

Shvii Shel Pesach – Self-Nullification At The Sea

Lot [the nephew of Avraham Avinu] was saved from the destruction of Sodom only in the merit of Avraham Avinu (*Midrash Tanchuma: Vayeira: 9*). This doesn't simply mean that Avraham Avinu's merits saved Lot. Rather, this statement means that the inner recesses of Lot were infused with the inner traits of Avraham Avinu who had taught him. It was this inner quality which saved Lot from destruction. What exactly was this inner quality? It was the *mesirus nefesh*, the self-sacrifice which Avraham had in practicing kindness to guests, which was mirrored by the self-sacrifice which Lot showed when he was willing to house guests in Sodom. *Mesirus nefesh* was the only thing which could save him from the immorality [and destruction] of Sodom.

We are living in a generation today which is steeped in *tum'ah* (defilement). The only way to be saved from the strange, unwanted "winds" of immorality that blow through the world is, by having *mesirus nefesh* (to be willing to give up what we want, in order to do Hashem's

will). If a person today does not have *mesirus nefesh*, simply speaking, in order to do Hashem's will, he cannot survive our generation. The obligation that is upon us in our times is: to have total *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

Before the event of *kerias Yam Suf* (the splitting of the sea) when the Egyptians were chasing the Jewish people, the Torah says, "And Hashem said to Moshe, why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the children of Yisrael and journey on." Rashi explains that that Moshe was *davening*, and Hashem said to him, "Now is not the time to be lengthy in prayer, when the Jewish people are in a predicament." This begs a well-known question: If not now, when? Don't the Sages always teach that when a person is found in a predicament, he should grab onto the "art of the forefathers" which we have in our hands, and *daven* to Hashem? Why is it that when they came to the sea, their *avodah* was precisely not to *daven*?!

When a person is *davening*, it is because he wants a certain

thing. He may want one thing, or more than one thing, to happen. He is trying to attain his *ratzon* (will), through praying to Hashem to get it. But at the sea, the people had the *avodah* to transcend any of their personal *ratzon*, and to arrive at total self-nullification (*bittul*), of having no personal *ratzon* at all. At the sea, their *avodah* was to come to the recognition that "I only want what Hashem wants. If Hashem's will is for me to live, then I want to live. If Hashem wills the opposite, then that is my will also."

When the Jewish people were leaving Egypt, they had a will to leave it: "They cried out, and their prayers arose to G-d from all of their difficult labor, and Hashem heard their groans." But now when they were standing in front of the sea, they had a loftier *avodah* to do. Now their *avodah* was to have absolute *mesirus nefesh*: to be willing to give up their souls entirely for Hashem, and to accept the will of Hashem wholeheartedly. When that is the case, there is no gain in *davening*, and it would only be detrimental to do so.