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JEWISH LIBERATION

IN EVERY GENERATION EACH PERSON IS OBLIGED to regard himself as if he too had come out of Egypt. This statement is in the Haggada, and it is also the basic concept of Pesach: we ourselves went free.

The Sages tell us that the leaving of Egypt is a constant process. It means realising our freedom as Jews, in all aspects of our lives. What does this mean? Is there a special *Jewish* freedom?

Yes. The Sages explain that freedom has different levels. For a plant, freedom means good soil, water and light. To be trapped in one place does not worry the plant. It does not expect to be able to move around. But an animal does. For an animal food and water are not enough. The animal also needs freedom of movement. But the animal does not feel deprived if we do not teach it how to read and write, how to think and be creative.

So we come to the higher freedom of a human being. He or she needs food and water, freedom of movement - and also education, creativity, freedom of self-expression.

Now, in the case of a Jew, what do we mean by self-expression?

It means a sense of Jewish identity, the quest for knowledge of Torah, for Jewish expression in daily life. This constitutes a further level of need, a further level of freedom. If we restrict this, then the

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Jewish aspect of the person - his or her essential aspect - is not free. It is in Egypt. In fact the Hebrew word for Egypt, *Mitzraim*, is very similar to the Hebrew word for 'limitations', *metzarim*.

The way to go free is to let this Jewish aspect express itself. In every generation, and indeed every day, this is our private Exodus, our personal, Jewish liberation.

Indeed, we can experience this every time we pray. The soul of each person is a sacred portion of the Divine. However, the soul feels itself to be trapped by the limitations and self-centredness of the body and the ordinary material concerns of the person. For the soul, this is a kind of Egypt. Sometimes the person is able to leave these limitations of material concerns, at least for a few moments. For example, imagine a person praying. He or she is saying the Shema: Hear O Israel...

There is a brief time when the person is actually focused on G-d. At this moment there is just the person and G-d. For the soul, this is freedom¹.

FROM DRY BONES TO LIFE

The prophet Ezekiel lived during the Babylonian Exile. The Temple had been destroyed and the Jews were living in a foreign land. Many gave up hope of retaining their connection with Judaism. They began to assimilate.

Ezekiel gave inspiration and confidence to the Jews of his generation. In the Haftorah² read this Shabbat he described a valley strewn with the dry bones of people who had died long ago. Then G-d commanded him to tell the bones to come back to life. In a miraculous way, they did so. The message is clear: as Jews, we have a miraculous power of rejuvenation. Whatever has happened in the past, we are always able to come back to life and to thrive. This applies to us as an entire nation, and also to each individual man and woman. The future is life.

1. See Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi's *Tanya* Part 1, ch.47. 2. Ezekiel 37:1-14.

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53

SHABBAT IN PESACH

NUMBERS

Michael was so excited. His father had told him at the Seder that he would be getting an Ipad for his Birthday, which would be the day after Pesach finishes.

Michael's friend Sam had won an Ipad from a raffle, and there were so many things you could do with it, watch videos, play games, read books, play music, it was just amazing.

Michael was very excited. He hung up a big piece of paper in his room which a large 5! written on it. When his sister Leah walked into the room she asked "what does 5 exclamation mark mean?"

"5! Means: 5 days to my birthday, 5 days till I get my Ipad" Michael answered "and tomorrow I am going to put on a paper which says 4!"

"Interesting" said Leah "where did you get that idea?" she quizzed.

“I don’t know” he answered. “I guess I am just excited” Michael said thoughtfully. “Some ideas are just original” he said with a smile.

Later that evening, Michael was in the Synagogue during Maariv, the evening Prayer. After they finished the Amidah there was a bang on the table which reminded everybody to turn to the page where we count the Omer. The Chazzan made the blessing and said the day they had reached in the Omer. Now Michael was thinking: “Why do we count the Omer? Oh yes, I remember; when the Jews left Egypt, G-d told them that they would receive the Torah on Mount Sinai, but they would only get it on day Number 50”.

Suddenly Michael realized that everybody was leaving. He finished off counting the Omer and the end of the Maariv prayers, and left the Synagogue.

While he was walking home he continued to think about this. “...And the reason why we count is, because the Jews were very excited, so they counted each day till the great day of the giving of the Torah!”

“Guess what” said Michael to Leah when he came home. “I know where I got the idea of putting the paper with a number on the wall”.

“Where?” asked Leah.

“I got it from the counting of the Omer...”

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