

וְהוֹצֵאתִי וְהַצֵּלְתִּי וְגֵאֵלְתִּי וְלִקְחֹתִי

The Four Freedoms

Readings for discussion at your Seder this year

FREEDOM OF SPEECH
FREEDOM OF WORSHIP
FREEDOM FROM WANT
FREEDOM FROM FEAR

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FDR frames the Haggadah

On 6th January 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt stood before the United States Congress to give his State of the Union address. In what became known as the 'Four Freedoms Speech' he said:

"In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression, everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way, everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want... economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants, everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear... that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbour, anywhere in the world."



Roosevelt was hopeful about realising these global aspirations, "That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation." But it was not to be. Within the year Japan launched its surprise attack on Pearl Harbour, causing the United States to enter World War Two.

His speech was not forgotten, however. Thanks to the dedication of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, it paved the way to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The preamble speaks of "a world in which human beings shall enjoy

the freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want..." This precipitated the European Convention on Human Rights in 1950 which was formally incorporated into UK law with the Human Rights Act of 1998.

There is an intriguing biblical precedent to Roosevelt's four freedoms. They echo the four expressions of redemption which God relayed to Moses when promising to release the Israelites from slavery: "I am the Lord *and I will take you out (vehotzayti)* from under the burdens of Egypt, *and I will rescue you (vehitzalti)* from their bondage, *and I will redeem you (vega'alti)* with an outstretched arm... *and I will take you (velakachti)* to Me as a people and I will be your God..." (Exodus 6:6-7).

According to the Jerusalem Talmud (Pesachim 10:1), the reason we drink four cups of wine during the seder is to toast these four expressions.

Reordering and combining Roosevelt's freedoms with these expressions of redemption reveals a compelling four-stage progression to the Pesach Seder. How the Haggadah addresses these freedoms teaches us much about our lives and values today.

With the war in Eastern Europe and our continued recovery from the global pandemic, we are more aware than ever of the price of human freedom. So here are a series of readings and questions to spark discussion around your Seder table. All page numbers refer to *The Jonathan Sacks Haggada* (Maggid, 2013).

What does it really mean to be free? This year, let *Zman Cherutainu*, 'the time of our freedom', be an opportunity to share your concerns and hopes for freedom for all.

Stage 1. **וְהוֹצֵאתִי – VEHOTZAYTI**

Freedom from fear

FROM KIDDUSH TO VEHI SH'AMDA (P.14-45), THIS FIRST STAGE FRAMES THE SEDER
AND OPENS OR EVENING'S JOURNEY TO FREEDOM.

"We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord our God took us out of there..." (p.28). The ancient Egyptians persecuted our ancestors for centuries (p.44). They were forced to work and beaten if they did not comply. They endured terrible hardships, constant injury, and lived in fear of their lives.

Twice the book of Exodus uses the Hebrew word *befarech* to describe the slavery. "The Egyptians enslaved the Israelites *befarech*, and they made their lives bitter... all the work they did was *befarech*." (Exodus 1:13-14). Rashi explains *befarech* to mean, "with harsh labour that crushed the body and broke it". The aim was to break the Israelites both physically and mentally.

The subjugation was politically motivated. Pharaoh was worried that a large Israelite populace might choose to unite with Egypt's enemies and herald its downfall (Exodus 1:10). The despotic king laid the foundations for state-sponsored aggression to control them, spreading fear and panic.

God's response was *vehotzayti*, "and I will take you out". Only by removing the Israelites could God end their woes and give them their freedom. This was the biblical forerunner to Roosevelt's aspiration to secure freedom from fear and aggression for every nation.

Unfortunately, this freedom continues to be challenged. Too often the crime of aggression is committed internationally, when one state uses armed force against the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or political independence of another state. In

addition, there are still numerous states using fear to control their own citizens.

And so, the Exodus story must be continually retold and re-examined, to burn it into our memories. Says the Haggadah, "Even were we all wise, all intelligent, all aged and all knowledgeable in the Torah, still the command would be upon us to tell of the taking out of Egypt; and the more one tells of the taking out from Egypt, the more admirable it is." (p.30).



Notice that God taking us out of Egypt is the essential element in the response to three of the Four Sons (p.38-41). We are never too young to learn the lesson that all people should be able to live in freedom, without being afraid.

To spark discussion:

- What are we doing to realise this freedom?
- Should we trust our government to stand up for it?
- Is the UN an effective body to defend international aggression?
- How might society be taught to cherish freedom from fear?



Stage 2. *VEHITZALTI* – וְהִצַּלְתִּי Freedom from want

FROM *TZE ULMAD* TO THE TEN PLAGUES (P.46-71), THIS SECOND STAGE DETAILS HOW THE EGYPTIANS TREATED OUR ANCESTORS AND WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THEIR EXPERIENCE.



The heart of the Haggadah is the interpretation of four verses to be found in Deuteronomy (26:5-8) which concisely retell the Exodus story. Twice we hear about the oppression our ancestors suffered. “And the Egyptians dealt cruelly with us *and oppressed us (vaya’anunu)* ... And God saw *our oppression (onyeynu)*...” (p.54,56). As well as the aggression already discussed, we also need to understand the nature of this oppression (*aynut*).

The Haggadah gives an example of oppression: “the separation of husband and wife.” (p.58). This was an Egyptian state policy to curb Israelite population growth. But how is this example derived?

It seems to be related to the same Hebrew root for oppression that the Torah employs when discussing how Yom Kippur should be observed: “and you shall afflict (*ve’inytem*) your souls” (Leviticus 16:31). There it is better translated as ‘affliction’ because it is self-imposed rather than being enforced by an oppressor. The Mishnah (Yoma 8:1) lists five forms of self-affliction mandated on Yom Kippur: not eating (or drinking), bathing, anointing, wearing leather shoes or having sexual relations.

The Haggadah only mentions one of these five afflictions, but there is a whole body of rabbinic midrash which shows that *all these afflictions and more*, were imposed upon the Israelites.

In Roosevelt’s terms, the Israelites were denied freedom from want. Their lives were made sick and miserable through a lack of food and clothing, sexual segregation, and wretched living conditions.

God’s response was *vehitzalti*, “*and I will rescue you*”. According to Nachmanides, this was a promise that the Israelites would no longer be economically dependent on Egypt and that all their afflictions would end. Indeed, after their departure, God provided for all their needs: water from rocks (Exodus 17:6 & Numbers 20:11), *manna* from heaven (Exodus 16:4), and clothing and sandals that did not wear out (Deuteronomy 29:4).

Ill health, through hunger, poverty and lack of adequate medical provision continue to be global problems. The Exodus is a call for us to respond to these challenges. To follow God’s lead and aspire to rescue others from these afflictions.

To spark discussion:

- What are the best organisations to alleviate this suffering and affliction?
- How should we balance our support for Jewish and general charities?
- What solutions are there that invest in economic freedom and reduce dependency?
- How might we tackle the inequalities in our society?



Stage 3. *VEGA'ALTI* – וְגַאֲלִתִּי Freedom to speak

FROM RABBIS YOSSEI HAGELILI, ELIEZER AND AKIVA TO *BECHOL DOR VADOR* (P.72-91).
IN THIS THIRD STAGE WE LEARN TO EXPRESS OUR FREEDOM FOR OURSELVES.

Whilst the first two stages were about 'freedom from', freedom from fear and want, this and the next are about 'freedom to', freedom to speak and worship.

This division comes from philosopher Isaiah Berlin's essay, "Two Concepts of Liberty". Negative freedom is "the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity." Positive freedom is much more, it is "the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind... I wish to be a subject, not an object... I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer – deciding, not being decided for... I wish, above all, to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices..."



To my mind, positive freedom is best characterised in the Jewish tradition by the multiple, yet highly individual, voices of the sages. They disagreed about everything. They turned argument into an artform. Every page of the Talmud is alive with conflicting voices and opinions. And they address nearly every subject under the sun, and above it too. Any dispute is allowed so long as it is a *machloket l'shem*

shamayim, "an argument for the sake of heaven" (Mishnah, Avot 5:17).

In the Haggadah, this is exemplified by the discussion as to how much the Splitting of the Sea was greater than the Ten Plagues (p.72-75). Three rabbis argue about which biblical verse is the basis of the argument and then exactly how to read it. The nit-picking nature of the discussion brilliantly testifies to their distinct ways of thinking and individual modes of expression.

Abraham and Moses both used their own forthright voices even to challenge God. Rather than being censured, they were commended for their vocal interventions. It is what made them great advocates for our people.

The fourth book of the Torah, *Bamidbar*, literally "in the wilderness", can be read as *ba'medaber*, "in the place they [learn to] speak". The book contains numerous conflicts in which people find their own voices and challenge each other. "If liberty means anything at all," said George Orwell, "it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."

All this was only possible after the Exodus. God promised *vega'alti*, "and I will redeem you" – this became a redemption of body and soul, and speech too.

To spark discussion:

- How can a person be encouraged to find their own voice?
- Is Roosevelt's freedom of speech really akin to rabbinic individualism?
- Should free speech include hate speech?
- Which voices make you uncomfortable and why?



Stage 4. **וְלִקְחָתִי – VELAKACHTI** Freedom to worship

FROM HALLELUYAH TO THE FOURTH CUP (P.92-141). IN THIS FOURTH STAGE WE USE OUR
FREEDOM TO PRACTICE OUR FAITH, THANKFUL TO GOD FOR WHAT WE HAVE.

The Haggadah begins by focussing on physical freedom and then gradually moves on to spiritual freedom. To be free, we must be allowed to worship God and observe our religious traditions. This was an essential aim of the Exodus from the outset. During Moses's first encounter with God at the Burning Bush, located at the base of Mount Sinai, he was assured, "when you take this People out from Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." (Exodus 3:12).

God promised, "*and I will take you (velakachti) to Me as a people and I will be your God.*" This, states Ibn Ezra's commentary, refers to the receiving of the Torah, our manual for Jewish practice.

To this day the Seder is one of the most keenly observed of our Jewish practices. We sit together to eat and drink, pray and praise. All these are intertwined in the tradition – the singing of Hallel begins before the seder meal and continues after it is completed (p.92-95, 122-131).

Sadly, too many times in our history we had to gather in secret, hiding our religion. There are countless stories of clandestine seders. In the Middle Ages, during one of the darkest periods of anti-Jewish persecution, a paragraph was added to the Haggadah to be said after the third cup of wine. Concerning those who seek to harm us, we say to God "*Shefoch chamachta, Pour out Your rage...*" (p.120). We still recite these words today, not just to remember the past, but to alert us to the tragedy of religious persecution in our time, wrought not only on our own people but those of other faiths too.



Roosevelt ended his speech by recommitting to his nation's "faith in freedom under the guidance of God" and by re-stating its fundamental value: "Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere. Our support goes to those who struggle to gain those rights or keep them. Our strength is our unity of purpose. To that high concept there can be no end save victory."

Seder night is a journey into freedom, with four markers along the way: God first granted us freedom from fear and want, and then gave us the freedom to speak and worship. We hope to continue to enjoy these four freedoms for ourselves and all humanity. So long as these freedoms are lacking in any part of the world, our journey is not over.

To spark discussion:

- In which parts of the globe do Jews find it hard to practice their Judaism?
- Should we fight for the freedom of worship for religions that we disagree with or find problematic?
- Does a state have the right to limit religious freedom, and if so, how?



Stage 5. **VEHEVEYTI** – וְהִבַּאתִי

The fifth freedom

IN THE FINAL PART OF THE HAGGADAH (P.142-165), WE SING SONGS ABOUT JEWISH HISTORY, GOD AND THE ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH. THIS LEADS TO A FINAL LESSON ABOUT FREEDOM.

Rabbi Sacks teaches in his Haggadah that if you look more deeply into the sources you will discover that seder night is really all about fives, not fours. The Mishnah mentions a fifth *question* (Pesachim 10:4), there is a fifth *verse* in Deuteronomy about the Exodus (26:9), there is a fifth *child* (the absent one), and there is a *fifth* cup (Elijah's). Similarly, there is a fifth expression of redemption, "*and I will bring you (veheveiti) to the land...*" (Exodus 6:8). And so there should be a fifth freedom too, what is it?

Roosevelt's four freedoms and international codes of human rights can only take us so far. According to Genesis, we are all created in God's own image (1:27). This means that in some ways there must be unlimited potential for what it means to be a human being. In an essential way, we are boundless. There is always more to learn, more to understand and more to aspire to. The desire to be more, to reach ever higher, is part of the makeup of human freedom.

We communicate this freedom as the seder draws to a close when we all join in to exclaim, "*leshana haba b'Yerushalayim*, Next year in Jerusalem!" (p.150)

For centuries, even the possibility of a physical return to Jerusalem could not be realised. It was a distant dream, a vain hope, an aspiration that could not be realised. But the belief that someday they or their descendants would reach Jerusalem spurred on generations of Jews.

Now it is a reality. The Jewish people have come home, and Jerusalem is our

crowning glory. And for Jews across the globe, it is just a plane ride away.

But *leshana haba b'Yerushalayim* implies infinitely more than this. Consider that even those Jews celebrating seder in Jerusalem this year will be singing these words. This is not just their desire to be in the same location twelve months hence. 'Next year' is *always* out of reach. These words embody the Jewish aspiration to always be building a better world for ourselves, for our people and for all humanity.

This is the fifth freedom, the freedom to always be growing and becoming more. It is the freedom to truly live. It is a fitting culmination of the seder.

To spark discussion:

- What is the difference between optimism and hope?
- Which is the most important of the five freedoms for you?
- Can you find other kinds of freedom in the Haggadah?
- How might you be different 'next year'?





Finding fresh and interesting approaches to the Haggadah is challenging for anyone organising a Pesach Seder. As well as delicious food to eat, you should provide plenty of food for thought. This special pamphlet shows how the freedoms we have today were born in the Exodus story, and why they are so important to promote and protect, especially now.



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