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Freedom and Self-Restraint

One of the mitzvot given only to the generation that experienced the Exodus was the command to place the blood of the Korban Pesach on the doorposts. Immediately afterward, the Torah adds:

וְאַתֶּם לَا תַצְאוּ אַשְׁר מִפְתְּחַת-בַּיִתְךָ עַד בָּקָר

“...None of you may go out of the entrance of your house until morning.” (Shemot 12:22)

Why were Bnei Yisrael forbidden from leaving their homes that night? One might suggest a practical reason — to avoid the “peripheral danger” of the plague of the firstborn. But Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (Masoret HaRav) offers a far deeper insight.

The Rav explains that the transition from slavery to freedom is a spiritually volatile moment. Freedom does not grant license to abandon morality; rather, it demands an elevation of morality. The very masters who had humiliated, tortured, and broken the slaves were suddenly helpless before them. The natural reaction of a newly freed slave — whose children were murdered, whose dignity was



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desecrated, whose body was beaten — is to erupt in vengeance.

History has seen such eruptions: the slave uprisings in ancient Rome, the German Peasants’ Revolt, the Cossack rebellions in Eastern Europe. Oppression boiled into bloodshed, and cruelty was repaid with cruelty.

Yet in Mitzrayim, at that moment of hysteria — וְתַהַי, צַעַקָּה גָּדְלָה בְּמִצְרָיִם, “a great outcry filled Egypt” — something unprecedented happened. When the Jewish slaves finally had the opportunity to avenge a century of pain, there was no rioting, no smashing of store fronts, no violence, no retaliation.

Instead, the people stayed indoors by Divine command — not because they were hiding, but because they were rising. They were eating the Korban Pesach, singing Hallel, and preparing not only for physical liberation but for moral elevation. Their first act as free human beings was not revenge — it was **restraint, holiness, and gratitude**.

This was not just noble behavior; it was the beginning of the Jewish people’s unique moral identity. From that night on, it became part of our national DNA: We celebrate God’s salvation without sinking into cruelty. We defend ourselves without losing ourselves.

And so it remains today.

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The world often distorts the way the IDF defends the State of Israel, ignoring both the moral code we uphold and the restraint we exhibit. But we know the truth — that our army's very name, **Israel Defense Forces**, reflects a moral mission rooted in that night in Egypt. Just as our ancestors refused to allow suffering to warp their character, so too we must remain vigilant that our victories never compromise our values.

Freedom is not simply granted — it is shaped by the choices we make once we have it. That night in Mitzrayim, Hashem taught us that true freedom begins not with breaking chains, but with mastering the self. The greatest revolution of the Exodus was not the fall of Egypt; it was the rise of the Jewish soul.

Every generation faces its own Egypt, its own moments of fear, anger, and uncertainty — times when the call for vengeance or despair feels natural. Yet the Torah whispers the same timeless message: *Stay inside tonight. Hold onto your holiness. Become the kind of free person who will build a redeemed world.*

When we choose dignity over rage, conscience over impulse, and faith over fear, we walk the path our ancestors forged that very first night. We show the world — and remind ourselves — that Jewish freedom is not only a gift from Hashem, but a commitment to Him. May we have the strength to defend ourselves with courage and to uplift ourselves with restraint. ■



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