

"LIONS AND DOGS AND DOVES AND HAWKS"  
The Zoology of Freedom

" חג המצות זמן חרותו " -- the festival of Passover is the celebration of our freedom. Passover not only commemorates an act of liberation in the dim past, but reminds us that the aspiration to and striving for freedom are un-ending tasks.

Freedom is quixotic. One is never sure of it. It is not something which, once achieved, is forever certain, safe, secure. It requires constant struggle. Judaism no doubt endorses the American Revolutionary slogan, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

All of Jewish history is, in a manner of speaking, a long record of freedom lost and regained; a drama of galut and geulah (exile and redemption); of herut and avdut (freedom and slavery). It is as if Jewish history were really a large Seder-table, where sometimes we drink the "Four Cups," and are heady with freedom -- and then bite into the bitter herbs and experience the agony of subjugation; where now we practice hesevah, inclining in a manner of aristocracy, and then taste the humiliation of the harosset. And sometimes, perhaps most times, life is more like the matzah -- a peculiar and paradoxical blending of both motives, of freedom (for matzah is the sign of that bread which did not rise because we were in a hurry to leave Egypt and emerge from servitude) and slavery (the "bread of affliction").

We may, perhaps, find a wise insight of the Sages into the nature of freedom in a rather unexpected source. The Mishnah tells us that there were five unusual characteristics of the אש של מערכה, the fire on the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem. One of those qualities was, that it was רבוצה כארי, the fire seemed to crouch like a lion. The Talmud (Yoma 21b) comments upon this: can you then say that the fire was רבוצה כארי, crouching like a lion?  
דהתנא אמר ר' חנינא סגן הכהנים אני ראימיה ורבוצה בנגב

did we not learn that Rabbi Haninah had said, "I saw the fire on the altar in the Temple, and it looked like a crouching dog?" The Talmud solves the problem by stating:

לא קישיא, כאן במקדש ראשון כאן במקדש שני  
Both statements are true, but they refer to different temples! In the First Temple, the altar-fire looked like a crouching lion, but during the Second Temple it appeared like a crouching dog.

Frankly, I do not know the difference between the two crouching shapes. But no matter, their importance is as symbols. For a lion and dog may be said to represent two conceptions of the conduct of a Jew, especially of Jews as a national entity.

The lion is not afraid of resistance. He knows what he wants, and will fight for his vital needs. He may suffer defeat, and in that case he will lick his wounds -- but never will he bow, never will he beg for his wants. The lion loves freedom -- better freedom alone in the desert, hungry and thirsty, than mountains of meat in a posh cage.

The dog places no value on freedom. He seeks only to survive, and eat. Not only does he not cherish freedom, but he rejects it: he is always looking for a master, someone to please, someone with whom to ingratiate himself, someone whom he can serve faithfully and thus get his reward: a bone from the table. He will even prefer a merciless beating in his master's house to being on his own, and if expelled will return again and again.

The First Commonwealth was the period of the Lion in Jewish history. It began with the conquest of Canaan by Joshua and the Israelites, went through the period of monarchy (Saul, David, Solomon, and their followers), the building of the First Temple, until the defeat of the Israelites and their exile under Nebuchadnezzar. This was a colorful if uncertain period in Jewish history. There were many defeats as well as triumphs, moral backsliding as well as spiritual attainments. But above all, these were 900 glorious years of proud and dignified national selfhood. The fire on the altar was רבוצה כארי, crouching like a lion.

The Second Commonwealth was the era of Kelev, the Dog. The return to Palestine was not precipitated by our own determination and resolve, but by the grace of the Persian Emperor Cyrus, who issued the original "Balfour Declaration." It began when the great Nehemiah, hearing of the distress of his brethren in the Holy Land, wept before the King and his consort, who inquired as to his unhappiness. Only then did they promise to help the Jews, and Persia even granted us our first Jewish governor-general (Zerubabel). It was the period of shtadlanut, of political maneuvering and manipulation and begging and cajoling in order to attain the end of Jewish statehood. For 400 years we served different masters: Persia, Greece, Syria, Rome.

Jews during the Second Temple were wealthier, more affluent, and more developed than during the First. But during the First Commonwealth, we acted like hungry lions -- ריבוצה כארי; during the second, more like well-fed pets -- ריבוצה ככלב.\*

I believe that both themes can be detected in the story of the exodus from Egypt itself. For the exodus represents an oscillation between ari and kelev.

In the beginning, when the Israelites left Egypt, they went out ביד רמה, with their heads up, with dignity, with joy. We were even told ובלב לא יחרץ לשׂינן, "the dog will not whet his tongue against thee." Indeed, not, for the dog knew that we were made of different mettle, that we were crouching like lions!

But soon, our people lost this leonine quality as the loneliness and leanness of freedom in an unchartered desert took its ineluctible toll. In their hunger and solitude and fear of the unknown, the former slaves began to think back to the סיר הבשר, the flesh pots of Egypt -- which probably never existed. In their fear, their minds threw up fictional illusions and false memories:

זכרנו את הדגה אשר אכלנו במצרים

"we remember the fish which we ate in Egypt." They were slaves! They forgot the beatings, the torture, the agony, and they created for themselves memories of things which never were, all in an attempt to find security from the terror of freedom.

A canine conception if there ever was one! One is tempted to see a reflection of this doggish deprecation of freedom in the halakhah that hametz is permitted on Passover only if it is so denigrated, so ugly, so denatured, so devalued, that נפסל מאכילת כלב, that even a dog will not eat it. The kelev is the bottom limit, the symbol of that against which genuine freedom is measured.

That is why the Lord told this generation that had turned from ari to kelev that במדבר הזה יפנו פגריכם, in this desert you will fall dead, you are not worthy to enter the Holy Land. Only a generation born in the desert -- free, proud, dignified, leonine -- will be privileged to enter in the Land of Israel.

\*I am indebted for the above thought to Isaac Elon, in an article in Sinai, Tishri 5719.

Not only the Exodus and the two Commonwealths, but the modern history of Zionism too shows both motifs. Zionism began as shtadlanut: Herzl approached the Sultan, Weizman influenced Balfour, Jews throughout the world worked on the United Nations. The fire on the altar of Jewish life was רבוצה ככלב, crouching like the dog. However, our experiences with the nations of the world, with Europe and the East, with the Holocaust and the Arab intransigence and cruelty, awoke within us an ancient spark of גור ארץ יהודה, of "Judah as a lion cub," and Jews rose like the lions of Judah to restore their land and their folk to their former eminence.

The State of Israel, no matter what its political leadership, is not ready to grovel like a dog. It will strive for peace, but it will not beg for crumbs from the table of Nixon, or for shirayim from that of Secretary Kissinger. Israel may be forced into unpleasant moves, in an effort to attain peace. But the real question is: how far will it go?

My readings of the temperament of Israelis is that there are very few extreme Hawks and very few extreme Doves. Most people vascillate between the two.

For myself, I am not a Hawk. I would be ready to return most of the Sinai and the parts of Syria beyond the Golan Heights. But although I am not a Hawk, I do not want Israel to act out of weakness. Eric Hoffer was right when he said that, "Power corrupts the few, but weakness corrupts the many."

I am not a Dove. I cannot identify with those who are ready to give anything for peace, because that is not far from being ready to give everything for peace. But although I am not a Dove, I would not want purely religious issues concerning Judea and Samaria to becloud the crucial political decisions of whether or not to return the West Bank or how much of it. The issue must be decided as one of national survival, not as a halakhic question to be decided by rabbis consulting texts.

But whether Dove or Hawk or neither or undecided or both -- and most Israelis are in the last three categories -- Israelis today are רבוצה כארץ, never רבוצה ככלב! We have lived through too much to leave our status of lions and go back to being mere household pets of other nations. The Jews of Israel know that we have what we have not because of the kindness of the world, but despite it! Never again dog-houses!

The recent report of the Agranat Commission, which

investigated the **מחדלים** or shortcomings that led to the setbacks of the Yom Kippur War, has already been traumatic, and may yet prove to be convulsive in Israel. But I take that as a sign that the country is basically healthy, that it retains the quality of **ארי** and not of **כלב**. Consider this: this is the first time in living memory that Jewish leadership is being brought to account, that it is forced to be responsible to its constituency. It has not happened before. It does not happen now in the United States. What "Jewish leaders" feel they must report to the people whom they purport to represent?

It is possible that the government will fall because of it. That may appear to weaken us externally for a short while. But it will strengthen us internally immeasurably. I do not say that I would like to see such a political development, but if it comes, and it well may, it will be a sign of inner rejuvenation, of the re-democratization of Israel. And I am confident that we will emerge stronger and better. And as for the enemies about us: **לא יחיצ כלב לשונו**, "let not the dog whet its tongue!"

Furthermore, we American Jews are wrong in our general attitude to the results of the Yom Kippur War. I am personally annoyed with Israelis who, in an attempt to keep up the old image, declare that the victory of the Yom Kippur War was even greater than that of the Six Day War. Such statements are a tribute to the power of myth-making. But I am more distressed over the attitude of many American Jews who either fear to visit Israel because of political and military unrest, or equally as much, those Jews who visit Israel as an act of **ניחום אבלים**, consoling the mourners. Yes, it is true that grief and bereavement exist in the land because of the 2,000 young people, the cream of the country, who gave their lives in the war.

But let us remember: it was not a pogrom! Jews did not cower in their cellars as the enemy wrecked havoc above. They fought back, and fought back bravely. Lions have suffered a temporary setback, and they are not likely ever again to beg like dogs.

This Passover, the **זמן חירותנו**, the season of our freedom, let us remember that in our days the **אש המערכה רבוצה כארי**, the fire on the altar of our national life crouches like a lion. Of course, the old Israeli arrogance and cockiness was foolish. The self-image of so many Israelis (fostered by American Jews, whose knowledge of Jewish and Zionist history usually came from Leon Uris's Exodus and who saw the typical Israeli as an Ari Ben Canaan)

as a Jewish superman, was both dangerous and silly. But that does not negate the real psychological fact that a new mentality now motivates Jews, especially the Israelis.

In Israel's dilemma -- and it is our as well -- survival remains the first order of business on the national agenda. Solomon had taught us that

טוב הכלב החי מן האריה המת, better a living dog than a dead lion. But the quality counts as much as survival itself! What kind of freedom shall we be getting for ourselves? Israel may indeed have to make some concessions for peace. But Israelis, most of them, will not consent to a salami-like dismemberment of the country. If, Heaven forbid, it comes to that, the "spirit of Masada" (which always lies very close to the surface of Israeli awareness) will be aroused, and Israel will inform the world, paraphrasing Solomon, that טוב האריה המת מן הכלב המת, better to die like a lion than to die like a dog!

The United States learned in Viet Nam that you cannot defeat an enemy just because it is a little country. The United States must now recognize that you cannot sell out an ally just because it is a little country.

In the next few weeks or months, we will learn the real intentions of our Secretary of State. I hope all will go well. But there is good reason to feel that deals have been made and promises have been given which will weaken Israel critically. If that is the case, and I certainly hope it is not, we American Jews will have to stand by the State of Israel during very difficult days, even if it means resisting this possible change in American foreign policy.

So let us summarize our thoughts in this season of our freedom.

The choice between Dove and Hawk is a purely political one in deciding the means of establishing maximum freedom. But the choice between Lion and Dog is a spiritual one in deciding the very nature and essence of our freedom.

The political zoology of freedom will be based largely on whether we veer more towards Dove or Hawk. But the ultimate theology of freedom will be based squarely on our choice of kelev or ari.

וככלב לא יחרץ לשינוי, the dog did not whet its tongue as the Israelites left Egypt, and it must remain silenced

in the exodus of our day as well. The choice has been made for us.

The Talmud (Ber. 57b) tells us that

ראה גוב של אריות אומר ברין שעשה ניסים  
לאבותינו במקום הזה.

One who sees a den of lions should recite the blessing to God, "who performed miracles for our ancestors in this place." The plain meaning of the text is that when one beholds a pride of lions, he must recall the miracle that occurred to Daniel and his friends when they were cast into the lions' den and emerged safe by the miracle wrought by God.

I suggest another meaning. When one sees a pride or den of lions, he must thank God for the miracles performed for our ancestors. He must praise the Almighty for having endowed our people with the quality of the lion, for having given us even in the infancy of our history -- when we left Egypt as a band of disorganized slaves -- the blessing of leonine courage; for having graced Jews throughout history with the ability to rise from the crouching of a dog to the crouching of a lion. For it is this quality of the lion that has given us Passover, זמן חרותנו, the time of our freedom.

Therefore, he who sees a pride of lions must bless God who gave us the pride of freedom.