

15th to 22nd of Nissan 5783
April 5th to 13th, 2023

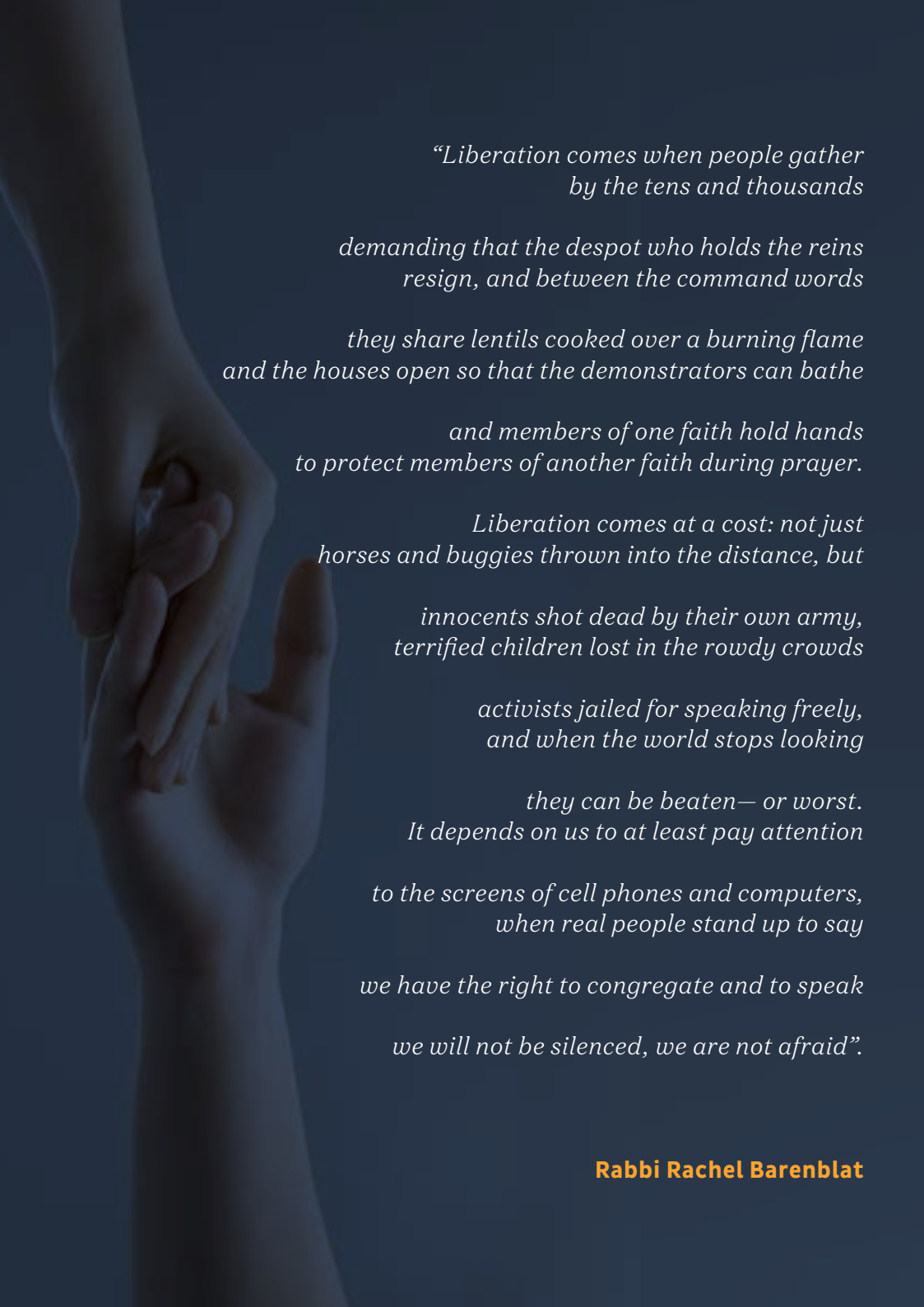


נספ

PESACH

By: Rabbi Diego Elman

Freedom and Destiny

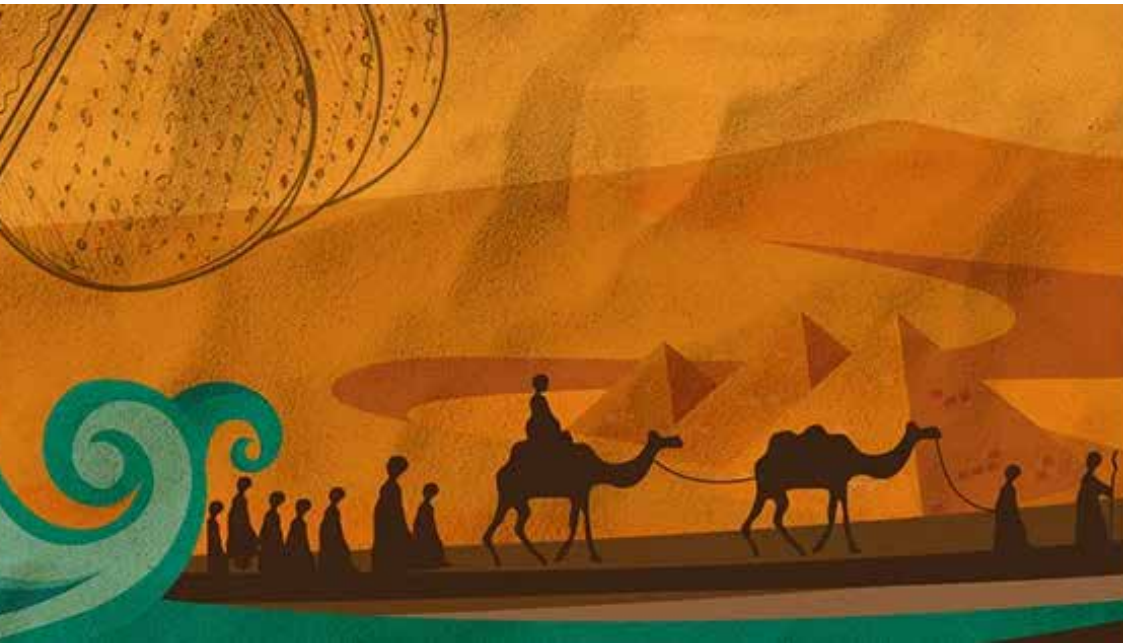


*“Liberation comes when people gather
by the tens and thousands
demanding that the despot who holds the reins
resign, and between the command words
they share lentils cooked over a burning flame
and the houses open so that the demonstrators can bathe
and members of one faith hold hands
to protect members of another faith during prayer.
Liberation comes at a cost: not just
horses and buggies thrown into the distance, but
innocents shot dead by their own army,
terrified children lost in the rowdy crowds
activists jailed for speaking freely,
and when the world stops looking
they can be beaten— or worst.
It depends on us to at least pay attention
to the screens of cell phones and computers,
when real people stand up to say
we have the right to congregate and to speak
we will not be silenced, we are not afraid”.*

Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

In every generation there are those who not only see themselves as leaving Egypt, but we are also witnesses, with regret, of how many seek to be freed and fail.

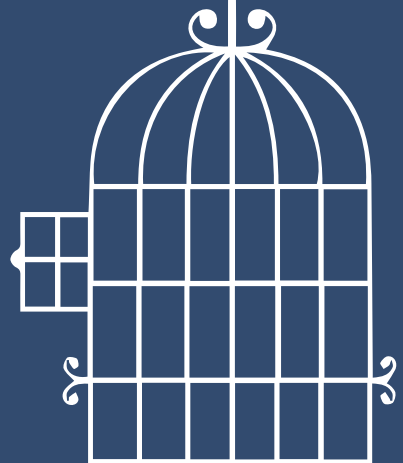
The Jewish story of the exodus has inspired many oppressed and persecuted people down the centuries. Even nowadays there are those who fight for their freedom; your fight is happening right now and much closer to us than we realize.



When we read, in the Torah, about the feat that gives rise to the festival of Pesach, it is noteworthy that the reason for leaving there, is expressed in four personal actions attributed to God: I will take away (them), I will rescue, I will redeem and I will take. He never says "I will free". This is somewhat surprising, because the main title of its period is zman cherutenu, the time of our deliverance. This leaves us with the impression that this liberation has nothing to do with any divine action, but with a human commitment. He takes us out with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, but He does not set us free, perhaps because this movement cannot come from the outside in, but must be born from the will of each one.

There are several ways to say “freedom” in Hebrew. On the one hand is dror, which is freedom of thought and expression. We can see today how, through different techniques and tools, from the most explicit to the most subtle, whether threats, programs of intellectual domination, a bombardment of messages on social networks or many other ways, an attempt is made to influence our mind. The Jewish scholar Moshe Ibn Ezra (Spain, 1089–1167), relying on the book of Proverbs, 26:2, explains “dror” by comparing it to a bird that sings while it is free.

Another form is the one the Torah uses when it explains that a slave was freed from his master: chofesh, as when we sing in the Israeli anthem, Hatikvah, “lihiot am chofshi beartzenu” (to be a free people in our land). Chofesh is used to talk about “freedom from” something. When that being no longer joins the unequal relationship with those who subjugated him, he can do whatever he wants, and no one conditions him or can impose any order on him. We can say that it is about physical freedom.





But our sages did not call this feast “zman chofshenu”. Passover seems to imply another kind of freedom; that's why they named it “zman cherute-nu”, alluding to another Hebrew word that means freedom: cherut, which is “freedom to” do something. That is: there is something rooted in our entirety that drives us to do what we believe to be right.

“The Tablets were the workmanship of God—vehamichtav michtab Elohim—and the scripture was the scripture of God—charut al haluchot—engraved on the Tablets”, Shemot (Exodus) 32:16. Charut (engraved) should be read as Cherut (freedom), say our sages in Pirkei Avot 6:2.



Cherut is spiritual freedom, imprinted, engraved within us as the words of God were engraved on tablets.

In our Jewish reform vision, freedom acquires, among other forms, the name of personal autonomy. Everyone decides for himself. We are authorized interpreters and creators of the Judaism we want to live. Always, I understand, taking care that this autonomy is not an exacerbation of individualism. It is an autonomy with responsibility and community and social commitment.

May Pesach be inspiring for the pursuit of freedom with a noble, positive and sensitive purpose, and may we convert it into action and thus build our own destiny.

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