



BEGINNING *within*

BEGINNING WITHIN MASTER COURSE

5. CHOOSING YOUR FREEDOM

To live a life of full expression, we must be free.

Freedom cannot be given to you, only you can give it to yourself.

Freedom cannot be taken from you, only you can deny yourself of it.

Welcome back for Module 5! In Module 4 we learned how to speak truthfully after going through the Checking into Reality exercise. We also discussed taking full responsibility for our lives, owning our emotions and how we feel. No one can make us feel anything. How we process what we experience is what determines how we feel.

The Human Journey

I'm going to begin this module by getting a little biblical. It's the point I want to get to. Don't get lost in the biblical element. Stay focused on the point. It is interesting to note that G-d makes a point of commanding us to recall a historical event on a daily basis. The reason why is because this event is far more than just historical, it repeats itself in our lives every day. It is these words that we recall, "That you remember the day you went out of Egypt every day of your life." Why does G-d want us to remember every single day of our life the day that the Jewish people left Egypt? It is because the journey of the Jewish people from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land is the journey that every single one of us is supposed to go through in our lives. It is the paradigm of the human journey. It is the path that anyone who wants to live freely must travel. Without the willingness to travel this path, we will always remain in a state of victimhood and servitude to our desires, to other people's control and to the circumstances of life. What I can definitely tell you is that being that you're watching this video and you've made it to Module 5, you are clearly a person who is traveling the road to freedom!

The human journey is leaving the slavery of a body oriented life to the freedom of a soul oriented life. The body is very subjective and enslaves us to its paranoia over its lack of self-worth. The soul is clear without any bias or subjectivity and therefore exists freely without the weight and burden of any form of fear. It can be dedicated to its values without external people and things slowing it down. This may give you a much greater appreciation for why we were given a holiday called Passover. It's actually an eight-day annual workshop when we are supposed to realign ourselves onto the path of living freely.

What's intriguing is that numerous times after the Jews left Egypt during their 40 years in the desert, they complained to Moses. They wanted to go back to Egypt. One can only wonder why they would ever want to go back to enslavement. In fact, though, there is very good reason why they wanted to go back to Egypt. It is much easier to live a life where you never have to take responsibility and you can always blame your victor. It also provides a certain level of safety and predictability in knowing your circumstances. When you're not moving forward in life and taking some risks to grow, things tend to remain the same. It's the easier approach to life. This is the reason why, very often, people choose to be a victim rather than take responsibility for their life. To be free, one needs to enter into a new land with many unknowns and take responsibility for how they're going to make things work. This requires far more effort. Of course, the reward is commensurate with the effort, but many people simply don't want to exert that effort and would actually choose enslavement over the effort to acquire freedom.

Our constant desire to get acceptance from those around us is our way of living in Egypt, being enslaved to what other people think about us and depending on them for our worthiness. Freedom is when we make the courageous choice to find our worthiness from within, knowing our inherent value no matter what. No matter what others think, no matter how we perform, no matter where our standing is on the social ladder.

By way of example, sometimes parents will always tell their children what to do and how to do it. "You shouldn't wear that, you should wear this." "That's not how you do it, this is how you do it." While it is a parent's job to teach their children, when we make every decision for our child and instruct them instead of suggesting to them, we train them to disown their lives and just follow orders. This follows many people into adulthood. This happens as well in adult relationships. When we're met with constant disapproval from a spouse, for example, the easiest thing to do is just resign ourselves to their will. We often hear people speak this way about their spouse. "It's no use arguing." "They always know better." Part of owning our lives and becoming free includes sharing our light with the world. When we feel differently, we can simply state that while I know this is the way you think it should be done, this is the way I am choosing to do it. This doesn't mean that we're picking a fight, we're simply doing what we truly feel is best. Of course, often our spouse is correct and we go right along with them.

Slavery vs. Freedom

You may have heard of Natan Sharansky, a refusenik, a Jew who lived in the Soviet Union who was refused a visa to leave the country. He was eventually imprisoned for supposed counter-revolutionary activities. He shares a story which is very telling about what freedom is and how each and every one of us has the choice to be free from within. Natan Sharansky is a very strong-willed man and the Soviets had a very hard time breaking him. He was exposed to repeated interrogations in an attempt to break him down. Whenever he was interrogated there would always be two officials interrogating. This was to ensure that the prisoner never developed any form of relationship with one of the officials. By each official knowing that another official was watching them, they were very careful not to do anything they weren't supposed to. This is the classic behavior in fear controlled countries. Once, when he was being interrogated, he repeatedly interrupted the officers telling them that he wanted to share a joke with them. He was finally able to get them to pause and he told them this joke. Brezhnev, the former premier of the Soviet Union, was not known to be a very intelligent man. During the Cold War, in his attempt to outdo the Americans, he called in his Russian cosmonauts and told them, "We must outdo the Americans, we are going to be the first country to send cosmonauts to the sun." They told him, "Don't you realize that before we even get halfway there we will have burned up by the heat of the sun?" Premier Brezhnev said, "Do you think I'm a fool and didn't think of that?" "We will send you at night!" After Natan Sharansky shared this joke he started laughing wholeheartedly. He then looked at his interrogators and said, "I'd like to ask you a question." I am the prisoner and yet I can sit here and laugh at this joke while the 2 of you

are the free ones and yet each of you are terrified to laugh in front of the other one. So I wonder, who really is the prisoner?

This is a powerfully telling story about what it means to live a free life. If we are constantly too scared to be ourselves out of fear of what others will think or say about us we are far from free. We are definitely enslaved. It is only after we go through the process of learning how to live life Beginning Within that we become free people.

Similarly, psychotherapist Viktor Frankl, a holocaust survivor, shared, “We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms -- to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.”

Perhaps the greatest gift that God gave humanity is freedom of choice. In fact, our intellectual ability to differentiate and discern and thereby make choices is uniquely human. When we can learn to differentiate between what is true reality versus what is our subjective view of reality and then make our choices based on the true reality we are living up to what G-d expects of us.

You see, as long as we remain enslaved to the world around us we cannot truly be available to dedicate ourselves to our true purpose. This is one reason why the first of the 10 Commandments is, “I am G-d your G-d who took you out of Egypt.” It’s G-d’s way of telling us that in order for us to be dedicated to our G-dly purpose we must first liberate ourselves from our personal Egypt, our body perspective, our enslavement to other things and people. We must realize the inherent worthiness we all have by virtue of the fact that G-d put us here. Only then can we be available as an individual to dedicate ourselves to the purpose for which we were created.

Acceptance

Another very important tool that is necessary to live life beginning within is acceptance. This word can be misleading so I want to clarify what I mean by acceptance. Acceptance means to simply accept what is. It means accepting that right now this is the way things are and I accept it. I accept it even though it is inconvenient for me, painful for me, or simply unjust. Why should I accept it if it is not what I want? For one simple reason, because it is. We never want to live in denial of reality and as long as we are in denial of reality we cannot do anything to change it for the future.

This leads us to a second very important point about acceptance. Acceptance is not resignation which is what the word acceptance often implies. Acceptance means that I accept that this is what is right now. At the same time, I am resolute in my commitment to changing it in the

future. In fact, we can only truly change something after we've accepted it. We only have the ability to ask "what am I going to do about this," after we've accepted what is. As long as we are protesting what is by not accepting it, we are not permitting ourselves to move forward.

Many of the unhealthy responses that we have learned to use in dealing with different situations comes from our insistence on not accepting what is. Finding the ability to accept what happens in our life is the pathway to removing these unhealthy responses. We become less disappointed and angry. It diminishes our jealousy. It permits us to forgive.

With every single event that happens in life we always have three choices in how we are going to respond to it.

1. Be angry. This is someone who hasn't accepted what happened and continues to protest it as indicated by his emotional state.
2. Accept what is and be happy. This requires acceptance.
3. Accept what is and do something to change it. This requires acceptance.

Let me give you an example. When we find ourselves very unsatisfied at the job we are at because we have a boss who treats us disrespectfully, we have three choices. We can do what most people do, accept what is and be angry, which of course is really protesting what is and not accepting it at all. We do this when we are beginning without, when we are happier being a victim and will always complain about the situation but never exercise our power to do something about it. We can accept the situation and choose to be happy despite our boss. Neither our boss nor circumstances cause us to feel a certain way. Our emotional state is our choice. Or we can accept what is and choose to do something about it such as respectfully telling our boss that we will not accept being spoken to disrespectfully, we can quit the job, or many other possibilities that you may come up with.

There is a fundamental Jewish belief known as divine providence. Divine providence means that everything that happens to us is G-d orchestrating it. What we choose to do is our choice, what happens to us is from G-d. This is a belief that can be very challenging to believe and at the same time is the solution to many of our problems. That's usually the way things are. The more challenging something is, the more opportunity it offers. I translate the practice of divine providence simply as acceptance. It's when we shift from the perspective that life happens to us and we begin to realize that life happens for us.

I'm going to go deeper to an area that I don't have the full right to discuss since, thank G-d, it's beyond the realm of my experience. I'm going to quote a senior colleague of mine, Rabbi Yisroel Deren, who lost 4 of his 8 children to Bloom syndrome. Now clearly, he is a very advanced and developed person. This, he said after losing his fourth adult child. "There is a

phrase that some people say when they feel that life is not fair. And that is, 'Why is G-d picking on me?' "Yet, if you remove one word from that phrase, it changes everything." That word is 'on.' So instead of asking "Why is G-d picking on me," you ask, "Why is G-d picking me?"

It's a small shift in perspective that changes everything. Instead of viewing life's challenges as unfair and insurmountable, essentially protesting them, we begin to accept them even though we may never understand them. Once we do accept them, it creates the space for us to ask, "So what does G-d want from me with this?" Once we accept what already is, we can ask ourselves, "If G-d picked me for some particular challenge, it is an indication that I am up to the challenge, and that I can overcome the challenge and I can even do it with grace.

Indicators We're Enslaved

We are going to discuss some of the most common unhealthy behaviors so we can understand how they come from a perspective of beginning without. Negative unhealthy behaviors are very telling. Once we understand them we can use them as indicators that we are engaging with the situation from a biased and unhealthy perspective. Unhealthy behaviors are alarms that we need to do the Checking In To Reality exercise or speak with a friend who has a healthy perspective to realign you. You see, even our unhealthy behaviors can ultimately serve us.

Anger

Let's talk about one of the most common unhealthy behaviors, anger. Anger actually shows up in different levels of strength. There is disappointment, frustration and anger. All three of these are different levels of anger. Disappointment is a mild form of anger. Frustration is a more escalated form of anger. Anger is as we know it, anger. Anger in all its forms is someone simply stating that they are not accepting what is. It is as if someone is trying to force things to be the way they want it by intimidating others with their anger. It is also a form of someone desperately trying to make the issue about them when it should really be about something or someone else. It is one of the most destructive forms of behavior that we use. It is also one of the first signs that we live as a victim.

Many people feel that their anger is what fuels many of their accomplishments. They are confusing anger with passion. When we are passionate we are focused on what needs to be done. When we are angry we make the focus about ourselves. When someone is angry they are being destructive. Destructive to both themselves and to those around them. We must remember a very simple rule, "When I am angry I am wrong!" This is the reason why Maimonides, when discussing anger, writes that one should stay as far away from anger as possible. When one truly ingrains the belief of divine providence into their perspective, their anger is greatly minimized because they begin to accept the things that happen to them in life and stop protesting them.

Consider this, if someone were to cheat me out of \$500, there is a good chance I would be very angry at them. If someone were to cheat you out of \$500, my sense of justice would tell me how wrong that is, but I suspect that my level of anger would be much lower. The reason is simple, when something happens to me it is personal and anger is my unhealthy response to protect myself. When something happens to you it is not personal for me. It's similar to the way someone once described to me the difference between minor surgery and major surgery. Minor surgery is a surgery that you are having, major surgery is a surgery that I am having. You get the point. When we stop responding to things through the filter of our subjective self we no longer have any need to get angry.

Think of this scenario. A team of commandos are rappelling from a helicopter into the middle of an enemy town full of terrorists. They need to break into a home and capture a terrorist in this very dangerous environment. Many unknowns exist around them during this mission. When something unexpected happens during the mission, do you think it would be wise for one of the commandos to get angry? Of course not! They have to remain sharp and clear headed throughout the mission. When we get angry we say and do things which we shouldn't. Why? Because we have lost our clarity and have personalized the issue that we're dealing with. So we become more focused on ourselves then the reality around us.

Now, look at yourself as a commando who was given a life mission. Every time you or I get angry we can no longer remain focused on our mission. We're too busy trying to defend ourselves from what is going on. Let's use a practical example. When my child comes out of bed for the 3rd time and I get angry, I must ask myself why I am angry. The event is my child coming out of bed and interrupting what I'm doing. My judgment is that my child is taking away my peace and relaxation. My feeling is anger. My reaction is that I yell at my child. Perhaps without realizing it, I am trying to force my child not to come out of bed again by instilling within him the fear of my anger. Who am I thinking about? Myself. If I were thinking about my child, then I would ask my child, "Why are you out of bed again when I told you not to come out?" The tone of this question would not be with anger but more matter of fact. If the child has a legitimate reason, we deal with it. If the child gives an unacceptable answer, I would tell my child to get back into bed and perhaps attach a consequence to his coming out again. That is a clear headed way of dealing with the reality at hand instead of getting lost in my own reality.

Judgment

Another very common unhealthy behavior is making judgments. I want to clarify that there is a big difference between making an observation and making a judgment. It's the exact same difference between passion and anger. An observation is when I simply observe the facts. A judgment is when I attach my own interpretation of the facts to the event. We have a very strong tendency of judging which is an outgrowth of beginning without. Judgment always explains why the circumstance or the people are the problem. When we lose the need to blame we stop judging. We simply learn what the facts are and ask ourselves what is our responsibility

in this situation. Reaching such a point which, is what this course, is all about is extremely powerful for ourselves and for all of the people in our lives. Once we stop judging we can actually begin unconditionally loving and accepting others.

Guilt

Guilt is another feeling which is often glorified as an indication that I am sensitive to my wrongdoings. Often, we feel good that we're feeling guilty, it's a sign that I have a moral conscience. Actually, guilt is what prevents us from being productive and moving forward. Let me define the word guilt being that people use this word in different ways with different meanings. When I say guilt I mean when we identify with something that we have done and we let that action define us. For example, we will think or say, "I am such a bad person because of what I did." Such is the response of someone who is self-conscious and makes their wrongdoing all about themselves and not the actual issue. This feeling of guilt also makes us feel as if we are being responsible for what we have done wrong because we are feeling bad about ourselves. What this feeling of guilt actually does to us is keeps us in a negative place and removes our energy, leaving us with little ability to take the courageous steps necessary to fix what we've done wrong, such as the Checking Into Reality exercise. When we can accept that we are not perfect, that we make mistakes and some of them may be serious and have significant implications, then we can move forward. Now we are not condemning ourselves but rather being honest that we made a terrible decision. We ask ourselves what we can do to fix the damage and what we can do to make this better in the future. We must remain focused on the matter at hand and not get lost in ourselves.

Clarity vs. Confusion

I want to point out again that when we first begin practicing the Checking In To Reality exercise to differentiate between the reality and our perception of reality, we will often be confronted with confusion. You may convince yourself, as I often do, that the reason why you are really upset is because when you see bad behavior it makes you upset. Your moral gene can't handle it. Here's a very simple litmus test to know when your feelings are distorting the reality as opposed to you seeing reality for what it is. Whenever we resist reality, indicated by a state of anger, judgment, or guilt, we can be sure that our self-orientation and bias is so strong that our emotional reaction is about us, not about the event.

Let's review everything we learned in this module. True freedom is not being afforded the right to live as you believe. It is having the inner strength to take on the responsibilities that your values demand of you. As long as we remain a victim to the people and circumstances around it is impossible for us to experience freedom. This is because we are do busy trying to accommodate the expectations of the people and things we depend on in place of dedicating ourselves to our values. This is why learning to accept the circumstances and people in our life.

As long as we're protesting them, we are living in denial and not in the position to respond to them. Once we accept the situation or the person, we can start working on how to respond to them. We also learned that three behaviors always serve as clear indicators that we are enslaved to others. They are anger, judgment and guilt. All three are destructive.