



Thought Tools

Slavery Times Two

March 10, 2010

24th day of Adar, 5770

Volume III Issue #10

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The community that Michael Medved and I co-founded, Pacific Jewish Center, worshipped in a beautiful old building located on the Los Angeles ocean-front.

Each morning I hurried to synagogue for services, passing many colorful characters camped on the beach. The mild climate coupled with the generosity of tourists apparently made life on Venice beach quite appealing.

I was always struck by the contrast between the eccentric boardwalk denizens lolling around all day and the synagogue members first racing to services and then to work.

Those of us with families, jobs, and responsibilities seemed enslaved to the clock and the bank account with very little leisure. The seaside squatters, enslaved to their egos had nothing but leisure. However, their lifestyle choice granted them little real freedom. They were only free to do nothing.

This theme of the Passover Seder is expressed in strangely redundant language, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt." It could have been merely, "We were slaves to Pharaoh" or alternatively, "We were slaves in Egypt."

We can understand why both Pharaoh and Egypt are mentioned once we know that in Hebrew, they are not merely proper nouns but words with opposite meanings.

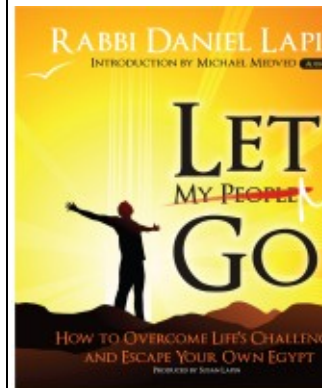
The word Pharaoh is not only the name of Egypt's ruler, it also means undisciplined, wild and unrestrained. Pharaoh's name in Hebrew is identical to the word used for the phrase "get out of control" in this verse.

*Moses saw that the people were running wild
and that Aaron had let them get out of control...*

(Exodus 32:25)

[Let Me Go:](#)

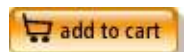
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פרעה

Pharaoh

Now, in Hebrew, Egypt's name is MiTZRayim. It is not only the name of a country, but it has a meaning of confined, constrained and restricted as in a narrow passage such as the Straits of Gibraltar.

*From the straits I called upon God...
(Psalms 118:5)*

The Hebrew word for straits is MiTZaR, the singular of MiTZRayim

מצר

Straits

מצרים

Egypt

Why does the Seder liturgy stress that Israel was enslaved to both Pharaoh (wild and unfettered) as well as to Egypt (shackled and limited)?

These words reveal two different forms of slavery. Egypt enslaved the Israelites' bodies with unrelenting taskmasters and confiscatory rates of taxation. Meanwhile, Pharaoh enslaved their souls by encouraging them to abandon moral restraint and wallow in drooling depravity and concupiscent self-indulgence. Indeed, we are told that the Israelites in Egypt had sunk to debauchery and immorality.

Recently I was back at Pacific Jewish Center as a guest speaker. The synagogue and its lovely members hadn't changed and neither had the sparkling ocean lying beyond the broad white beach. And those Pacific panhandlers hadn't changed either. They were a bit older-looking and a bit scruffier but still alone, indolent and indigent; with as few choices in life open to them as slaves.

Whether in contemporary California or early Egypt, we can all easily become slaves, with our bodies enslaved, our souls enslaved, or both.

This is why the redemption route led to Mount Sinai where Moses would convey the morality and discipline that are the indispensable adjuncts to freedom. To get free, a slave must be delivered both from the rigors of physical enslavement and from the far more deleterious spiritual enslavement to his own ego. This is surely true for each of us, potentially slaves to our work and financial realities as well as to our self-gratifying impulses.

I think that the members of my synagogue were truly free. They did work hard to earn money that allowed them dignity and options in life. At the same time they elevated their families, the Sabbath, holydays and Torah study above work. While seemingly limiting their personal freedom through jobs, faith and family they actually expanded their possibilities and are truly able to say on Passover night, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and God took us out."

A number of you have asked whether I offer any Passover resources. My audio CD, [Let My People Me Go: How to Overcome Life's Challenges and Escape Your Own Egypt](#), has helped countless people improve their lives using specific strategies and inspiring lessons from this holyday.

(Reminder: [Thou Shall Prosper](#) with its income enhancing wisdom is currently available at a reduced price.)

פרעה

...get out of control

To see Rabbi Daniel La television show, click on blue button



TCT Television Net

[Ask the Rabbi](#)



Rabbi,

I recently heard you on [Dave Ramsey](#) show ai tuned in during your discussion about the overflowing cup as it relates to giving/helpin family.

I did not hear the sourc of the wisdom...is it Biblical or historical or other?

Thank you so much,
Jeff H.

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Susan's Musings

This week's musing - [Truly "Grate"ful](#)

To post comments and feedback, or to print, go to www.susanlapin.com.
You can also reach me at susan@rabbidaniellapin.com.

Just over a year ago, on the day after Thanksgiving 2008, a fisherman in East Texas' Lake Sam Rayburn pulled in an 8 lb bass. Inside it, he found a beautiful blue-stoned class ring...

To read the rest of Susan's Musings click [here](#)

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