

FrameWorks SpiralNotes Series
Pesach & Haggada - Introduction



*New Moons, Liberty
and the
Path to Freedom*

transcribed and edited by Geoffrey Dworkin
based primarily on shiur in West Hartford, Connecticut, 1999 and on published essays

In this essay, we introduce the complex structure of the Haggada, and trace its two-tiered architecture to the separate concepts of Liberty and Freedom, essential elements in a human life of awareness and ongoing renewal...

Patterns in Time – Spiral Notes Series

פסח: New Moons, Liberty and the Path to Freedom

Transcription of a lecture delivered by R. M. Weinberg in West Hartford, CT



It is appropriate to begin a discussion about פסח as early as ראש חודש, as the הגדה itself suggests, because it is possible that one might think that the commandment to tell over the Exodus narrative begins from the start of the month of ניסן:

יכול מראש חודש? תלמוד לומר 'ביום ההוא'. אי 'ביום ההוא' יכול מבעוד יום? תלמוד לומר 'בעבור זה'. 'בעבור זה' לא אמרתי אלא בשעה שיש מצה ומרור מונחים לפניך.

It is possible that [the obligation to tell over the Exodus begins] from the new month, but the text teaches, 'On that day.' If 'On that day,' it is possible [that the obligation can be fulfilled] during the day time, but the text teaches, 'because of this.' "Because of this" I didn't say except in an instance when matzah and maror are placed before you.

In one sense, it is reasonable that the הגדה considers this somewhat unusual possibility because the entire Exodus story begins, from the point of view of the Jews, with the מצוה of not only creating a calendar, but also sanctifying the new moon and announcing the new month:

הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם, רֵאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים רֵאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה. (שמות יב:ב)

This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.

What this implies is that the elements of ראש חודש itself must be central somehow to an understanding of what freedom means. Therefore, the הגדה, a book that not only commemorates freedom, but focuses on the meaning of freedom and the actual attainment of freedom, really has good reason to propose יכול מראש חודש.

What is troubling, though, is the odd placement of this suggestion of יכול מראש חודש within the הגדה itself. Certainly, one would think that should someone make this proposal, it would be offered as part of some sort of introduction to the הגדה. Yet, this question is posed only after central aspects of the actual הגדה have already been presented. Indeed, it appears to be a violation of the very idea called סדר, 'order'. We appreciate that the הגדה is organized by a tight order, a סדר, which is so tight that a tradition has emerged to outline and memorize all of the steps of the evening, even calling the night itself "The סדר." Yet, despite this, any probing review of the הגדה leaves one with the inescapable feeling that beyond the misplacement of יכול מראש חודש, the text appears to be going back and forth,

making false starts, and never really completing a point. So much so, that the הגדה ends without really discussing the issues that one would expect to be addressed more thoroughly. For instance, one would imagine that the stories from the book of שמות would be presented in all of their detail and rich imagery. Instead, what the הגדה ultimately offers is, apparently, just an introduction.

Consider the contents of this "organized" book. It starts off with מה נשתנה הלילה הזה and immediately proceeds to עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים, making it appear that the הגדה is starting off with a story. But right after that, it goes off on a tangent by saying how important it is to discuss this story. And it provides illustrations of individuals who did just that. From there, the הגדה goes on to announce ברוך המקום, which seems to be more שבועות related (stressing the *Kabbalat Hatorah*) than פסח oriented, and from there the ד' בנים, who probably would have played a better role introducing their own questions in the מה נשתנה. Then the הגדה asks, maybe the סדר should have taken place two weeks ago on ראש חודש, but it says no – בעבור זה. But at this point, the סדר still does not even discuss the story, as it only provides the reader with more background – the Jewish people were once idolaters but eventually emerged from that state. And just as it seems that the הגדה is finally going to begin the story with its mentioning of עקב's children, it digresses yet again and mentions more ספרות. At this point, the הגדה discusses אברהם and the בתים בין הבתרים and from there, almost in an attempt to make the הגדה seem important, it states, והיא ששעמדה לאבותינו. It's odd that the הגדה goes to such great lengths to make itself sound relevant. What is this doing here? Finally, it seems that the author tries to roll in all the non-sequiturs by introducing אבי אבד אבי, which is, in and of itself, an interesting device, as it seems that it only tries to pull out little hints that allude to the שמות stories, but never actually discusses or addresses them in meaningful detail. Eventually, the הגדה concludes with the פסח, מצה, and the דיינו and then— that's it! It never does get to the discussion it introduces and introduces – there is only one line, עבדים היינו, and that is it. To say that this book is a paradigm of order almost seems outrageous – what in the world is this all about?

There are many levels one needs to look at in the הגדה in order to understand it completely. One thing that provides fascinating clues is that there are strict halachic criteria which define what can be considered "הגדה." The primary ingredient of the הגדה is מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח – one has to begin discussing something that went wrong, something that reflects poorly on the Jewish people, and then end with the change. The גמרא offers two approaches as to what this means, one by רב and the other by שמואל.

מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח: מאי בגנות רב אמר מתחלה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו ושמואל אמר עבדים היינו. (פסחים קטז.)

'Begin with that which is debase and end with praise.' What is this debasement? Rav says, 'initially, our forefathers were idolaters,' while Shmuel says, 'we were slaves.'

רב says גנות means that one is supposed to say, מתחלה עובדי עבודה זרה and now God has brought the Jewish people close to him. That is, a person is supposed to say that the Jewish people were far from God and now they have managed to become a people of God. שמואל, on the other hand, says גנות refers to עבדים היינו, the Jewish people were in a state of slavery and then were delivered from that state of slavery and became free men.

Now, if we consider the other criteria of הגדה, we see that it includes a question and answer dynamic. This aspect must be included within the הגדה because the law to tell over the story of the Exodus is itself introduced in this format:

וְהָיָה כִּי-יִשְׁאַלְךָ בְּנֶךְךָ, מִחֶר-לֵאמֹר מַה-זֹּאת: וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם, מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים.

And it shall be when your son asks you later, saying, 'What is this?' And you shall say to him: By strength of hand God brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage.

This need to present the הגדה in question/answer format is so central to the הגדה that even if someone doesn't have a son, even if no one else is at the table with him, he must ask himself questions and provide answers.¹ The מצה is even called לחם עוני, not just the bread of poor men, but לחם שעונין עליו דברים,² bread over which one provides answers.

Looks carefully at the הגדה, and you will recognize that it incorporates two totally separate הגדות, that of רב and that of שמואל.³ Both of them include questions – one the מה מתחלה עובדי עבודה – גנות – גנות and the other the questions of the four sons, they both discuss וְעִבְדֵינוּ וְעִבְדֵינוּ and וְעִבְדֵינוּ קָרְבָנוּ הַמְקוֹם בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְעִבּוּדְתוֹ, שְׂבַח עֲבָדִים הֵינּוּ זֶה וְעִבְדֵינוּ וְעִבְדֵינוּ and וְעִבְדֵינוּ הַמְקוֹם, שְׂבַח and the other meaning of שְׂבַח, where both end with blessing, בְּרוּךְ הַמְקוֹם and בְּרוּךְ שׁוֹמֵר. Not only that, but the order repeats several of the night's מצות: wash twice, dip twice, speak about the מצה twice, הַא לְחֶמֶא עֲנָא and מְצָה זוּ once for each format of הגדה.⁴ There are, therefore, two parallel הגדות that we read, one that represents the local events in Egypt, that the Jewish people actually were slaves, and the other a more global, historical view.

Consider further the conceptual distinctions between these two הגדות and another fascinating difference emerges. הגדה's שמואל revolves around Liberty, רב's הגדה revolves around Freedom, which are two very different issues. When considering the problem of enslavement, the resolution is the fact that וְעִבְדֵינוּ, we were "brought out": We have the ability to live in Liberty. Freedom, of course, is a much more complex idea. What Freedom implies is not only the right to decide whatever we want, but the ability to make meaningful, significant choices. When a person has choices and is free to make those choices – that is Freedom. An individual who is free to decide but can make no choices of consequence is not free. One whose "choices" consist of what he will pick off of a dinner menu, is at liberty to decide what he wants to eat, but is not free to choose. Choice is more profound, with implications and consequences to one's ongoing life and moral stature. Freedom is creative, not just decisive.

So what רב is saying is that Liberty is insufficient. What needs to be spoken about is the other aspect of the Exodus, Freedom, which is a long, historical journey toward extensive moral vision and potential, a journey which begins in essence with אברהם. That journey begins as a journey away from idolatry.

כִּיֹּן שִׁנְגַּמַּל אֵיתָן זֶה הַתְּחִיל לְשׁוֹטֵט בְּדַעְתּוֹ וְהוּא קָטָן וְהַתְּחִיל לְחֻשׁוֹב בְּיוֹם וּבְלֵילָה וְהָיָה תְּמִיָּה הַיָּאֵךְ אֲפֻשֶׁר שִׁיְהִיָּה הַגְּלָגֶל הַזֶּה נוֹהֵג תְּמִיד וְלֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ מְנַהֵיג וּמִי יִסְבֵּב אוֹתוֹ כִּי אֵי אֲפֻשֶׁר שִׁיְסַבֵּב אֶת עֲצָמוֹ וְלֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ מַלְמַד וְלֹא מוֹדִיעַ דְּבַר אֵלָּא מוֹשְׁקַע בְּאוֹר כְּשָׁדִים בֵּין עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים הַטְּפָשִׁים וְאֲבִיו

ואמו וכל העם עובדי כוכבים והוא עובד עמהם ולבו משוטט ומבין עד שהשיג דרך האמת והבין קו הצדק מתבוננת הנכונה... וידע שכל העולם טועים ודבר שגרם להם לטעות זה שעובדים את הכוכבים ואת הצורות עד שאבד האמת מדעתם ובן ארבעים שנה הכיר אברהם את בוראו כיון שהכיר וידע התחיל להשיב תשובות על בני אור כשדים ולערוך דין עמהם ולומר שאין זו דרך האמת שאתם הולכים בה ושיבר הצלמים והתחיל להודיע לעם שאין ראוי לעבוד אלא לאלוה העולם ולו ראוי להשתחוות ולהקריב ולנסך כדי שיכירוהו כל הברואים הבאים וראוי לאבד ולשבר כל הצורות כדי שלא יטעו בהן כל העם כמו אלו שהם מדמים שאין שם אלוה אלא אלו כיון שגבר עליהם בראיותיו בקש המלך להורגו ונעשה לו נס ויצא לחרן והתחיל לעמוד ולקרוא בקול גדול לכל העולם ולהודיעם שיש שם אלוה אחד לכל העולם ולו ראוי לעבוד והיה מהלך וקורא ומקבץ העם מעיר לעיר ומממלכה לממלכה עד שהגיע לארץ כנען והוא קורא שנאמר ויקרא שם בשם ה' אל עולם וכיון שהיו העם מתקבצין אליו ושואלין לו על דבריו היה מודיע לכל אחד ואחד כפי דעתו עד שיחזירוהו לדרך האמת עד שנתקבצו אליו אלפים ורבבות והם אנשי בית אברהם ושתל בלבם העיקר הגדול הזה וחבר בו ספרים...

רמב"ם יד החזקה - הלכות עבודת כוכבים פרק א הלכה ג

Once this mighty one [Avraham] was weaned, he, as a child, began contemplating and thinking day and night... He did not have a mentor, or someone to make things known to him, but was immersed amongst the foolish idolaters of Ur Casdim, where everyone, including his mother and father, served idols, as did he. In his heart, however, he continued to contemplate, until he realized the way of truth and understood the ways of righteousness from nature... he knew that the whole world was erring, and knew that what caused the mistake was that they [had] worshipped the stars and figures for so long that the truth had vanished from their minds. [Avraham] was forty years old when he recognized his Creator. And once he achieved this, he began to reason with the inhabitants of Ur Casdim and to argue with them, saying that by serving idols they were not following the way of truth. He broke their images, and began to proclaim that it is not fitting to serve anyone other than God, and to him it is fitting to bow down and to offer drink sacrifices and sacrifices to, so that future generations will recognize Him. Abraham also proclaimed that it was fitting to break and destroy all the images, so that nobody will err on account of them, like those who imagined that there is no God except for their idols did. Since people were listening to him, the king, [Nimrod], sought to kill him, but a miracle was performed for Abraham, and he went to Haran, where he got up and proclaimed to the whole world that there is just one God in the world, whom it is fitting to worship. He went and gathered people together from cities and kingdoms, until he reached the land of Canaan, where he continued his proclamations, as it is written, "...and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God." Since people were coming to him with questions about this matter, he would answer each person accordingly so that he would return to the way of truth, until thousands and tens of thousands came to him. These were the people of the house of Abraham. He implanted this important principle in their way of thinking, wrote books...

אברהם was not a religious figure; he was a freedom fighter. He had no knowledge of a God that requires worship or demands worship. He wanted one thing only – the discovery of fundamental truth. And when he discovered the notion of monotheism, it was not in a religious sense; rather, it was in an existential sense. He came to recognize that there is a vast unity that underlies nature and everything that we are able to conceive of, and each successive stripping away of layers-of-explanation points increasingly to a common center of all existence. And he recognized as well that the reason that people would stop thinking at one point, and would not continue to strip away eventually to arrive at his conclusion, was because of their psychological need to project a religion. Therefore, he went out to destroy idolatry because he said, as long as people have this available, they will always stop at secondary explanations for phenomenon, so that rain could be explained away by postulating a rain god or thunder by postulating an angry cloud god, then any *ad hoc* explanation will suffice for any phenomenon whatsoever.

Interestingly enough, רמב"ם opens his entire work with the same observation:

יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות, לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון.

(רמב"ם, הלכות יסודי התורה א:א)

The most basic of basic principles and foundation of wisdom is to know that there is a Prime Existence.

Historians of science agree that there has never been a non-monotheistic culture that has developed fundamental science. They may have developed a technology or an interesting taxonomy of various issues (Aristotle certainly did), but the idea that you could strip away reality and find something fundamental underneath it – which is of course the whole basis of modern science, an enterprise which has gone on for centuries to continuously tear away what appear to be laws of nature that are themselves outgrowths of underlying, much more fundamental ideas – that has only happened because of monotheism and its commitment to underlying unity. And therefore, רמב"ם's statement that all knowledge is ultimately predicated on the recognition of מצוי ראשון, of prime existence, is the very definition of monotheism.

It is in that sense that we can say אברהם was a freedom fighter. He wanted every human being to be able to discover truth and not to stop at his own projections, whether such projections were religious or general wishful thinking. אברהם only could say it may be a good idea to serve God because it is good "public relations," since there is obviously a very strong need in a human being to serve, but he never justified particular service of God, for how could he know that service was anything but a projection of the human mind – you may enjoy praying or bowing or sacrificing, but you have no way of knowing that this is indeed what God wants. He could only say that, because it is so much a center of human need, do it—otherwise we'll lose the whole revolution! Only at הר סיני did God tell the Jewish people דרך עבודתו, how to serve him.⁵

What's more amazing is that in very concrete terms, אברהם was a true freedom fighter, taking dangerous political stands. He had an antagonist who is an historical figure of archetypal proportions that are exactly equal to אברהם – נמרוד. נמרוד, fascinatingly enough, appears with a different name in the תורה. We find in the war in which אברהם gets involved in that the king of שנער, which is בבל, is called אמרפל. The גמרא says⁶ that אמרפל

refers to נמרוד, but he was called אמרפל because he attacked אברהם and "אמר" said, "פל," throw him into the fiery furnace, which became the symbol of אור כשדים. If one considers the name נמרוד, it means the same thing as אמרפל, just a reversal of language. In Aramaic, נם means say, and רד is fall, which means that this man is named after his relationship with אברהם. Throughout Jewish history, the גלות is typically identified through some sort of connection to נמרוד. So if you look at the תרגום when פרעה first appears, he is referenced as son of נמרוד or the association of נבוכדנצר as being the son of נמרוד.⁷ This is so because we are dealing with archetypes. Anyone who takes a stance of repression against Liberty, follows the primal tower of Babel vision, a society of imposed homogeneity⁸ where there was a national project forced on everyone, all of that became an archetype of what it means to be for homogeneity and against variety, unfettered thought, and penetrating to more fundamental levels and instead, to define what it is that people would think and worship.

So when אברהם had to counter נמרוד, it was on both levels. On the level of Liberty, to allow people to ask questions, and on the level of Freedom because he was demanding of people to create meaningful choices for themselves. Of course, he was fomenting too much difficulty, and as people began to ask questions, the regime was no longer comfortable with אברהם and so נמרוד ultimately attacks him. אברהם escapes נמרוד and begins a new life and he is promised the land of Israel. And he says, במה אדע, But how do I know.⁹ And that is the passage that is quoted in the middle of the הגדה. God said to אברהם, and this is the whole reason that we went to Egypt, you asked, 'How can I know;' 'How can I know' is a very profound question because 'How can I know' doesn't mean 'I don't trust you God', but that there is a paradox involved in that commitment. אברהם says, if you are telling me that you will be giving the land of Israel to my children because you like me, then I accept that. And he did, because the first time God promises אברהם the land of Israel, אברהם bows down and says thank you very much:

וירא ה', אל-אברם, ויאמר, לזרעך אתן את-הארץ הזאת; ויבן שם מזבחה,
ליהוה הנראה אליו. (בראשית פרק יב:ז)

*And God appeared to Avraham and said, I will give this land to your children.
And he built an altar there for God who had appeared to him.*

But, when God tells אברהם that he will give אברהם the land as an *inheritance*, that didn't make any sense to him:

ויאמר אליו: אני ה' אשר הוצאתיך מאור כשדים לתת לך את הארץ
הזאת לרשתה. ויאמר: אדני ה', במה אדע כי אירשנה. (בראשית טו:ח-ט)

*And he said to him, I am God, who had taken you out from Ur Casdim to give
you this land as an inheritance. And he said, my Lord, God, how will I know
that I will inherit it?*

An inheritance would mean that it is mine, says אברהם. But it isn't mine yet to bequeath. If you mean that it is an outgrowth of my achievement, how in the world does a person pass on his philosophical achievements to his children? What is to prevent them from doubting everything that I have given them, from regressing? Excellent question, says God. You ask במה אדע, well ידע תדע, you will indeed know, but only as the end result of a very long

process that begins in Egypt and lasts for over 400 years. And not only that, but אימה חשכה – גולה – there will be other exiles to be endured as well. God tells him, I relate to you as a process and at each stage of the process, whatever it is that you have achieved in understanding me, that is what I shall be. But the point is, that that process is essentially a re-creation of the life of אברהם on a national scale.

So that the very same things that אברהם has to go through the nation has to go through – he is locked into אור כשדים,¹⁰ stuck between people who know nothing, never had a clue as to anything beyond the religion of his own town, and had to find his own way back to life and light, and to discover what it meant to be human and to free the human spirit from being locked into עבודה זרה, which meant to be locked into projections and never to grow and never to achieve. The Jewish people had to go through their own life as אברהם and work things out in essentially the same way, but level after level, and each stage with greater and sophistication. And this is that center point of the הגדה, והיא שְׁעֵמֶדָה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ, each generation must discover the nature of its own identity in order to be able to achieve a greater and greater recognition of what it means to be free.

So what we have here is a two tiered development, one in which it appears that the boundaries and problems are physical, the other in which we recognize the underlying issue is that even with Liberty, we might have no Freedom because we have no ability to see things afresh, we cannot deal with the issues because we already think we know the answers to the issues. To this end, we have two הגדות, because there are two things that always need to be addressed: the ability to have choices, where those choices have consequential distinction is in how your life will be lead. And not just the right to make decisions over what to select from a menu, but rather questions of what type of human being to be. And of course, that is only consequential and meaningful if there is an absolute backdrop against which it can be measured. And that is the בְּרוּךְ הַמְּקוֹם שֶׁנָּתַן תּוֹרָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ, Blessed is he who gave the תורה to his people, that's part of the freedom itself, I will take you out of Egypt so that you will talk to me and I will let you know that creation is purposeful, is meaningful and it is necessary for you to participate in order for you to be yourself. And because of that, your choices will be extremely consequential, and the implication of each of your choices and the more sophisticated you become, the more you will notice the details of those choices. The more black and white a person is, the more black and white his choices. But, as a person becomes more and more and more aware, then each moment of life presents new, perhaps subtle moral challenges, but as he moves in one direction, then the next step becomes easier. So that the idea of heightened sophistication, heightened awareness, knowledge of greater difference and distinction is what freedom is all about and what the הגדה is all about. The wise son feels a greater sense of freedom not because he knows more תורה, but because he is more aware of distinctions that bother him. When someone says מֵה־זֹאת, as the simple son does, then his level of freedom is limited.

We have here an insight into one of the fundamental aspects of Judaism. Namely, we do not have a conception of just Freedom nor do we have a conception of just Liberty. Liberty without Freedom ultimately is lost, because someone who has more commitment than you will ultimately succeed in taking away your liberty. One needs to be able to exact his choices unfettered, and those choices need to be real and meaningful, because making choices against a backdrop of whims and personal predilections is just another name for anarchy. This definition of Freedom as needing Liberty to make real, meaningful choices returns us to that other necessary ingredient to the הגדה, the need to ask questions.¹¹

The question/answer dynamic within the הגדה is not based on the mere concern for communication, because it does not necessarily involve the definitive elements of effective communication. It does not require any real or actual interchange – a lone diner can ask himself the questions – nor does it involve imparting new information. Indeed, the הגדה itself issues an official disclaimer regarding the absolute value of transmitting news:

וּאִפְלוּ כִּלְנֹו חֲכָמִים, כִּלְנֹו נְבוֹנִים, כִּלְנֹו יוֹדְעִים אֶת הַתּוֹרָה--מִצְוָה עָלֵינוּ
לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם; וְכָל הַמְאָרִיד בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם, הֲרִי זֶה מְשֻׁבָּח.
(הגדה של פסח)

Even if we were entirely learned, entirely wise, entirely knowledgeable of the Torah, it would still be incumbent upon us to speak about the Exodus. The more you say, the more praiseworthy!

Rather, articulation itself is a primary purpose of the מצות of the סדר night, articulation as an expression of awareness. The questions and answers, the storytelling to children, the sharing of insights, the acting out of freedom, are in one sense only details, a methodology of articulated consciousness. The הלכה reduces all the varied faces of the הגדה to this one issue of awareness:

'והיה כי ישאלך בנך מחר לאמור, 'יכול אם שאלך אתה מגיד לו ואם לאו
אי אתה מגיד לו? תלמוד לומר: 'והגדת לבנך' אף על פי שלא שאלך. אין
לי אלא בזמן שיש לו בן. בינו לבין אחרים מניין? תלמוד לומר 'ויאמר משה
אל העם זכור וכו'. (מכילתא דרשב"י שמות י"ג)

Being as the Torah says, "When your child will ask in times to come," you might suppose that only if he asks do you tell him. But what if he does not ask? Therefore the Torah also says, "you must declare to your child," even if he did not ask. But what if one does not have a child? Where do we know that [it applies] even between you and yourself? The Torah therefore says, "Be aware of this day when you left Egypt..."

All these other מצות – provoking questions, supplying answers, making declarations – are techniques of "Be aware...". What is more, they are meant to be means of attaining consciousness even when applied outside of their normative context – even when such application appears almost silly: provoke and ask yourself the questions if you must, and then give yourself the answers! This is the path to awareness. Articulated awareness is the only real awareness, and there is nothing silly about questioning oneself when the issue is consciousness. The extent of investment in the events, the need to know, the questions that demand answers, the connection to others who must know – all these are part of one's relatedness and are therefore elements of the necessary awareness one needs to truly experience freedom. Such awareness is the necessary state of consciousness needed to be able to discern the impact and direction of one's choices, to exact the freedom attained on פסח.

In light of this conception of freedom, it is certainly reasonable to have thought that one could have started discussing the פסח story from ראש חודש.¹² Note how as a prelude to the events of the Exodus, משה is commanded to communicate the requirement for the Jewish

people to institute a calendar whose maiden month would annually celebrate the transformations about to occur to the Jewish people:

ויאמר ה' אל-משה ואל-אהרן בארץ מצרים לאמר. החדש הזה לכם ראש
חדשים: ראשון הוא לכם לחדשי השנה. (שמות יב:א-ב)

*God spoke to Moshe and Aharon in Egypt saying, This month is to be the
head of the month to you – the first month of the year...*

A calendar is more than a symbol. New beginnings introduce fresh ways of perceiving history, and the reckoning of time is the most potent expression of historical perception. משה's charge to announce the new moon proclaims a calendar that reckons time and history from the birth of freedom in the month of the Exodus. The very first מצוה given to the Jewish people as a nation requires the establishment and maintenance of a dating system celebrating freedom as the center of life, a freedom never to be taken for granted.

Now, the distinctive element of this calendar is that it is something that is out of the hand of God. As opposed to the divinely mandated שבת, the announcement of the new month and holidays is something only man can declare, אשר-תקראו אתם במועדם,¹³ you will announce them in their appointed times. This ability to create and define time is the ultimate freedom of choice: just as you will define the course of time, of Jewish history and its trajectory, so too will you define the course of your own individual life, the trajectory and viscidities of your own personal history. And yet, though ראש חדש presents us with the emboldening possibilities of choice and may even encourage us to discuss the power of Freedom, we are still not at Liberty to do so – the time is not yet ripe! Only on the fourteenth of ניסן, a night which was a ליל שמורים,¹⁴ a moment "kept in waiting from the six days of creation,"¹⁵ when the appointed time of זמן חרותינו liberates us from the shackles of גנות, can we look at the מצה ומרור before us and say 'בעבור זה,' because of this! and discover and be משבח our fundamental identity and what we care for most of all.

ונאמר לפניו שירה חדשה



This essay is based on a transcription of a lecture delivered by R. M. Weinberg in West Hartford, CT as well as excerpts from other relevant material, as referenced.

Please note that these notes are for personal use only and may not be copied, broadcast or otherwise disseminated without expressed permission.

endnotes:

¹ פסחים קטז.

² פסחים לו.

³ See:

מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח. מאי גנות אמר רב מתחלה, ושמואל אמר עבדים, והאידיאן עבדיןן כתריןן (רי"ף על מסכת פסחים דף כה/ב)

⁴ Accordingly, the breakout of the two הגדות would be as follows:

רב	שמואל
שאלה - ארבעה בניים	יין
מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח-	רחיצה
מתחילה עובדי ע"ז	כרפס - מרור - אכילה כזית
שבח - והיא שעמדה לאבותינו	יחץ - מצה -הא לחמא
ברוך שומר...ברוך הוא	ייתי ויפסח - פסח
ידוע תדע	שאלה - מה נשתנה
דרשת ארמי אובד אבי	מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח -עבדים היינו
יין	חייב להראות את עצמו: אילו לא הוציאנו
פסח מצה ומרור	שבח - הרי זה משובח - זכירה וחשיבותו
חייב להראות את עצמו: בכל דור ודור	ברוך המקום...ברוך הוא
רחיצה	
אכילת מצה ומרור	

זכירת מקדש: אל המקום הזה

⁵ See above רמב"ם הלכות עבודה זרה א: ג.

⁶ See עירובין נג.

⁷ See: נבוכדנצר היה מזרעו של נמרוד הרשע (פסחים צד).

⁸ ויהי כל-הארץ שפה אחת, ודברים אחדים (בראשית יא: א)

⁹ בראשית טו: ח

¹⁰ See above רמב"ם הלכות עבודה זרה א: ג.

¹¹ The following three paragraphs are adapted from "The Freedom of Speech," *Frameworks - Exodus*, R. M. Weinberg.

¹² The following paragraph is adapted from "The Game of Historic 'Jeopardy'" *Frameworks - Exodus*, R. M. Weinberg.

¹³ ויקרא כג: ד

¹⁴ See שמות יב: מב

¹⁵ See ראש השנה יא: