

LBT's From Light to Liberation: *Freedom*

Week of March 14, 2021 / 1 Nissan 5781

Framing: In Hebrew, there are two words for “freedom”: *hofesh* and *herut*. The former, *hofesh*, refers to the freedom that an individual might feel when they have no responsibility. Think about when you were a kid on the last day of school: no more classes, no more exams, and all you had to do was sign your classmates’ yearbooks and then you were free -- *Hofesh!* *Herut*, on the other hand, is a more existential freedom. It’s a freedom that comes with responsibility that an individual and a society have to work to preserve. This is the heart of an individual having the freedom to think their own thoughts, speak their own mind, vote their conscience, and do so without fear of violence or one’s own safety. *Herut* is not just the notion that an individual can be free to do what they want (*Hofesh*), but that there must be real limitations on an individual’s freedoms if their actions harm or hurt others’ ability to be free. The text below, from the Passover *Haggadah*, is our annual reminder to consider what it might be like to live in a world without *Herut* and to appreciate the responsibility that comes with our own freedom.

הגדה של פסח, מגיד, פסח מצה ומרור ז'

בְּכָל־דּוֹר וְדוֹר חַיֵּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלוֹ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְהַגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בְּעֵבוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה יי לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם. לֹא אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּלֶבֶד גָּאֵל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, אֲלֵא אִף אוֹתֵנוּ גָאֵל עִמָּהֶם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְאוֹתֵנוּ הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם, לְמַעַן הִבִּיא אוֹתֵנוּ, לְתֵת לָנוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם.

Pesach Haggadah, Magid

In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see themselves as if they were part of the Exodus from Egypt, as it is stated in the Torah: “And you shall tell your children on that day, saying: For the sake of this, the Eternal did this for *me*, in *my* Exodus from Egypt.” And the Holy Blessed One did not just redeem our ancestors who had been slaves in Egypt. **Rather, God also redeemed us (today) with them!** And we know this from another verse in the Torah: “And God took *us* out from there, in order to bring *us*, to give to *us*, the land which had been sworn to *our* ancestors.”

Questions for Reflection:

1. Have you had an “Exodus” moment in your life? Reflect on a time when you felt constricted, limited, even spiritually diminished by another? How were you able to emerge on the other side?
2. What are some of the responsibilities you shoulder that come with our freedom today? When can you be completely free to do whatever you want? When has that sense of complete freedom created problems?
3. The texts presented here show us that both the Passover Haggadah and the Torah want us to consider ourselves as if we personally left Egypt, maybe that we are in an ongoing state of leaving enslavement, of one sort or another. We can also read these texts as teaching us to empathize with those whose freedoms are more limited than our own. How does your mindfulness practice help you relate to and empathize with those who have a different lived experience than you? How does that empathy help facilitate genuine *herut*, freedom, in our society?