



PhiloTorah D'var Torah

From & To

Personal note: Over 50 years of teaching in some situation or other, I have taught and spoken and written about Pesach and the Hagada countless times. Every year I fear that my Pesach preparation might be a "Been there; done that" experience. And every year, B"H, I not only give other people something new to chew on, but I find something new for myself. And that thrills me. No one, no matter how old and learned, should be without something that is a chidush for himself. With that said, let me share this new insight with you.

The mishna in P'sachim (10:4) tells us that when we tell the story of Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim, we should start with G'NUT (the shameful beginning of the story) and end up with SHEVACH (the glorious conclusion).

This is fulfilled twice at the Seder table. Once with the statement AVADIM HAYINU... We were slaves to Par'o in Egypt; VAYOTZI'EINU... And G-d took us out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

And shortly thereafter, we tell it differently: MIT'CHILA HAYU... At first our forefathers worshiped idols, but now HAMAKOM (G-d) has brought us near to His service.

If you are feeling "Been there; Done that - got the T-Shirt" - be patient.

The standard distinction between these two "tellings" is that the first refers to the physical Exodus and the second refers to the spiritual Exodus.

Fine, so far.

I'd like to point out a different distinction between the two "tellings".

Erich Fromm, in *Escape from Freedom* (1941), distinguishes between "freedom from", which is the liberation from external constraints, and "freedom to", the active, creative realization of one's potential.

Isaiah Berlin in a 1958 essay, "Two Concepts of Liberty", distinguished between negative freedom (freedom from interference) and positive freedom (freedom to be one's own master).

The *Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood contrasts "freedom from" and "freedom to".

Each of those writers treated the topic in their own way, but all three made the point about there being two types of freedom.

And that's what we can see in the Hagada.

Aside from the physical vs spiritual distinction, we should also notice that AVADIM HAYINU expresses Freedom from. We were in Egypt for 210 years, oppressed and enslaved for 117 of those years, and G-d took us out. Freedom. Baruch HaShem. But that was only the beginning.

The second "telling" concludes with HaShem taking us to Him, making a Covenant with us. Giving us the Torah and its Way of Life.

First, HaShem took us out of Egypt – Freedom from. Then, He brought us close to Him – Freedom to.

For that, while some sadly see this as anything but freedom, we should be thrilled and delighted to be Avdei HaShem, servants of G-d. There is no greater freedom for a Jew than that. That is our "Freedom to". **PTDT**