

In the first month, on the fourteenth of the month in the afternoon, is the time of the Pesach offering to Hashem. And on the fifteenth day of this month is the Festival of Matzos to Hashem. (23:5, 6)

Rashi explains that although the Festival actually begins in the evening (of the fifteenth day of *Nissan*), the *Pesach*-offering is slaughtered during the afternoon of the fourteenth. In the Torah, the word *Pesach* is used to describe the offering, while *matzos* – *Chag HaMatzos*, defines the Festival. *Haamek Davar* considers the time of *Bein Ha'Arbayim*, in the afternoon, to be part of the holy convocation of the Festival, so that labor is forbidden at that time. Why is there a separation between the time of slaughtering the sacrifice and the time that it is eaten – during the actual Festival? It almost seems as if we slaughter the *Korban* as a preparation for entering into the celebration of the festival of freedom.

In *Shemos* 34:17, the Torah admonishes against idol worship, “You shall not make yourselves molten gods.” The very next *pasuk* enjoins us in the *mitzvah* of observing the Festival of *Pesach*, “You shall observe the festival of *matzos*.” This prompts the *Izbitzer Rebbe*, *zl*, to ask: What relationship exists between idol worship and *Chag HaPesach*? Why does the Torah juxtapose the prohibition against idol worship upon the *mitzvah* of *Pesach* observance? He cites the *Zohar HaKadosh* who posits that one who does not observe the *mitzvah* of *Pesach* is tantamount to an idol worshipper. How are we to understand this?

The *Rebbe* explains that the word *maseichah*, molten (idol), implies that this figure was cast (so to speak, in stone); it has achieved its full form, with no ability to change. A *maseichah* is a “done deal,” complete in its form; a *maseichah* represents the lack of desire and ability to change. It is what it is – and will remain so. This concept runs counter to the underlying motif of the festival of *Pesach*. This *Yom Tov* is to open up our hearts, so that we are offered a penetrating view of our inner self, our true self. It is a time when we deepen our understanding of Hashem, establishing a stronger, more enduring bond with the Almighty. In short, it is a time for rejuvenation, for elevation, for change. As spring symbolizes a new beginning, so, too, does *Pesach* reflect a new beginning within us. There is no place for the immovable, unchangeable *maseichah* within the *Pesach* experience.

I would like to take this idea further. In Hebrew, the word *maseichah* means mask. How many of us live life concealing our true selves with a mask? We put on an air of self-confidence, assured in our relationships, because so many people view us as their anchor, the one person upon whom they can all count. In truth, we are living a lie. Our days are reduced to acting according to a script written for us by our surrounding, adoring society. Our own hopes, our life's aspirations, all fade into oblivion as we are compelled to be the person that others perceive us to be. We seem to have so many friends and admirers, but, in truth, we are sadly alone.

At times, we wonder: “How would people react if they knew the truth about me? Would I have so many friends if I did not act out the façade of self-assured confidence?” For many of us, a solid, significant disconnect exists between our outward identity and our true selves. People truly desire the freedom to be themselves, but, more often than not, resort to following society’s script for fear of rejection or disapproval, thus compromising their own individuality. That is living the life of *maseichah*, mask.

Another mask causes greater damage: the mask of non-spirituality. How many Jews are trapped in the façade of nonobservance, seeking a way out, wanting to be accepted, but have been wearing the mask for so long that they themselves have begun to believe that the mask is the true image of them?

I have met and worked with such people, and, behind the mask, they feel disingenuous, isolated, almost fearful of exposure. They fear exposure of the truth that they really are not as non-observant as they claim to be. Their lives are lived in a state of internal struggle and pain. How can one be authentic if he is molding himself to be the person that others will love, accept and approve of?

Pesach is the time for removing the masks, ridding oneself of the façade, the sham that he has been living until now. One cannot entertain the idea of freedom unless he has first divested himself of his personal enslavement. Thus, the Torah enjoins us to remove the mask behind which he has been hiding, prepare to face the reality of who he is, where he has been and where he must now go.

During the *Seder* service, we recite the phrase, “One is required to view himself as if he was just released from Egypt.” We must identify with the Jewish People by accepting their travail. They were in exile; we were in exile. In order to experience freedom, one must taste the bitterness of exile. Freedom has little meaning to one who does not understand the challenges of servitude. Freedom means removing the mask. Perhaps this is why the *Korban Pesach* is slaughtered prior to the onset of the Festival. The Jew must participate in the sacrifice, symbolic of the Jews’ willingness to sacrifice himself for his faith. The Jew who has been concealing himself behind the façade of observance or non-observance must come to grips with his true identity. He has been fooling only himself. He has worn the mask for so long that he now believes that he really is either observant or non-observant. *Pesach* is a wakeup call. The Jew who has distanced himself is welcomed home. Now is the time for resurgence, rejuvenation, a new beginning. Unless the *maseichah* is removed, however, there can be no beginning – since there has been no “end.”