

Freedom – Bible Style

by HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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I do not know how else to say this, but it is time to get back to basics. When I look out and see in what directions people lead their lives, all I see is the great massive brick wall they are blindly heading towards with reckless abandon. Religion has not proven itself to be a safeguard against this insanity, in many times it has even contributed greatly to it. It is time to step down hard on the brakes and to regain control of an insane situation.

Let me remind you of the wise words of Thomas Jefferson, “I fear for my country when I remember that G-d is just and that His justice cannot sleep forever.” When G-d's Justice does awaken, and this reality is that great brick wall growing ever closer, most are going to be smashed to pieces, and this includes the religious and even those living in the Holy Land. Judgment and destruction has come before with countless deaths and stories of suffering and loss and it will surely come again. While this future may not be generally avoidable, it can still be avoided by those single individuals who wake up and get themselves together as Heaven so desires.

Basics are the fundamentals. They are the first building blocks of religion and of life in general. Without these there is no religion, no true life and certainly no true freedom. Israelite history begins with G-d's bringing forth the nation of Israel out of slavery and into freedom. So, freedom, and what it really is and how it is lived, is step one of all basics. So, let us discuss what is freedom of both the mind and body and how it is meant to be lived according to the Torah.

The Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:2) begins with the words, “I am G-d, your L-rd, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” We all pay attention to the first part of this commandment and acknowledge that G-d is our L-rd and we acknowledge the historical statement that He brought us out of our bondage in Egypt. But this commandment is saying much more than a mere historical statement. This commandment is not only a commandment to acknowledge G-d as our L-rd. In order to fulfill this part of the commandment, we must also simultaneously fulfill the commandment to be free from Egyptian exile, not only in its physical historical form, but also in its psychological, mental form. This is the actual meaning of this commandment and why these words were spoken by G-d and included here. G-d had no need to remind anyone of their recent historical experience, which everyone knew so well. Rather the mention here is to enforce the future importance and psychological requirement to live as free human beings.

Everyone believes that they understand what is physical freedom. Freedom is often considered to be the ability to choose and to do what one pleases. Yet, this definition of freedom is just simply wrong! No one, anywhere at any time is ever free to do what they want, as they please. We are all limited by laws, be they man-made or natural. We may challenge man-made laws and even seek to have them molded to our wishes. This is often accomplished be it for good or bad. Yet, although we have the collective power to mold man-made laws, we as a race are completely powerless before natural law. Try as we may to manipulate the forces of nature through our technologies and sciences, in the end, we always find ourselves stymied, limited and unable to free ourselves from our natural shackles that keep us so confined within the limitations placed upon us by nature and nature's G-d and Creator.

Even when G-d brought forth the nation of Israel out of Egypt with miracles and wonders, the ten plagues themselves were nothing more than Divinely manipulated expressions of natural laws already in place in nature. With the exception of the plague of the first-born all the plagues that struck Egypt were explained away as a string of bad-luck natural phenomena that had hit the country. Only the spiritually adept magicians serving in Pharaoh's court recognized a Higher Hand in all what was happening, a hand that Pharaoh and his staff denied the existence of. As wise King Solomon said, 'there is nothing new under the sun.' As it was in Pharaoh's times so is it today with modern political and social leaders. They see the Higher Hand in operation and even so, dismiss it, discount it and ignore it. We all know where this got Pharaoh. I fear for us today knowing that we are walking down the same path towards an ultimately similar fate.

G-d brought forth the nation of Israel from their bondage in Egypt, this we know. However, as mighty as G-d was and is, even though He brought Israel out of Egypt, still He could not get Egypt out of Israel. Although the people were physically freed from bondage, still in their minds they thought and felt like emasculated slaves. The episode of the Spies, recorded in Numbers (13-14) clearly shows how the majority of the nation cowered at the thought of having to face a superior military power. Their fear was reminiscent of the slave's fear of his master. When the nation cried and sought to return to Egypt, G-d punished them and imposed on them a sort-of imprisonment for life sentence. That entire generation was to stay in the desert until all those who cowered would die.

In order for freedom to become real, it has to be acted upon. Although freedom can be given, it will not last unless defended. The nation of Israel, while thankful for G-d's redemptive power that brought their bodies out of Egypt, still emotionally could not rise up to the occasion to live as free men, to trust in G-d and to act to defend and reinforce the freedom given to them as a Divine gift.

Essentially, once given the free gift of freedom, the nation would have to go about to earn it and thus truly experience its psychological reality. Yet, the original generation could not rise up to that task. They feared and they panicked. Although out of Egypt, Egypt was not out of them. G-d's only choice was to allow the cowards to die and the next generation, raised in freedom, only knowing freedom, to move on because, not knowing the mental enslavement of their fathers, this new generation would press on to fight to keep that which they had. Unlike their parents, the children of Israel born in the wilderness were raised to experience and know only true freedom, even if it meant that such freedom had to be fought for to be maintained.

Freedom and slavery have always been states of mind before they materialize into states of being. The body always follows the mind. Therefore, slavery is first and foremost a psychological state. The children of Israel although physically redeemed were still psychologically slaves. They embraced the slave mentality of needing an overlord and could not face the state of being independent, with all the responsibilities and obligations that such freedom entails. This state of psychological slavery is the mind set of the Egyptian Exile and it survives to this day as a state of mind embrace by all too many in the modern world.

Freedom according to the Bible is a state of independence not only from foreign oppressors, but also from internal psychological problems that cause one to seek a higher authority other than G-d to make one's decisions. This mentality of substituting one's own independent thought and actions for those of another is the Biblical understanding of mental slavery and thus the cause of all physical forms of bondage that come about because of the preexisting mind-set. This mentality is what is prohibited by the Ten Commandments and is tantamount to idolatry in Divine Eyes. Essentially what the Bible is teaching us is that if one surrenders independent thought and relies upon others to take care of them, to think for them and to tell them what to do, to define for

them what is right and wrong, and to essentially take over thinking for them, that eventually this mentality and desire will lead one into the worst forms of physical servitude. This subservience of mind violates the first two of the Ten Commandments.

The freedom state of mind by definition materializes a passionate desire for independence. The generation that left Egypt was still accustomed to being told what to do and to have everything provided for them, "from cradle to grave." This entitlement mentality was etched deep into consciousness. In spite of all the Divine interventions, miracles and revelations, the slaves of Egypt could never shake free their minds from thinking like slaves. They could not replace servitude to Egypt for servitude to G-d because the two express diametrically opposed meanings.

Serving Egypt made one a slave, both mentally and physically. Serving G-d meant that one had to become free, free in mind and in body. Serving G-d meant that one would have to become responsible and independent. One could rely upon G-d but still one had to take the necessary steps to make appropriate provisions. A slave cannot and does not do this. Only a free man can do this and long ago our Sages taught that there is no true freedom outside of Torah, for Torah alone, as the natural Code that it is, defines for people both their rights and responsibilities.

The American Declaration of Independence makes mention of the laws of nature and nature's G-d. It also mentions that certain "truths" are "self-evident," such as "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." While all human beings are created equal, not all human beings choose to live as equals. While some strive to be the best they can be, others do not strive at all. Instead of going up the ladder of life's successes, they instead through apathy, laziness and sometimes fear go down the ladder rung after rung, with many hitting rock bottom and staying there out of a lack of caring. Although all are created equal, many chose not to embrace their equality.

The Founding Fathers of the U.S.A. considered the pursuit of happiness to be an unalienable human right bestowed upon us by our Creator. This idea is itself found in Torah in numerous places. Yet, while most people look at this statement and interpret the emphasis to be on the acquisition of happiness, I look upon it and see the essential factor as being the pursuit. In other words, those who do not make the efforts to achieve seldom do.

We have the right to pursue happiness, but nowhere does the American document state that its authors believed that happiness itself was a unalienable human right, which must be bestowed upon one by both G-d and government. We have the right to pursue it, but the efforts must be our own. We have the right to independent pursuit of happiness. We have the right to work for ourselves and to improve our lots in life as best we can. We do it, not another, no other person, group or government is meant to take the place of the individual. The individual stands supreme and it is he/she alone that bares the burden to either find or lose one's happiness.

The effort must be that of the individual. Happiness is an accomplishment to be earned. It is never meant to be given freely. Therefore, only the truly independent and free can honestly and accurately pursue happiness. As for everyone else, who make no effort or pursuit, they will have what they do (or don't) with no one to blame for their portion in life other than themselves.

Now, of course, we have lazy religious people, who make no effort to improve themselves. They fall to the bottom of the proverbial ladder and instead of making efforts to rise up again, they instead concoct stories and fantasies how their present lot must be G-d's Will and that they are content in such a fallen state. Yet, surrendering to such a sorry state of mental laziness is not now

nor has it ever been G-d's Will for any human being. Therefore, this religious 'smoke-screen' is false, deceptive and serves to reinforce the mental slavery of those who embrace it.

In Biblical times, after the generation of Moses, once Joshua had led the nation of Israel to settle in the Holy Land, the people had no centralized government and nor did they seem to need one.

The Book of Judges often makes the statement that "every man did what was right in his own eyes because there was no king in Israel." Many times this statement is interpreted to be a negative, that the people lacked leadership and needed it. But this interpretation is not true! It is contradicted by the Bible itself.

In the Book of Samuel, the people came before the prophet and asked him to anoint for them a king. The prophet Samuel considers this desire to be a terrible thing and equated it with outright rebellion against the direct authority of G-d. Now, there was no theocratic government at that time. Although there were both priests and prophets, none of them had established a centralized form of government with themselves entrenched in power. The many failings of the nation of Israel during the Judges period is clear proof of this. Nonetheless, for the individual to have the ultimate authority and responsibility before G-d seems to have been the Divine Will and the Heavenly plan.

Samuel acquiesces and appoints for the people a king, Saul, yet he warns them that they will be very sorry for choosing such a form of government. Indeed, in short order, Saul's monarchy becomes corrupt and is eventually replaced with the monarchy of King David. Now, although David is called G-d's beloved, nonetheless, his government is bereft with problems. These continue into the administration of David's son, Solomon and into the days of Solomon's son, Rehoboam.

It was in the days of this grandson of King David that the ten northern tribes rebelled against the Davidic dynasty, seceded from the united tribes of Israel and created their own country, with its own leadership and government. And what led to this great secession? The Bible is clear, the people rebelled over the level of governmental taxation. The Solomon/Rehoboam government had placed a tax burden upon the people more than they wanted to bare, so they seceded from the united tribes and declared independence. Did their independence alleviate the tax burden? This is not an issue that is pursued in the Biblical texts, so we do not know. All we do know is that the ever changing administrations in Israel led to greater and greater corruption until such a time a greater military power arose and swallowed up the country. This same scenario repeated itself during the Second Temple period and seems to be repeating itself, almost identically today.

To this day we have no idea where the ten lost tribes may be, but they may have been far flung to the ends of the Earth, to such places as Afghanistan, China and even what will later come to be called the Americas.

Mental slavery leads to physical slavery. This is what happened in Egypt and the exact same thing happened in later Israel, when the nation fell under the influences of foreign powers. Redemption is freedom and freedom is not just a concept, it is a way of life. Freedom is a way of life that has to be defended and strengthened or otherwise it will be weakened and lost.

Freedom lasts only for those who fight for it. But the battle begins inside, in the mind and heart. The individual must will to be independent and free. The individual will therefore by nature and definition demand minimalist government and loath any dealings with the government no matter how benign or small it may be. This attitude is also reflected clearly in the words of our Sages throughout the Talmud and especially in Pirkei Avot. The truly free human being turns to G-d for

help and makes every independent effort to provide for the bounty that G-d has promised. The truly free human being never turns to another for a “hand-out” and would never consider surrendering one's hard earned freedom in return for some type of governmental subsidy or payment. The truly free human being believes in G-d and believes in him/herself. The truly free human beings makes all efforts necessary to acquire and maintain life, liberty and happiness. This was the mentality of the Founding Fathers of the U.S. They learned this mentality right out of the Bible.

What is Biblical transcends nationality. The United States was founded upon sound Biblical principles, which I have come to call Americanisms. Basically these are the natural unalienable rights spoken of in the American Declaration of Independence and their source is the universal code for righteous and moral living referred to in Judaism as the Sheva Mitzvot of Benei Noah.

Today, this universal code is almost completely misunderstood by both Jew and Gentile alike. Nevertheless, the American Founding Fathers understood it well and built a nation upon it. In the beginnings of the U.S. freedom was the bedrock of the society. Over the many decades this became lost and for the most part, even America today no longer practices true Americanism. But while society in general might be on a terrible road to destruction, righteous minded individuals who remember freedom and are willing to struggle for it can extract themselves from a failing system and learn to live in accordance to Biblical independence and thus raise their odds of surviving the coming melt-down.

Step one in serving G-d is to know Him. Yet, unless one first knows oneself and discovers one's personal independence how can one ever expect to come to know G-d? In the Passover Seder, we are told that everyone must view themselves as if he/she were personally redeemed from Egypt. This is a psychological truth and it must be addressed.

Step one is simple living in mental and physical freedom, free from the machinations of a surrounding society gone awry. Living free requires independence and the baring of responsibility. This is what was meant when the Sages in Pirkei Avot said, “in a place where there are no men, strive to be a man.” A “man” refers to any human being (male or female) who takes up the yoke of responsibilities and acts properly, with righteousness, dedication and if necessary with self sacrifice.

Only one who is free from one's own self, from one's evil inclination (yetzer hara) can truly be called free, and thus in fulfillment of the first of the Ten Commandments. Only a free “man” can truly know G-d. In order to be free, one must not only think free but act free. This course of action might very well place one on a collision course with the surrounding society. Thus, in order to fulfill Torah properly one may have to relocate to a place where one can indeed become free and live independently of government interference and control, as much as this is possible. This is what the ancient Sages of Israel have done, since Biblical times. It is their role models that we endeavor to follow.

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