

## THE PROLOGUE TO FREEDOM

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Passover is the festival of Freedom. It commemorates not only our ancestors emancipation from Egyptian slavery, but also recalls the anniversary of the birth of the ideal of human freedom and individual liberty.

Freedom is not a negative concept. In its perfect form, freedom does not mean the absence of restraint, lack of duty and want of responsibility. Like any other worthwhile ideal, freedom too imposes certain duties, certain obligations. No nation can hope to gain its freedom and independence, unless it is willing to assume some specific duties, and be prepared to go through some definite processes which lead directly to the desired goal.

There are four conditions which are essential to the acquisition of freedom. These four conditions, these four preliminary steps are best exemplified by Pesach and particularly the four special Sabbaths which precede the holiday. When taken together these unique Sabbaths present a definite program without which the attainment of freedom is impossible.

The first of the special Shabbosim is known as Parshas Shkolim. On that Shabbos every Jew is reminded of the ancient duty to contribute half a shekel for the maintenance of the Bais Hamikdosh and the purchase of community sacrifices. Here we have the first preliminary step which prepares us for freedom, civic-mindedness. A people will never attain freedom unless every member composing that people is willing to do his part, contribute his share to the general welfare. In a selfish society where each one is interested in himself, where each one is indifferent to the plight of his fellow man, there can be no freedom.

The second step which prepares a people for freedom is a

clear awareness of its position in the world, a realistic appraisal of its history. A people ignorant of its past will fail to provide for the future. A people which refuses to heed the lessons of history in the imaginary belief that what has happened in the past cannot happen in the future, what has happened in one part of the world cannot happen in another part, such a people will fail miserably in its efforts to solve the problems that confront them.

This thought is conveyed to us by the second special Shabbos which bids the Jew remember the atrocities and cruelties perpetrated by the barbarous Amalekites. One of the first mitzvas given our people as they entered the Holy Land was להכרית זרעו של עמלק. Unless the people fully realized the menace presented by Amalek their newly won freedom could not be made secure.

Today, only 12 years after the conclusion of the second world war, some of our people are beginning to show signs of forgetfulness with respect to the cruel fate that befell European Jewry. It therefore becomes our duty to proclaim aloud once again: "Remember what Amalek did unto you!" So long as our people will remember the cruel annihilation of European Jewry, so long will we be vigilant and continually strive to protect our own freedom. But no sooner do we forget the mass destruction of European Jewry, then we begin to live in a world of illusion, develop a false sense of security and expose ourselves to the threat of dictatorship and slavery.

Civic-mindedness, history consciousness are two important steps essential to true freedom. Before the absolute goal can be achieved, however, a third condition, equally important must be fulfilled. This condition is exemplified by the third of the special Shabboshim, Parshas Poroh. On that Sabbath we read a chapter from the fourth book of the Pentateuch which describes the ceremony of burning the red heifer, the ashes of which were utilized for ritual purification. This ceremony is known as the most mysterious ritual of the entire Torah. By its very nature it preaches the necessity for faith in the supernatural, in the mysterious, in the heavenly. As a preliminary step in the preparation for Pesach it teaches that freedom and religion are inseparable. Any revolu-

tionary movement dedicated to the ideal of freedom which attempts to eliminate G-d from its midst will eventually end in human enslavement instead of human betterment.

The French revolution was born amidst the shouts of liberty, equality and fraternity. But no sooner was G-d banished from its program, no sooner was religion of faith replaced by what was termed "religion of reason," then it turned into a reign of terror and an age of the guillotine. The Soviet revolution in 1917 promised to liberate the enslaved millions of that backward country. Today, forty years later, some 200 million people are shut off from every outside contact by an impenetrable iron curtain. These and numerous other historic experiences prove conclusively that where there is no G-d there can be no freedom.

The fourth Shabbos is known as Parshas Hachodesh. On that Shabbos we read **הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשִׁית חֳדָשִׁים**. "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months." The word "unto you" is significant, and the sages derived from it a remarkable idea. There are some people who believe that man is not the master of his own destiny. They openly assert that man's destiny is predetermined and that nothing within our power can alter or improve it. In our age of atomic and hydrogen bombs, these people have turned prophets of doom and forecast the end of all civilization. Judaism rejects this philosophy. Man is the architect of his own future, as is stated in our Torah: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse, therefore choose life, that thou mayest live, both thou and thy seed." "This month shall be unto you" our sages observe," means that the month is fully within your control."

Thus the fourth preparatory step essential to the acquisition of freedom is the acceptance of the philosophy that man is the captain of his boat and can steer it in accordance with his aims, convictions and aspirations.

In addition to the four special Shabboshim, we have Shabbos Hagadol, the Great Shabbos, which immediately precedes Pass-

over. On that Sabbath, four days before the exodus, our ancestors displayed unusual courage and fearlessness. In complete defiance of their Egyptian overlords they prepared to slaughter the Paschal lamb which was sacred to the Egyptians. In bidding the people to perform this act, Moses, our master, indicated that courage and fearless defiance of the tyrants are indispensable elements in the attainment of freedom.

We, in our age, have lived to see our people regain some of its freedom. We have, thank G-d, a free and independent state of Israel. Like Passover of old, the attainment of our new freedom was preceded by the five point program so necessary to true freedom. Let us hope and pray that the marvelous qualities which led to the creation of the new State will become the cornerstone of its national existence and will bring to our people everlasting glory and perpetual freedom.