

## Freedom as Sacrifice: Pesach as an Antidote to the Decay of Liberal Society

### I: Freedom as individual Liberty and autonomy

#### 1. Berlin, I. (1958) "Two Concepts of Liberty." In Isaiah Berlin (1969) Four Essays on Liberty.

The first of these political senses of freedom or liberty (I shall use both words to mean the same), which (following much precedent) I shall call the 'negative' sense, is involved in the answer to the question 'What is the area within which the subject - a person or group of persons - is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?' The second, which I shall call the 'positive' sense, is involved in the answer to the question 'What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?..'

The 'positive' sense of the word 'liberty' derives from 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 the instrument of my own, not of other men's, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer - deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is, of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realising them. This is at least part of what I mean when I say that I am rational, and that it is my reason that distinguishes me as a human being from the rest of the world. I wish, above all, to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by reference to my own ideas and purposes. I feel free to the degree that I believe this to be true, and enslaved to the degree that I am made to realise that it is not.

#### 2. Shemot 12

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן, בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר. ב הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם, רֵאשִׁית חֹדְשֵׁי: רֵאשִׁית הוּא לְכֶם, לְחֹדֶשׁ הַשָּׁנָה  
1 And the LORD spoke unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying: 2 'This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.

#### 3. Seforno

From now on the months shall be yours, to do with them what you shall desire, For in the times of slavery your days were not yours, they were for serving others and their will.. Therefore This month shall be unto you the beginning of months for this is when your free existence begins. (Own Translation).

### II: Liberalism v Conservatism

#### 4. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 429:1

סעיף א — שואלין בהלכות פסח קודם לפסח שלשים יום

We enquire into the laws of Passover starting 30 days before

#### 5. Shemot 13:17

And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them through the land of the Philistines, even though it was nearer.

#### 6. Yuval Levin: Taking the Long Way: Disciplines of the soul are the basis of a liberal society (Journal of First Things)

"The liberation of the individual from outside coercion is the short way to liberty—and the way that most progressives and conservatives today seem to have in mind. The formation of the individual for freedom is the long way to liberty—and the way that our liberal society plainly requires. The long way is a prerequisite for what the short way promises; it is a necessary preparation. But our political instincts now incline us to seek shortcuts. We're tempted to pursue individual liberation without preparation."

This leads to an increasingly dangerous failure of self-knowledge. A liberal society depends on the long way of moral formation, yet it does not understand itself as engaged in such formation. Its commitment to pluralism makes its politics neutral regarding the souls of its citizens, or rather commits it to shaping those souls for neutrality—forming people only to live and let live. That is how we are taught to think of what our society does.

"The long way to liberty begins unavoidably with marriage and the family, and the case for the short way begins as a case against their necessity...To live as a father and husband, wife and mother, child and sibling, is to live lives shaped by duties and obligations that sometimes grate but often bring joy. This is why the family is best suited to creating individuals freely -discharging their responsibilities, the very foundation of any liberal vision of society. Indeed, the family helps us see that freedom ultimately is impossible without responsibility. We can hardly be surprised, therefore, that so many of our culture wars are focused on the family."

“Work is another crucial element of the long way to liberty. Like the family, it, too, has an obvious economic utility, enabling us to support ourselves and our families financially. But work also buttresses dignity, inculcates responsibility, encourages energy and industry, and rewards reliability. It can help form us into better human beings and better liberal citizens. To see only its material utility is to imagine that work, like family, could be replaced by more efficient forms of distribution. If work is nothing more than a means to material support, nothing is lost if we provide for the needs of those with meager means in ways that do not require them to enter the workforce.”

“Liberal learning is out of step with our times because it offers us not vocational skills but the shaping of habits of thought and practice. It forms our souls through exposure to beauty, to truth, and to the power of the sublime that we can only glimpse through the mediation of rare artistic genius. It is, in this sense, closer to an aristocratic idea of leisure than to the modern idea of training. It is -decidedly not utilitarian. It is no short way to liberation. And it is therefore under fierce assault precisely in the -academic institutions that should be havens for -liberal formation.”

“in our time, a commitment to the long way requires us to defend against a corrosive pseudo-liberalism. Cham-pioned by some progressives, but too often enabled by conservatives, it encourages precisely philistinism—a form of freedom that is but license for the morally unfree, and actively disparages every form of nobility, refinement, dignity, order, and transcendence.”

“But this has things backwards. Real progress very rarely looks like social transformation. It more frequently looks like personal transformation. Each of us alone is weak and corrupt, but through profound moral exertion, and moral formation, we can rise above the dirt and make ourselves a little more noble, more responsible, more decent, more sympathetic, more loving, more free.”

“When the Book of Exodus tells us that God did not take his liberated people to their promised land through the land of the Philistines but opted instead for a longer way through the desert, it also tells us why: “for God said, if they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.” Untutored and unformed, confronted too quickly with the costs and burdens of liberty, they might choose slavery.”

“It is a calling that requires us to think about our choices in more than crass terms of utility. And ultimately, it is a calling that requires us to choose, and to help others choose, the path of family, faith, work, learning, and community, and to avoid the path of philistinism—even though it is nearer.”

## 7. Shemot 12-13

כ וְהָיָה, כִּי-יֹאמְרוּ אֲלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם: מָה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת, לָכֶם. כִּז וְאָמַרְתֶּם זָבַח-פֶּסַח הוּא לַיהוָה, אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל-בְּתֵי בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם, בְּנִגְפוֹ אֶת-מִצְרַיִם, וְאֶת-בְּתֵינֵי הַצִּיל; וַיִּקַּד הָעָם, וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ

26 And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you: What mean ye by this service? 27 that ye shall say: It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S Passover, for that He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.' And the people bowed the head and worshipped.

ח וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ, בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר: בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה, עָשָׂה יְהוָה לִי, בְּצֵאתִי, מִמִּצְרַיִם.

8 And thou shall tell thy son in that day, saying: It is because of that which the LORD did for me when I came forth out of Egypt

יֵד וְהָיָה כִּי-יִשְׁאַלְךָ בִּנְךָ, מָחָר--לֵאמֹר מַה-זֹּאת: וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו--בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם, מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים.

14 And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying: What is this? that thou shalt say unto him: By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage;

## 8. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz: Change and Renewal p226

Liberation, then, depends on acquiring an authentic identity, not on rejecting external labour. The meaning of liberation is accepting an authentic system of values, an authentic scale of goals. One who has no identity of his own and no God of his own is bound to always remain a slave, even if his master is not at this moment standing over him.....

In order to achieve true redemption and not only an end to exile, it is not enough for the Jewish people to leave 'the wilderness of the nations', it must also reacquire its own essence, its character, spirit, ways of thinking and ways of life, only then can it be a nation of free people.

## Freedom as the capacity for sacrifice

### 9. Abraham Joshua Heschel: The insecurity of Freedom: p14

We all share devotion to the hard-won freedoms of American people. Yet to be worthy of retaining our freedoms we must not lose our understanding of the essential nature of freedom. Freedom means more than mere emancipation. It is primarily freedom of conscience, bound up with inner allegiance. The danger begins when freedom is thought to consist in the fact that 'I can act as I desire'. This definition not only overlooks the compulsions which often lie begins our desires; it reveals the tragic truth that freedom may develop within itself the seed of its own destruction.....

Freedom is the liberation from the tyranny of the self-centred ego. It comes about in moments of transcending the self as an act of spiritual ecstasy, of stepping out of the confining framework of routine reflexive concern. **Freedom presupposes the capacity for sacrifice....**

Freedom is a gift which may be taken away from us. It is not an absolute but a relative possession, an opportunity. We are free only when living in attachment to the spirit. The blessings and opportunities of living in a free society must not make us blind to those aspects of society which threaten our freedom: the tyranny of needs, the vulgarization of the spirit are a particular challenge.

## 10. Shemot 12.

3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying: **In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household; 4 and if the household be too little for a lamb, then shall he and his neighbour next unto his house take one according to the number of the souls; according to every man's eating ye shall make your count for the lamb.** 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year; ye shall take it from the sheep, or from the goats; 6 and ye shall keep it unto the **fourteenth day of the same month;** and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at dusk. 7 And they shall take of the blood, and put it on the two side-posts and on the lintel, upon the houses wherein they shall eat it. 8 And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; with bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9 Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; its head with its legs and with the inwards thereof. 10 And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; but that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. 11 And thus shall ye eat it: with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste—it is the LORD'S Passover. 12 For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. 13 And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and there shall no plague be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. 14 **And this day shall be unto you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.**

## 11. Rashi

והיה לכם למשמרת - זה לשון בקור שטעון בקור ממום ארבעה ימים קודם שחיטה ומפני מה הקדים לקיחתו לשחיטתו ארבעה ימים מה שלא צוה כן בפסח דורות הי' ר' מתיא בן חרש אומר הרי הוא אומר (יחזקאל טז) ואעבור עליך ואראך והנה עתך עת דודים הגיעה שבועה שנשבעתי לאברהם שאגאל את בניו ולא היו בידם מצות להתעסק בהם כדי שיגאלו שנה' (שם) ואת ערום ועריה ונתן להם שתי מצות דם פסח ודם מילה שמלו באותו הלילה שנה' מתבוססת בדמיון (שם) בשני דמים ואומר (זכרי' ט) גם את בדם בריתך שלחתי אסיריך מבור אין מים בו ושהיו שטופים באילילים אמר להם משכו וקחו לכם משכו ידיכם מאילילים וקחו לכם צאן של מצוה

"For what reason did God command that the lamb be taken four days prior to its slaughtering, a requirement which does not pertain to the Paschal lamb of future generations? Rabbi Matiah the son of Heresh used to say '...the time has come to fulfill the oath which I [God] swore to Abraham that I will redeem his children. But they were not engaged in any commandments for which they could merit being redeemed as is stated, 'and you were naked and bare' (Ezek. 16:7). Therefore He gave them two commandments, the blood of the Paschal lamb and the blood of circumcision."

## The danger of freedom and liberal society

### 12. Devarim 8:11-14

יא השמר לך, פן-תשכח את-יהוה אלהיך, לבלתי שמר מצותיו ומשפטיו וחקותיו, אשר אנכי מצוך היום. יב פן-תאכל, ושבעת; ובתים טובים תבנה, ושבת. יג ובקרך וצאנך רבין, וכסף וזהב רבה-לך; וכל אשר-לך, ירבה. יד ורם, לבבך; ושכחת את-יהוה אלהיך, המוציאך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים. טו המוליך במדבר הגדל והנורא, נחש שרף ועקרב, וצמאון, אשר אין-מים; המוציא לך מים, מצור החלמיש. טז המאכלך מן במדבר, אשר לא-ידעון אבותיך: למען ענתך, ולמען נסתך--להיטבך, באחריתך. יז ואמרת, בלבבך: כחי ועצם ידי, עשה לי את-הסיל הזה. יח וזכרת, את-יהוה אלהיך--כי הוא הנתן לך כח, לעשות חיל: למען הקים את-בריתו אשר-נשבע לאבותיך, כיום הזה

11 Beware lest thou forget the LORD thy God, in not keeping His commandments, and His ordinances, and His statutes, which I command thee this day; 12 lest when thou hast eaten and art satisfied, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; 13 and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; 14 then thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; 15 who led thee through the great and dreadful wilderness, wherein were serpents, fiery serpents, and scorpions, and thirsty ground where was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; 16 who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that He might afflict thee, and that He might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end (**in the end OR with responsibility**); 17 and thou say in thy heart: 'My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth.'

18 But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God, for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

**The antidote to the decay of liberal society: shared narrative, family, social responsibility, ability to suppress immediate gratification, gratitude**

**13. Devarim 26: 1-11**

1 And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and dost possess it, and dwell therein; 2 **that thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which thou shalt bring in from thy land that the LORD thy God giveth thee; and thou shalt put it in a basket and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there.** 3 And thou shalt come unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him: 'I profess this day unto the LORD thy God, that I am come unto the land which the LORD swore unto our fathers to give us.' 4 And the priest shall take the basket out of thy hand, and set it down before the altar of the LORD thy God. 5 And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God: **'A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous. 6 And the Egyptians dealt ill with us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. 7 And we cried unto the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice, and saw our affliction, and our toil, and our oppression. 8 And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders. 9 And He hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the land, which Thou, O LORD, hast given me.'** **And thou shalt set it down before the LORD thy God, and worship before the LORD thy God.** 11 And thou shalt rejoice in all the good which the LORD thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thy house, **thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is in the midst of thee.**

**14. David Brooks; The Road to Character**

This is what Kierkegaard called "the dizziness of freedom." When the external constraints are loosened, when a person can do what he wants, when there are a thousand choices and distractions, then life can lose coherence and direction if there isn't a strong internal structure....

If you don't develop a coherent character in this way, life will fall to pieces sooner or later. You will become a slave to your passions. But if you do behave with habitual self-discipline, you will become constant and dependable. The things that lead us astray are short term—lust, fear, vanity, gluttony. The things we call character endure over the long term—courage, honesty, humility. People with character are capable of a long obedience in the same direction, of staying attached to people and causes and callings consistently through thick and thin. People with character also have scope. They are not infinitely flexible, free-floating, and solitary. They are anchored by permanent attachments to important things. In the realm of the intellect, they have a set of permanent convictions about fundamental truths. In the realm of emotion, they are enmeshed in a web of unconditional loves. In the realm of action, they have a permanent commitment to tasks that cannot be completed in a single lifetime.

**15. Jonathan Sacks; The Chief Rabbis Haggadah**

That, therefore. Is the journey the counting of the Omer represents: from Chofesh, the negative freedom of Pesach and the release from slavery, to cherut, the substantive freedom of covenant and the revelation at Mount Sinai. Freedom means more than loosing your chains. It involves developing the capacity to think, feel and act for the benefit of others. That needs families, schools, places of worship, conversation between the generations, rituals, prayers and the telling of stories. It needs 'habits of the heart' and it takes time – which is why, between Pesach and Shavuot, we become conscious of time by counting days. Pesach is the beginning of the Journey, not the end. To win freedom is one thing; to sustain it, another. Judaism taught this truth in the simplest of ways, by counting the days between Pesach and Shavuot, exodus and revelation. Freedom begins with defeat of tyranny, but is preserved by a code of virtue – the Torah, Israel's 'constitution of liberty' – which lies beyond the realm of democratic vote, individual preference or passing fashion. Judaism early sages asked, 'Who is mighty?' the answered: not one which is strong enough to defeat his opponents, but one which is strong enough to practise self restraint. Moral virtue needs a different and more difficult strength than military courage. That is what we learn on the journey from Pesach to Shavuot, from individual to covenantal freedom.