

*Chol HaMoed Pesach*

## Why Does Preparing for Pesach have to be such Agonizing Slavery?



**Dear Rebbetzin,**

Growing up in a *yekkish* (German Jewish) home I naturally became a 'neat freak.' Soon after Tu b'Shevat I start Pesach preparations as it takes me and my cleaning crew about two months to get my home together. For the past ten years, I have been following my plan to get each room ready by a certain date. The cabinets are reorganized, the walls, lamps and light switches scrubbed down until each room shines. The last week is reserved for the kitchen. That week requires the most intense cleaning eradicating any residue of *chametz* (leavened) by means of my weapons of dish soap, oven cleaner and bleach. This year the devoted chief of my cleaning crew deserted me, and I was at a complete loss, as she is totally irreplaceable. No one else did a satisfactory job and I was devastated. Why did Hashem do this to me? Why did I, who cared so much about cleaning my home to the dot, have to be left without my chief cleaner upon whom I relied so much all these years? Why did I have to go through this agonizing slavery almost alone in my kitchen for hours without end?

**Nokia Weiss** (name changed)

**Dear Nokia,**

I very much sympathize with you in your desire to make your home super kosher for Pesach. Although dust is not chametz and the woman of the home is not a Pesach sacrifice, I do believe that spring-cleaning is *hidur* (beautifying) the mitzvah of cleaning for Pesach, as long as we are able to do it with enthusiasm and happiness. It sounds like you experienced some major challenges and obstacles in your Pesach cleaning routine. I understand it is a great loss to lose your prior devoted chief of cleaners, and to feel overwhelmed with all the pressure of Pesach cleaning on your shoulders. I understand that you were very upset and questioning G-d why this happened to you. It is indeed a good question when realizing that everything G-d does is for our best, and all challenges are tests that help us grow. So what lesson is it that Hashem wants to instill in you through this hardship?

### Freedom from Being in Control

The holiday of Pesach is about gaining freedom. Freedom doesn't necessarily mean to be free to do whatever you feel like. Such freedom is in fact slavery to the *yetzer hara* (negative impulse). True freedom is to let go of attachments. The matzah we eat on Pesach is simple; it needs nothing except flour and water. Freedom on Pesach is to become like the matzah – to free ourselves from relying on anyone or anything other than Hashem. True freedom is to accept that only Hashem is in control. It seems to me that the lesson Hashem wants to teach you is to let go on the attachment to be in control. You cannot control your chief of cleaners; you cannot make anyone do what you want them to do. You need to do what you can and rely on Hashem for the rest. You may have to accept that this year you weren't able to do as much extra cleaning as in the past. As long as you got rid of the actual chametz that should suffice.

### Receiving Divine Assistance When We Rely on Hashem Alone

I heard the following story in the name of the Rebbe of Biala about a Jew who was extra strict in his Pesach preparations. He was so concerned about not getting a single crumb of chametz in his water

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barrels that he made the gentile water carrier cut his hair and change his clothes before drawing water. When he visited Rebbe Mordechai of Chernobyl zt"l for the last day of Pesach, the Rebbe told him that there was chametz in his water barrel. He returned home and indeed found bread floating in his water barrel. When he asked the Rebbe why this happened to him, he explained: "Other people are not so fanatic in their preparations for Pesach as you are. They know they are imperfect, and turn to Hashem for help in protecting them from inadvertently possessing or eating chametz. Therefore, Hashem protects them. Without Hashem's help, it is impossible to rid ourselves from every last crumb of chametz. You, on the other hand, relied on your own resources and excessive stringencies. You were so sure of your own abilities to protect yourself that you did not turn to Hashem for help. Hashem would have preferred you to be less exacting and more humble. Therefore, He allowed this to happen to you." When we rely on nothing but our own endeavors, we deprive ourselves of the assistance that Hashem offers those who rely on Him (*Mevaser Tov, Ma'amar HaHoda'ah*).

### Emerging from Self-imposed Slavery

On Pesach, we change our routine and go with the flow, overcoming our attachments to getting things done in our usual way. We use different sets of dishes and kitchenware, and we do not eat the same kinds of foods as during the rest of the year. On Pesach, we went out of slavery. Every Pesach we need to emerge from our own self-imposed slavery. Hashem didn't tell Moshe to merely demand "Let My people go," but rather "Let My people go, that they may serve Me." We need to free ourselves of the obsession with any extra work that is not serving Hashem, and therefore no longer serving us either. This gives us freedom to rest on the holiday of Pesach and enjoy what is, rather than craving what isn't. May you truly emerge liberated this Pesach!