Our definition of freedom has become indivisible from escapism.

The archetype of freedom is the Exodus from Egypt which we commemorate in the festival of Pesach. The name for “Egypt” in Hebrew is “Mitzrayim” which is from the Hebrew word “metzar” meaning “narrow,” or “constriction.” Egypt was the ultimate place of constriction. No slave had ever escaped from there, let alone an entire nation.

When the Torah talks about freedom it always connects it to a clear idea of the purpose of that freedom. Freedom without a purpose is slavery. When Moshe asks Pharaoh to let the Jews leave Mitzrayim, he says “Thus says Hashem: Let My people go — and they will serve Me.” The second part of the statement is the reason for the first. The only reason we were redeemed from Egypt was so that we could serve Hashem.

But why does Hashem need to be served? What does He get out of it? The answer is — nothing. We can give nothing to Hashem that He doesn’t already have, because everything we have is His. However, when we serve Hashem it is we who benefit. When we serve Hashem we establish a relationship with Him. We connect ourselves to the only Reality that there is. True freedom is being yoked to the truth. To the extent that we connect ourselves to Hashem, we are connected to reality. This is the definition of freedom. To the extent that we allow ourselves to be drawn into the myriad of mental arcade games of escapism we disconnect ourselves from the Real World.

Every Pesach we have a golden opportunity — a launch window — to connect with this reality, the reality of freedom.

We tend to think of ourselves as being static in time and that time passes around and over us. We talk of someone as “timepassed him by.” In reality, we are the time travelers. Time is fixed and we pass through it. Time has fixed points. Stations, if you like. I remember as a child my father once bought me a train set. It was the most beautiful train set in the world. (I think he spent half the night putting it together in time for my birthday.) It came complete with drivers and guards, and people waiting at stations with suitcases reading little miniature newspapers. But the train always ran in a circle. Over the bridge, through the tunnel, through the first station, across the level crossing with the cattle grid to the second station. Round and round, round and round.

Similarly, every spring we revisit the train station called Pesach. It’s the same Pesach as last year. It’s the same as the first Pesach. Thus it contains all the power of freedom of that first Pesach. Its power is undiluted by the years. Because in reality, the years have not passed by. The same reality that existed then exists now. The Exodus from Egypt created a spiritual landscape which is the essence of this time of the year. It’s in the air. All we need to do is to hook into it.

The Exodus from Egypt created a spiritual landscape which is the essence of this time of the year. It’s in the air. All we need to do is to hook into it.

Look outside. The trees are blooming. The call of the dove is fulfilling the Creation.

As it says in the Haggadah: “Each person is obliged to see himself as if he actually came out of Egypt.”

Sources:
- Yesod VeShoresh Ha’emuna, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, as heard from Rabbi Mordechai Fishberg

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