

## זמן חרותנו - The Time of Our Freedom *Thoughts on the Freedom We Have In Messiah*

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In the Kiddush we recite at the Pesach Seder, the festivals are called מועדים לשמחה, “appointed times of joy,” חגים וזמנים לששון, “festivals and times for rejoicing,” and the Pesach festival in particular is designated as חג המצות, “the festival of unleavened bread,” זמן חרותנו, “the time of our freedom,” מקרא קדש, “a sacred gathering,” and זכר ליציאת מצרים, “a memorial of leaving Egypt.”

As the disciples of Yeshua, each year as we celebrate Pesach we see the remarkable ways in which the themes of the festival are fulfilled in Yeshua’s death and resurrection and why, the divine calendar of the universe, Pesach was chosen as the time when our Savior, our Pesach sacrifice (1Cor 5:7), would give His life to redeem us from the bondage of sin. And as we celebrate His resurrection during Chag HaMatzot, we likewise focus on the new life we have in Him:

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Messiah was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:4)

Even as our forefathers on that night of Pesach left the bondage of Egyptian slavery and crossed through the Red Sea to freedom, so we, being united with Yeshua in His death and resurrection, have forever been freed from the cruel taskmaster of sin in order to live in the freedom of God’s glorious kingdom.

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col 1:13–14)

What exactly is this freedom we have, since we have been rescued from the “Egypt” of our bondage? What is the freedom we enjoy as citizens of the “kingdom of His beloved Son”? And how do we live in the reality of this newly acquired freedom and enjoy the shalom that this freedom brings?

The first thing we need to establish is an honest definition of “freedom.” All too often we have the idea that “freedom” means “being able to do whatever I want to do, without anyone else inter-

fering.” But one need only look at human society in general to realize that this definition of freedom is wrong. For those who live for themselves are enslaved to the never-satisfied taskmaster of self-centeredness. In fact, true freedom is when we both desire and are able to do what pleases God. Or to put it another way, we are most free when glorifying and enjoying God brings us our deepest satisfaction.

Have you noticed how often God’s ways are just the opposite of our natural way of thinking? For instance, we naturally think that wealth comes from keeping what we have for ourselves, but God teaches us that we only truly possess that which we are willing to give away. We think that “looking out for number 1” is the way we find personal success, but Yeshua taught “whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matt 16:25). Natural man thinks that success comes from controlling others, but God teaches us that the way to greatness is by serving others (Matt 20:26; 23:11).

The same is true when we talk about “freedom.” We experience true and lasting freedom the more we become the bond slaves of Messiah. This is exactly what Peter teaches us in his first epistle:

Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. (1Pet 2:16)

One of the things we learn from history is that people who have been subjected to slavery for all of their lives struggle to think and act as freemen when they are finally liberated. Very often the deeply entrenched culture of slavery is a difficult mindset to overcome. Let us consider that the sin nature against which we battle is a “culture” as old as humankind itself. The flesh continues to say “Your a slave to your own desires! You don’t have the right to say ‘No!’ to sin because sin is your master!” Listen to what Paul admonishes us as new creations in Messiah Yeshua:

Now if we have died with Messiah, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Messiah, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Messiah Yeshua.... For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under *the condemnation* of the Torah but under grace. (Rom 6:8–11, 14)

So the first step in living out the freedom we have in Messiah is to know who we are in Him and not to listen to the lies our sinful nature tries to make us believe. Sin is no longer our master, for we have been brought out of that slavery by the mighty hand of God in Messiah! We no longer live in “Egypt” and so we must forever stop listening for the harsh voice accompanied by the whip of the “Egyptian taskmaster.” That voice, which still echoes in our mind, no longer has any power. Sin as a master has been drowned as the waters of the sea through which we passed closed over him.

But it is not enough to live in the reality that sin is no longer our master. We must also practice, as a way of life, the characteristics of a person who has been given true freedom. If true freedom means exercising our newly acquired ability to please God, then we must train our wills to live in the realm of this freedom. This is what Paul means when he writes:

It was for freedom that Messiah set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. (Gal 5:1)

What is this “yoke of slavery” to which Paul refers? It is the slavery of thinking that somehow what Messiah has done for us is not entirely sufficient. That somehow, after we crossed through the parted waters of the Red Sea, and watched the enemy destroyed as the waters closed over them, there still is the possibility that we will be pursued by another Pharaoh and taken back to Egypt in chains. That the exodus we have experienced through Messiah’s death is not enough to keep us free from sin’s tyranny. So we look for other things to assure us that we are truly free. We hope that religious rituals will secure our freedom, or that our membership in a religious organization will guard us from becoming Egypt’s slave again. Or we fear that God may not be completely satisfied with us, and that as a result of our less than perfect faith, He might drag us back to Egypt Himself and put us under that bondage again.

But what does Paul admonish? “Keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” Even as Yeshua will never again need to die, so we who are “in Messiah” will never again be subjected to sin as our master. There is no possibility that we ever again will be enslaved in that “Egypt.” We have been transferred to the “kingdom of His beloved Son,” and our King will never allow the enemy to take us away from Him.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. (John 10:27–29)

What is more, since we have been redeemed by the death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession of Yeshua our Messiah and Savior (Rom 8:34), God the Father is fully, completely, and eternally pleased with us for He loves us with an eternal and infinite love which can never be diminished.

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Messiah Yeshua our Lord. (Rom 8:37–39)

It is when we are convinced that what God has said is true, that we are enabled to see ourselves as He sees us; to accept ourselves as He accepts us in His Son, that we gain the courage and fortitude to live as the persons we actually are—children of God!

and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Messiah, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. (Rom 8:17)

Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal 4:7)

Indeed, we celebrate *zeman cheiruteinu*, the “time of our freedom,” for it was at this very time of the year, nearly two thousand years ago, that our Messiah paid the price of our redemption so that we might live in Him, not as slaves to sin, but as those who have found true freedom in being His bondslaves.

Chag Semeach!