

Back to Human Bondage

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by Steve Fink

What is the relevance of spending a Pesach evening talking about Redemption and Freedom?

The 18th century Scottish historian/economist Lord Alexander Fraser Tytler (1747-1813) wrote in 1778 that the world's great civilizations generally progress through a similar series of cycles. After saying that the average existence of the world's greatest civilizations has been 200 years, he summarizes the course of a nation passing through 9 steps.

People in bondage first require a spiritual faith to give them courage to pursue freedom. Freedom to choose and develop his G-d-given gifts brings opportunities and leads to affluence.

But affluence tends to lead to selfishness; selfishness leads to complacency; complacency leads to apathy; apathy degenerates into dependency; and dependency can return one back to bondage.

Here's the sequence:

Bondage; Spiritual Faith; Freedom; Abundance; Selfishness; Complacency; Apathy; Fear; Dependency; Bondage

Note that the first generation throws off the shackles of bondage only to have a later generation through apathy and indifference allow itself to once again become enslaved.

Again and again, after freedom brings opportunity and some degree of plenty, the competent become selfish; luxury loving and complacent; while the incompetent and unfortunate grow envious and covetous; and all three groups turn aside from the hard road of freedom to worship the golden Calf of economic security.

In his book "When Nations Die; Ten Warning Signs of a Culture in Crisis," Jim Nelson Black reviews history, analyzing the death of nations, and identifying ten warning signs of a nation in crisis: (1) Lawlessness, (2) Loss of Economic Discipline, (3) Rising Bureaucracy, (4) Decline of Education, (5) Weakening of Cultural Foundations, (6) Loss of Respect for Tradition, (7) Increase in Materialism, (8) Rise in Immorality, (9) Decay of Religious Belief and (10) Devaluing of Human Life.

Freedom by itself is not sufficient for constructing the quality of society and culture appropriate to man, his

dignity and his capacity. Freedom must be oriented beyond itself to truth: the truth of man's origin, the truth of man's nature and the truth of man's destiny.

The decline and fall of nations is usually due to internal factors rather than external threats. Even though some may have fallen to barbarians, their demise ultimately came because of moral and spiritual weakness which manifested itself as military weakness.