

{THE TRUEST GIFT OF FREEDOM}

by Rabbi Rafi Kaiserblueth

In May, as my son Jordy's birthday was approaching, Rachel and I were struggling with how we were going to be able to celebrate. Clearly a party was out of the question. What was it that an almost 4-year-old wanted?

We struggled with being trapped in the mould and routine of how celebrations had always been. A party with lots of friends, one cake, presents, singing, and one day. We felt trapped, unable to be inspired, until we gave ourselves the freedom to venture beyond. Our solution was to create the week of Jordy. One

whole week of small celebrations with family (live and virtual), small outdoor playdates, and of course, four separate cakes including his specifically requested broccoli cake! Jordy was thrilled with his special week with nary a complaint about not having a big party. He still speaks of the Week of Jordy

It may seem strange to be contemplating freedom as we approach the High Holidays, a time normally devoted to taking stock of the past year, repentance forgiveness. Yet, here I am, almost five months after Pesach, approaching Rosh HaShanah, and freedom is foremost on my mind.

Without the normal events that help to remove us from the doldrums of routine, how can we mark those unique moments that arrive? How can we adequately prepare for the High Holidays without the normal processes of gathering, meeting, building up the anticipation?

How are we, in this period of constraints, able to express ourselves, to go beyond what has become a routine and surpass the routine which we have become so accustomed? How do we ascend into the sublime moments of the spiritual highs of the High Holidays?

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel writes in *God in Search of Man*:

The reality of freedom, of the ability to think, to will, or to make decisions beyond physiological and psychological causation is only conceivable if we



Marc Chagall - Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh

assume that human life embraces both process and event. If man is treated as a process, if his future determinations are regarded as calculable, then freedom must be denied. Freedom means that man is capable of expressing himself in events beyond his being involved in the natural processes of living.

To believe in freedom is to believe in events, namely to maintain that man is able to escape the bonds of the processes in which he is involved and to act in a way not necessitated by antecedent factors. Freedom is the state of going out of the self, an act of spiritual ecstasy, in the original sense of the term.

Who, then, is free? The creative man who is not carried away by the streams of necessity, who is

not enchained by processes, who is not enslaved to circumstances.

This time of year, we are given a choice. Are we to be bound to the past? Are we to be trapped in the routines of our lives, those processes, as Heschel describes, that dictate and govern our every action? Or, will we accept what is and what has been, but also accept that we can and must venture past that if we are to create the moments of meaning?

When can we be free?

Heschel continues:

We are free at rare moments. Most of the time we are driven by process; we submit to the power of inherited character qualities or to the force of external circumstances, Freedom is not a continual state of man,

“a permanent attitude of the conscious subject.” It is not, it happens. Freedom is an act, an event. We all are endowed with the potentiality of freedom. In actuality, however, we only act freely in rare creative moments.

When we shrug off the shackles of routine, of process, and arrive fresh and renewed at those moments that allow us to realise our potential, that is true freedom. To infuse the unique instants of our lives with holiness and spirituality and most importantly, meaning! That is the truest gift of freedom which we can give to ourselves. Let us be generous to ourselves this year. ■

Shanah Tova U'Metukah,

Rabbi Rafi Kaiserblueth

