

A-151

Norman Lamm

Shevii shel Pesach

April 13, 1955

A-151

"BY THE INNER LIGHT: A New Definition of Freedom"

1. As we take leave of the Passover Holiday, it behooves us to take one last look at the central theme of this all-important festival, the theme of Freedom and Slavery. Almost all our major religious events - including the Sabbath - are ZECHER LE'YETZIAS MITZRAYIM, in some way a recapitulation of this theme of Freedom, and it is therefore worth our while to reexamine it ~~before~~ so that we can carry over its message from Passover, Freedom's main religious expression, to the rest of the year.

2. For the ~~past~~ week we have been dealing with that word, Freedom, in its political sense (SHIABUD MALCHIUS).

*Yetzias Mitzrayim

*Medinat Yisrael

*Free World vs Iron Curtain Countries Etc.

3. While there is no doubt that the Freedom we celebrate does connote, to a very great extent, this concept of political independence, Freedom has a yet greater, nobler and infinitely more sublime meaning which was expressed by Raabi Kook, the Late Chief Rabbi of Israel in his commentary on the Siddur and Haggadah (Olat Reiyah).

According to R. Kook, the difference between slave and freeman is more than one of social standing, more than a matter of government lordship or an employment relationship or enforced servitude. For a man to know of he is truly free or slave, he must first know his INNER SELF. When he knows that inner self, when he has finally uncovered it from the morass of superficialities, then he must understand that true freedom means being true to that Inner Self, catering to it and pleasing only it, and not neglecting it while trying to please others. Living by this Inner Light, pleasing it and gratifying it is Freedom; pleasing others and living only to please others is sheer Slavery.

4. It is a definition that does justice to R. Kook's world-wide reputation as a great Jewish thinker and perhaps the last of the genuine original mystics that we have had. It is, to be sure, a profound definition of Freedom that requires thinking, but it is an all-embracing one. And it includes the meaning of Freedom in its political sense. For when Israel was in Egypt it could not be true to what it knew was its Inner Self, but had to please the taskmasters and social demands of Egypt. The same is true of any people being subjugated and lorded over by another people; it must please someone else, and so cannot be free.

But liberation, in the sense of overthrowing the taskmaster is not, according to this definition, the same as acquiring Freedom. I may be granted suffrage, the right to vote; I may be granted representation in a freely elected parliament; I may have all the rights of a citizen of a democracy. But if I still do not live in a manner true to that Inner Self, but try only to please the standards and conceptions and models set by others, I am not yet free. I am just as much a slave as if I were at the beck and call of Pharo.

5. If, then, we - those of us here in this synagogue this morning - are to determine whether we are free or slave, we must set for ourselves two tasks:

*to discover what is our Inner Self

*to answer the question: Are we true to that Inner Self?

6. And the answer to both questions can be found in the Rabbinic interpretations of what is perhaps the most glorious verse in that glorious Song of Freedom we read this morning: ZEH EILLI V'ANVEIHU, This is my G-d and I will glorify Him.

7. I wonder if you ever stopped in front of a mirror for just a short while - no, not to admire yourself or to make any adjustments or to otherwise practice the popular art of vanity

but long enough to ask yourself the astonishingly simple yet urgent question: Who am I? A name will not suffice, for a name is only a convenient label. But who am I really? What am I? What, in other words, is my real self? What is my Inner Self? Try to ask yourself that question sometimes. It is hard to answer. And the question keeps recurring.

Of course, a number of answers suggest themselves when you try to discover that Inner Self.

* Freud: Inner Self is the libido or Id, a bundle of wild, unmanagable sex drives. Man's real self is a lewd, lusty beast. The goodness and finer qualities you sometimes notice are only incidental, superimposed on the Inner Self by the mannersims of Society, or a strong Father image. But look long enough into the mirror, according to Freud, and you will find - a pervert.

* Adler: Inner Self is an insatiable hunger for Power. Man is motivated basically by a desire to conquer and control and determine the fate of others. Everything else about man is only the outer trappings, techniques for conquest. The mirror reveals a hideous Inner Self: a power-mad maniac.

* Christianity: According to the prevalent religion of the West, the real Man is frail, corrupt, despicable, sinful. Man's Inner Self is rotten, eaten through with Sin and doomed to eternal perdition - unless he espouses a belief which he cannot rationally accept. The Inner Self is a sad, evil self which can save itself by the magic of a certain belief.

pictures

***** Judaism, however, rejects these interpretations of man's Inner Self. Yes, Man has an unseemly, seedy side. He is lustful, he is possessed of inordinate appetites and desires for power, he does sin and usually tends to evil. But that is all acquired, that is the external, outer man. The Inner Self - that is something quite different.

8. Just what that Inner Self is our Rabbis hinted at in the first explanation of that verse ZEH ELI V'ANVEIHU.... ANVEIHU: ANI VE' HU, MAH HU RACHUM AF ANI RACHUM, MAH HU CHANUN AF ANI CHANUN.... Man was created in the Image of G-d; and therefore if one wants to know what the Inner Self of a Jew is - the answer is ZEH V'ANVEIHU, ANI V' HU - the ANI, the real "I", the true Self of a Jew is: HU - He, G-d Almighty. The G-dly qualities of Mercy and Graciousness and Kindness, Generosity, Benevolence, Goodness - these qualities, these truly Divine characteristics, that is the Real Man, the Inner Self. This Inner Self which can find its fullness of expression in the Torah of G-d, this Inner Self is what the Jewish Mirror shows to the Man who asks: Who and what am I? All the rest is ephemeral accretion, all the rest does not last. The sex, the power-hunger, the sin and the evil, all these are attached to Man, but they are not Man himself. The Inner Self is sacred - ANI VEHU, for the Inner Self, the ANI ~~is identical and~~ stems from HU - G-d.
9. Having established that the Inner Self of each and every one of us is that Goodness of G-d, that Divineness which Torah teaches us and which we can express thru Torah, the question is, what are we to do about it. And here is where the second Rabbinic comment on the same verse is of help. This too is a play on words. Our Rabbis took the same word, V'ANVEIHU, and related it to the word NA'EH, Beauty. And they said HISNA'EH LFANAV BEMITZVOS, Make thyself pleasing (beautiful) before Him (G-d) by performing the Mitzvos.
10. Here then is the real definition of Freedom: Your Inner Self is the CHEIEK ELOKA MI'MAAL, the G-dly qualities. Try to please them, try to be true to them, by observing the Torah, and do not forsake the Torah, the Law of G-d, by pleasing others. HISNAEH LFANAV, please only G-d, be true only to that Inner Self. Only then will you be truly free and not servile. Pleasing and satisfying Torah - my Inner Self - by observing its ritual and ethical mizvot, makes me free, because I am true to myself. Trying to please strange doctrines and standards means I am an obsequious slave.

11. With this definition, hinted at in the Talmud and formulated by Rabbi Kook, I believe we can begin to understand, if not solve, the one great dilemma that faces American Jewry today. For 20 centuries our people have lived in exile...U'MI'PNEI CHATA'EINU GALINU... we are in exile...HA'SHATA AVDEI LE'SHANA HA'BAAH B'NEI CHORIN...and there never was any question about it. A walk down the street made a Jew aware of the bitter reality of his exile. But since the rise of the modern democracy, and especially in America in the last 7 years, question has been apallingly complex. Are we American Jews in GALUS, in exile? - when we vote for office, and when we are elected to the most impressive offices the nation has to offer? Is this exile? And yet, are we to give up the beautiful hopes and sacred dreams of generations of SHIVAS ZION, of return to Zion? Are we to repeat the error of German Jewry.....?

12. A clearer understanding, however, can be gained with the definition of Freedom we have just presented. If by Freedom and Slavery you mean political F & S; if by Exile you mean political subjugation - then it is difficult to convince the great majority of Am. Jews that they are in exile, for the simple reason that have political freedom. This is the point the Ben Gurions and Israeli Zionists do not want to understand. Politically, American Jews are as free as any other individual Americans.

BUT: - & this is the crucial point- if by Freedom you mean that far more more profound and basic definition of being true to the Inner Self of Jewry, then we Am. Jews are in a deep, bitter, dark GALUS, as dark as any we have ever been in.

Just look at yourselves, in our own community. Whom do our people try to please? Their inner selves? - if you give credence to the Freudian or Adlerian or Christian definition, yes. But if you have any regard for the Jewish definition, the answer is NO.

Needn't recite to you the long list of non-Jewish patterns to which our Jews strive to accommodate themselves.

*Most of the innovations and new features in the non-Torah synagogues are borrowed, lock stock and barrel from the Christian Churches - & that includes the Organ and certain other technical arrangements. Whom are we pleasing with these Christian innovations - G-d, the ANI VE'HU of our Inner Selves, or the critical opinions and tastes of the people with whom we are politically free but to whom we are culturally and religiously servile?

*Just mention one thing since the "season" soon coming up: Weddings. Read in the papers about marriages (Jewish) performed "double-ring" ceremony used. We Jews know of no such chipper arrangement. I am sure that a good number of you people don't realize it. But it's a Protestant custom. And we're slaves, abject slaves, if we dance to another's tune.

*Hurt me: Sunday morning walked down street saw two handsome young Jewish children. During Pesach, not only not in Jr. Cong., but dressed for play in mud-pile. But Easter Sunday, they wore felt-hats, beautiful suits and big flowers - & not L'kavod Chol Ha'moed.

13. By that definition, our American Zionists must realize, we American Jews are in Galus, we are not freemen. And by that Standard, our Israeli friends must realize as well, a goodly part of Jewish Israel is in the same bitter Galuth.

14. If we managed to attain such a great measure of Political Freedom by our own efforts, and without leaving all the work for Messiah, let us do the same for this higher type of freedom. Let us free ourselves of this abject servility to the tastes and institutions of others. Let us be true to the sacred portion of our Inner Self.

15. CHARUS AL HA'LUCHOS....AL TIKRI CHARUS ELA CHEIRUS...not "engraved"...but "freedom"... the freedom we seek, the final, grand, noble stroke of freedom for which we pine and strive is the kind that will enable us to live according to the Ten Commandments, the Tablets of the Law, the law of Torah - that is, that G-dliness which is our Inner Self.

(Bl. 124)