

CHIZUK AND IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael -
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

"If Shabbat HaGadol comes, can Pesach be far behind?"

The original words taken from the last line of Shelley's poem "Ode to the West Wind", optimistically reads: "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" - As the bitter cold and the bleary skies of winter command the horizon, and pessimistic thoughts fully occupy one's mind, the poet optimistically points to the inevitable, and impending, arrival of Spring.

For many deeply mired in the hardships of Galut the experience of the Seder night had a similar flavor. The Seder provided us with the opportunity to take a quick break from all the sorrow and difficulties and magically transport oneself to an alternate reality (Maybe this explains why in Galut they need two Sedarim...) Leaving all our troubles behind, we could imagine ourselves as B'nei Melachim joyfully marching away from the slavery and sorrow of Egypt.

The Rabbis taught that "Go'el Rishon Hu Go'el Acharon", The Go'el Rishon, the first redeemer, Moshe, is deeply connected to the Go'el Acharon, Mashiach ben David, the final redeemer (Sh'mot Rabba 4:2).

Therefore, as we relive the Exodus from Egypt, the first Geula, we simultaneously look forward to the future anticipating the Geula Acharona, the Complete Redemption.

This notion of connecting past and

future, is an important theme in our daily prayers. The Talmudic saying speaks of connecting Geula (Redemption) to Tefilla, as an explanation for the order of the Davening where the Bracha of Ga'al Yisrael (thanking G-d for our deliverance from Egypt) precedes the Amida prayer.

The Birkat 'Geula', as we conclude the Sh'ma, deals with our past, while Tefilla, the Shemoneh Esrei prayer, deals with our hopes and dreams articulating our vision for the future. The words "Ga'al Yisrael" describing historical deliverance, is followed, to a large part, with images of the ingathering of the exiles to Eretz Yisrael, as well as G-d's own anticipated return to his city: V'LIRUSHALAYIM IRCHA B'RA-CHAMIM TASHUV - V'TECHEZENA EINENU B'SHUVCHA L'TZION B'RACHAMIM.

Our hopes of achieving this future redemption, hinge upon our learning and internalizing the message that was involved in the Exodus from Egypt. Leaving Mitzrayim behind, we gained a great deal: We gained our physical freedom as well as the psychological ability to visualize ourselves in Yerushalayim the Almighty's city. In order to do so, however, we had to sever our connections with the Avoda Zara that was part and parcel of Egyptian culture and values. Although this sounds simple, in truth it was anything but that. Seeing as we had sunk to the depths of the 49th gate of Tum'a (impurity), ridding ourselves of the idolatrous practices acquired during our bondage in Egypt, was no easy task.

One step in the long process of separating ourselves from such foreign

ways, is represented in a mitzva found in this week's parsha. The Torah (Vayikra 7:23) teaches us that "You shall not consume any blood, in any of your dwelling places, whether from fowl or from animals. Any person who consumes any blood - that soul will be cut off from its people." One might have thought that this would be rather simple and straightforward. After all who would want to drink a cup of blood anyway? And yet we find that the Torah feels the need to repeat this prohibition once again in Sefer D'varim (12:23), where we are commanded: "Only be strong that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh. You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out on the earth like water. You shall not eat it, that all may go well with you and with your children after you, when you do what is right in the sight of G-d." As Rashi explains, quoting the Midrash Tena'im, before Matan Torah the Jewish people were passionate about drinking blood. This was commonplace amongst other nations of the day, who would consume the blood or present it to their deities as a choice offering. [This prohibition is doubly important since food we ingest becomes part of us, and as the Sefer HaChinuch (mitzva 148) relates, negative traits, such as cruelty, can move over from the ingested animal, to the human host.] In order to wean us away from such practices, the Torah repeatedly commands us not to eat or drink blood, and to take measures to evade and avoid this practice.

On Shababt HaGadol, as Pesach looms near, we must try to internalize the lessons from Yetzi'at Mitzra'im. In order to help bring about our own personal

Exodus today, each and every one of us needs to understand our own personal Meitzarim - confines or boundaries - so that we can act to overcome them and achieve our full potential.

What are the Meitzarim that encircle us and hold us back? Is it possible that we have gorged ourselves upon the 'Chelev and Dam' of Galus thereby clogging our spiritual arteries? Have we become self imprisoned in the golden Ghettos of the Goldeneh Medinah?

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