

Shabbat Parashat Tzav/Shabbat Hagadol
FREEDOM!!!

There may be no one actor or movie that made the word “freedom” more famous than Mel Gibson in the movie Braveheart. Watching him play the role of William Wallace and giving that speech about how his people’s fight for freedom from oppression was greater than any man’s individual life always makes me think of the holiday of Passover, on which the Jewish people celebrates its freedom from four hundred years of living in slavery in Egypt. Just the word FREEDOM sends Wallace and his fellow troops into a frenzy, motivated to win their battle against great odds. Whatever one says about Mel Gibson and his public relations downfall after his religious beliefs and bigotry became very public, that scene in his movie career stands out and sends an important message to us all, especially entering the Passover season.

This year in Grade 5, students learn about different types of slavery and freedom through the TaL AM curriculum: physical, spiritual, and national. This week’s Torah portion exemplifies how the coming out of Egypt gave the nation of the Jewish people its first real experience and taste of spiritual/religious freedom. Now that the *Mishkan*/desert Tabernacle has been completed and assembled, it was time to induct Aaron, the *Kohein Gadol*/High Priest, and his sons into religious service. Standing before the entire Israelite nation, Moses dresses the *Kohanim* in their sacred uniforms of service, anoints them with pure holy oil and makes offerings in a very public and ritualized ceremony. After generations of oppression, one can only imagine how it felt for the People of Israel to be able to claim, celebrate, and worship their spiritual freedom. The rush of emotion must have been overwhelming!

This Shabbat, as every year on the Shabbat immediately before the arrival of Passover, we mark Shabbat Hagadol, the “Great Shabbat.” Traditionally, Rabbis would give long discourses on the rules for cleaning and preparing for the strictures associated with the festival. During this week prior to Pesah, one often hears just how much time and effort must be exerted in order to be ready for the Feast of Freedom. Some say, it is the true reliving of slavery. I beg to differ. The very fact that we have the ability freely to prepare for Passover cannot be interpreted or felt as slavery. For centuries, there have been communities of Jews who attempted to celebrate Passover and other Jewish festivals at the risk of their lives. We do not live under such conditions here today and must be grateful and appreciative of our reality. It cannot be taken for granted.

So, as we celebrate Shabbat Hagadol and prepare ourselves for the on-going work that is needed to prepare for our Feast of Freedom, don’t wait for the Seder to be appreciative of your freedom. Feel it even as you do the cleaning, shopping, and cooking which so many of our ancestors were not free to do themselves. Use this week before Passover to reflect on our good fortune. It will make your Seder a culmination of this week’s experience for you and your family.

Hag Kasheir v'Samei'ah/A Happy and Kosher Passover and Shabbat Shalom!