

Teachings of Rav Kook

Who is free?

The main theme of the Passover holiday is, undoubtedly, freedom. But we must understand what this freedom is all about. Does it refer simply to the end of Egyptian slavery? Is it only political freedom — a luxury which has eluded the Jewish people for most of their 4,000 year existence?

True to Our Inner Essence

The difference between a slave and a free person is not merely a matter of social position. We can find an enlightened slave whose spirit is free, and a free man with the mentality of a slave.

True freedom is that uplifted spirit by which the individual — as well as the nation as a whole — is inspired to remain faithful to his inner essence, to the spiritual attribute of the Divine image within him. It is that quality which enables us to feel that our life has value and meaning.

A person with a slave mentality lives his life and harbors emotions that are rooted, not in his own essential spiritual nature, but in that which is attractive and good in the eyes of others. In this way, he is ruled by others, whether physically or by social conventions.

Vanquished in exile, we were oppressed for hundreds of years by cruel masters. But our inner soul is imbued with the spirit of freedom. Were it not for the wondrous gift of the Torah, bestowed upon us when we left Egypt to eternal freedom, the long exile would have reduced our spirits to the mindset of a slave. But on the festival of freedom, we openly demonstrate that we feel ourselves to be free in our very essence. Our lofty yearnings for that which is good and holy are a genuine reflection of our essential nature.

(Adapted from *Ma'amerei HaRe'iyah, Celebration of the Soul*, pp. 141-143)