

The final days of Passover have always been a bit anti-climactic for me. Admittedly, growing up I knew that Passover continued past the seder, but I didn't know that the final two days were holidays, on which work ceases and during which we observe a set of restrictions for the sake of enhancing our celebration.

The seder is, of course, the main event of the Passover holiday. The remaining days often feel like a battle to find good food to eat, tired as we might be by our daily diet of matzah.

Yet, the final two days of the holiday are - from a *halakhic* standpoint - no different from the first two days during which we hold a seder. The final two days - Wednesday and Thursday - are imminently upon us. How can we experience these days with the same excitement that we experienced the first two days? Without the seder that might seem impossible, but that is the task we have.

The final two days round out an eight day period that is dedicated to the subject of freedom. That may seem like an ironic topic given the circumstances under which we are living, which feel manifestly un-free.

Ultimately, freedom is not exclusively a matter of the external world. To be sure, not being able to leave our houses, go places, and socialize inhibits our freedom, but these prohibitions don't eliminate the arena in which freedom truly dwells, which is within our own selves.

Take the following phrase and try to imagine with what you would fill in the blank. "I would like to be free from ____." Consider something that has to do with your habits or even your character that ultimately prevents you from experiencing that inward freedom that is really the goal of Passover. Even though we may be cooped up, we still have the opportunity to

practice accessing a deeper freedom within ourselves in a realm that is untouched by external circumstances.

For me, what I would like to most be free from is anger. Anger is a destructive force, but because it is always readily available, it is the emotion that we regularly turn to when we face disappointment or frustration. Each of us has to work very hard in the face of these natural features of life to gravitate to a different emotion that will override the impulse to anger.

Indeed, anger is an impulse - an ensconced impulse - that is ready to insert itself in the most varied of circumstances. When we challenge ourselves to be free from anger, what fills the void? I have found that gratitude can be the response we choose when confronted with disappointment, frustration, or any other life circumstance that undermines our expectations about how things should work out in the world. The practice of gratitude can conquer the impulse to anger! What is a greater statement of gratitude than what we will read tomorrow in the Torah: the Song at the Sea. After *bnei Yisrael* crossed through the Sea and the returning waves drowned the Egyptians, the people of Israel broke out into song. Song is one of those ways in which gratitude is most exquisitely expressed.

Freedom, however, is not only freedom “from.” It is also freedom “to.” In some ways, the challenge of experiencing inward freedom according to the rubric of freedom “to” is more challenging than freedom “from.”

The key to freedom “to” is the element of choice. We must ask ourselves, Are our choices coming from a free place, or are they conditioned by necessary factors that prevent freedom from truly reigning? The hardest but most important choice to make when considering freedom to is the freedom to love; and, indeed, love is the second prevalent theme during the

Passover holiday, which is why we read from the Song of Songs, a love poem attributed to King Solomon that expresses the love that binds Israel to God.

The Song of Songs declares, “Drink deep of love!” (5:1). Love is deep. It is deeper than any other force. To arrive at it, we have to drill through layers and layers of muck that prevent us from accessing it. What we strive for on Passover, then, is not only the freedom from anger but the freedom to love. Love is not directed exclusively to family or friends; it is a disposition toward the world and to all of God’s creatures, primarily the vulnerable and the stranger.

The freedom to love and the freedom from anger are the two aspects of freedom that Passover highlights. If we feel at a loss for what to make of these final days of Passover, let us recall these two freedoms and remember that our work is almost never done as we seek these kinds of freedom. Inner freedom is achieved through freedom from anger and the freedom to love.