activities (whereby “the right draws near”) that are **required** as a **preparation before** beginning to educate a student — like making humorous remarks to the students, or engaging with a youngster by giving him “things that he appreciates.”

6.

SERVITUDE, FREEDOM, AND BREAKING OUT

Just as these three steps are necessary when studying a radically new concept (as mentioned above in section 3), they are also necessary, and even moreso, when transforming a person’s entire being into “a new reality.”

Similarly, the “birth” of the Jewish nation would only be completed and perfected after they would “serve Hashem on this mountain” (as discussed above in section 2). All three of these stages were necessary:

- a) In order to receive the Torah, it was necessary for the Jewish people to “**serve.**” They had to labor and toil to divest themselves of their previous essence-characters (which were inimical to Torah). Additionally, “you will serve” refers to the *avodah* of a **servant**, who does his job with self-effacement and disciplined obedience.³⁰

In other words: In order to receive the Torah, the Jewish people needed to fulfill {their declaration that}³¹ “**We will do and we will learn** {everything that Hashem has spoken},” **prefacing** acceptance, “we will do,” before “we will learn.”

³⁰ {In the Hebrew original, “*kabbalas ol*,” lit., “acceptance of the yoke.”}

³¹ *Shemos* 24:7.

b) On the other hand, fulfilling {Hashem's directive}, "you will serve," does not require a person to break himself. On the contrary, serving Hashem reflects who he is in essence. For the {unity of the} Jewish people and the Torah are likened to the fish and the ocean.³² This is in harmony with *Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel's* position {regarding a *mikvah*}³³ that fish do not interpose between a person and the water.

As the Sages say,³⁴ "**No one is free except** a person who is occupied in Torah study." [This is perplexing: Torah demands that "you will serve," **servitude!**] For the true nature of a Jew is to fulfil Torah and *mitzvos*. As the *Mishnah* says,³⁵ "I was created to serve my Creator."

When a Jew **does not** fulfil Torah and *mitzvos*, Heaven forbid, he may imagine himself to be "free" of any burden. He may imagine that living this way is easier than living a strict life of Torah and *mitzvos*. Although his lifestyle may *seem* easier, he lives a life of "**crushing labor**,"³⁶ since his lifestyle (devoid of Torah and *mitzvos*, Heaven forbid) belies his true identity and nature.

[As the Sages³⁷ define **crushing** labor, "giving (men's work to women and) women's work to men." Although a woman's work seems lighter, for a man, such work would be "crushing labor," as he is unaccustomed to such work, and he finds it unnatural.]

³² *Brachos* 61b. {The *sichah* emphasizes that Jewish people and Torah are one. The context of this quote from the Talmud in *Berachos* talks of a beautiful parable offered by Rabbi Akiva, to explain why he continued to study and teach Torah notwithstanding that doing so put his life in danger.

"A fox trotting along a riverbank noticed fish fleeing from place to place. The fox asked them: From what are you fleeing? They answered: We are fleeing from the nets that people cast upon us. He said to them: Do you wish to come up onto dry land, and we will reside together? The fish said to him: Are you the one of whom they say, he is the cleverest of animals? You are not clever; you are a fool. If in the water we are afraid, although it is our natural habitat that gives us life, then in a habitat that causes our death, all the more so.

The moral is: As Jews, we must never desist from Torah study, about which it is written: "For that is your life, and the length of your days." (*Devarim* 30:20)}

³³ *Mikvaos* 6:7. {A *mikvah* is a ritual pool used for immersion to remove impurity. By law, nothing may interpose between a person's body and the water. According to Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, fish do not interpose.}

³⁴ *Pirkei Avos* 6:2.

³⁵ *Kiddushin* 82b.

³⁶ {*Shemos* 1:12.}

³⁷ *Sotah* 11b; *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 1, par. 11.

A Jew is only truly free when he complies with Hashem's directive, "you will serve."

c) *Matan Torah* transformed the Jews into something **qualitatively different**. *Matan Torah* enabled a Jew's *avodah* — which, on the face of it, ought to be measured and limited (in accordance with his existential limitations) — to be an *avodah* (bound up with the Giver of the Torah; consequently, his *avodah*) exceeds measure and limitation.

These three stages are expressed through the three names of the festival: "Chag HaMatzos," "Zman Cheiruseinu," and "Chag HaPesach." *Matzah* alludes to **bittul**, a lack of ego and haughtiness. "Cheiruseinu {our freedom}" alludes to a Jew drawing *bittul* into his sense of **self**, so that the true idea of freedom is discernible and sensed, as mentioned above, and he delights in it. *Pesach* means, "to **skip** over" — (the necessity of) Jewish people *skipping* to a qualitatively different state of being (— the way the Jewish people "skipped" at the time of (the Exodus and) *Matan Torah*, a gift from Above.) This was expressed by the Jewish people breaking out of their limitations, ascending to a qualitatively higher state.

7.

HOLINESS DOES NOT BREAK

A directive in our personal *avodah*, relevant to every Jew:

"The beginning of divine service, as well as its core and root" is reverence and *kabbalas ol*, the *avodah* characteristic of a **servant**.³⁸ However, a person must not perform *avodah* out of sadness or brokenness, Heaven forbid, since "your people are all righteous."³⁹

³⁸ *Tanya*, "Likkutei Amarim," ch. 41.

³⁹ {*Yeshayahu* 60:21.}

[However, if a person has put up a *separating curtain* or a *wall* {between himself and Hashem}, then he must first break **these** barriers, “in order to shatter the *kelipos*....⁴⁰ This is accomplished with a **broken heart and a bitter soul.**”⁴¹]

For holiness negates the very notion of “breaking.” Only when confronting “his body and animal-like soul,”⁴² if “they, Heaven forbid, control him,” must a person engender within himself feelings of “a broken heart and a humbled spirit.” Then, “the broken heart and embittered soul” (rooted in “holy severities”) will crush this bodily dominance. For the G-dly soul, however, there is no brokenness, only joy.⁴³

[This also explains the following story: The Alter Rebbe owned a silver snuffbox without a lid, because he had detached the (shiny) lid, and used it {as a mirror} to center the *tefillin* on his head precisely.

The Tzemach Tzedek was once told about this. The person relating the anecdote mentioned that the Alter Rebbe had broken the lid off the snuffbox. The Tzemach Tzedek responded, “Grandfather’s approach was not to break things. He did not break the lid; rather, it was probably attached to the snuffbox with a hinge-pin, and grandfather removed the pin {releasing the lid}.”

We might ask: Even if the Alter Rebbe had broken the lid, he would have done so for the sake of *mitzvah*, not (just) to break it!

The explanation: The realm of the holy is **altogether** devoid of “destructiveness.” In light of this reality, the Tzemach Tzedek was convinced that the **Alter Rebbe** would not have broken the lid.]

Therefore, the self-effacement and disciplined obedience needed at “the beginning of *avodah*” — the *avodah with the G-dly soul itself* — must be

⁴⁰ {*Kelipah* — *Kelipah* translates literally as “a shell” or “a peel,” denoting anything that conceals, and thus opposes, G-dliness, just as a shell or a peel conceals the fruit within.}

⁴¹ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 17.

⁴² *Ibid.*, ch. 34.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, ch. 31.

done with relish⁴⁴ and vitality fueled by the knowledge that this expresses the true “freedom” and true identity of every Jew.

-Based on a talk delivered *Acharon Shel Pesach*, 5737 (1977)

⁴⁴ {In the Yiddish original, “*geshmak.*”}