

Chapter 10

A Symposium About Slavery and Freedom

An Anthology of Quotations

*"We were slaves to Pharaoh" /
"We are slaves now"*

The Haggadah recalls slavery as a historic moment from the past — "we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt," but it also declares that "we still are slaves now, though next year we will be free." Are we today still slaves — if not politically and economically, then psychologically or spiritually? That is the theme of the symposium of famous quotes found below.

Directions:

- Reproduce a group of ten quotations for all the participants.
- Ask everyone to choose a quote about freedom and slavery that expresses something felt deeply.
- Ask participants at the table to read the quote they chose and explain their reasons for choosing it.
- Hopefully a discussion will emerge regarding the true nature of freedom.

1 *No human being is free who is not master of himself.*

— ENICETUS (ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHER)

2 *Freedom is not worth having if it does not connote freedom to err.*

— MAHATMA GANDHI (20TH C. INDIAN FREEDOM "FIGHTER")

3 *Better a thin freedom than a fat slavery.*

— FOLK PROVERB

4 *There is no boredom like that which can afflict people who are free, and nothing else.*

— RALPH BARTON PERRY

5 *A man may not always eat and drink what is good for him; but it is better for him and less ignominious to die of the gout freely than to have a censor officially appointed over his diet, who after all could not render him immortal.*

— GEORGE SANTAYANA (20TH C. EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHER)

6 *Security is never an absolute ... The government of a free people must take certain chances for the sake of maintaining freedom which the government of a police state avoids because it holds freedom to be of no value.*

— A. BARTHOLOMEW

7 *Praised be You who has not made me a slave.*

— RABBI AHA BEN JACOB (BABYLONIAN TALMUD SCHOLAR)

8 *None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free.*

— GOETHE (GERMAN 19TH C. WRITER)

9 *The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good, in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it.*

— J.S. MILL (ENGLISH 19TH C. POLITICAL PHILOSOPHER)

10 *He is the free man whom the truth makes free, and all are slaves beside.*

— COWPER

11 *Slaves are free when they are satisfied with their lot; free persons are really slaves when they seek more than their lot.*

— TACHIKOMORI

12 *Freedom is taken, not given.*

— AHAD HAAM (ZIONIST 20TH C. WRITER)

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13 I am for those that have never been master'd.
For men and women whose tempers have never been master'd.

— WALT WHITMAN (19TH C. AMERICAN POET), AS I SAT ALONE, 1856

14 Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves,
and, under a just God, cannot long retain it.

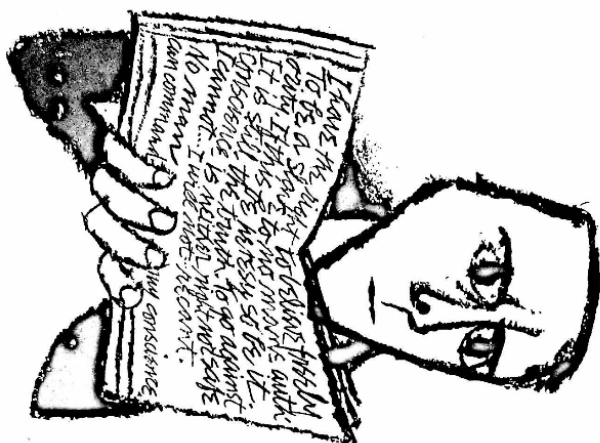
— ABRAHAM LINCOLN (U.S. PRESIDENT DURING THE CIVIL WAR), 1859

15 Better to be a free bird than a captive king.

— DANISH PROVERB

16 No human is wholly free. One is a slave to wealth, or to
fortune, or the laws, or the people restrain him from acting
according to his will alone.

— EURIPIDES (ANCIENT GREEK PLAYWRIGHT)



"No man can command my conscience."
FROM MARTIN LUTHER (16TH C. REFORMATION)

— BEN SHAHN, 1956

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17 Who, then, is free? The wise who can command their passions,
who fear not want, nor death, nor chains, firmly resisting their
appetites and despising the honors of the world, who rely
wholly on themselves, whose angular points of character have
all been rounded off and polished.

— HORACE (ROME, C. 25 BCE)

18 It is not good to be too free. It is not good to have everything one
wants.

— BLAISE PASCAL (FRANCE), PENNER, 1670

19 Since the general civilization of mankind, I believe there are
more instances of the abridgment of the freedom of the people
by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power than by
violent and sudden usurpations.

— JAMES MADISON (U.S. PRESIDENT), 1788

20 The Merciful demands that your servant be your equal. You
should not eat white bread, and he black bread; you should not
drink old wine, and he new wine; you should not sleep on a
featherbed and he on straw. Hence it was said, Whoever
acquires a Hebrew slave acquires a master.

— TALMUD

21 When is a man free? Not when he is driftwood on the stream
of life, ... free of all cares or worries or ambitions. ... He is not
free at all — only drugged, like the lotus eaters in the Odyssey ...
To be free in action, in struggle, in undiverted and purposeful
achievement, to move forward towards a worthy objective
across a fierce terrain of resistance, to be vital and aglow in the
exercise of a fierce enterprise — that is to be free, and to know
the joy and exhilaration of true freedom. A man is free only
when he has an errand on earth.

— ABRAHAM HILFEL SILVER (20TH C. REFORM RABBI AND ZIONIST LEADER)

22 Because I was born a slave, I love liberty more than you.

— LUDWIG BOERNE (GERMAN JEW), 1832

23 I hold a jail more roomy than would be the whole world if I
were to submit to repression.

— SAMUEL GOMPERS (AMERICAN JEW,
FOUNDER OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR), 1925

24 Though in themselves trivial ends are not important — indeed
it is of their essence to be unimportant — they give one a new
sense of breathing space. How important it is to the sense of one's
autonomy and worth to have some such area of arbitrary and
trivial concerns reserved to oneself.

— UNKNOWN

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Neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal
 we created you, so that you might be free according to
 your own will and honor, to be your own creator and builder.

For you alone we gave growth and development depending on
 your own free will. You bear in you the germs of a universal
 life.

— PIRO DELLA MIRANDOLA (ITALIAN RENAISSANCE HUMANIST);
 ORATIO DE HOMINIS DIGNITATE

The serious threat to our democracy is not the existence of
 foreign totalitarian states. It is the existence within our own
 personal attitudes and within our own institutions of
 conditions which have given a victory to external authority,
 discipline, uniformity and dependence upon the "Leader" in
 foreign countries. The battlefield is also accordingly here —
 within ourselves and our institutions.

— JOHN DEWEY (20TH C. AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER OF EDUCATION)

The ambiguous meaning of freedom was to operate throughout
 modern culture on the one hand, the growing independence of
 man from external authorities, on the other hand, his growing
 isolation and the resulting feeling of individual insignificance
 and powerlessness. Freedom from the traditional bonds of
 medieval society, though giving the individual a new feeling of
 independence, at the same time made him feel alone and isolat-
 ed, filled him with doubt and anxiety, and drove him into new
 submission and into a compulsive and irrational activity.

— ERICH FROMM (20TH C. GERMAN JEWISH PSYCHOLOGIST),
 ESCAPE FROM FREEDOM

What then is the meaning of freedom for modern man?
 He has become free from the external bonds that would prevent
 him from doing and thinking as he sees fit. He would be free to
 thought, and felt. But he does not know. He conforms to
 anonymous authorities and adopts a self which is not his. The
 more he does this, the more powerless he feels, the more is he
 forced to conform. In spite of a veneer of optimism and
 initiative, modern man is overcome by a profound feeling of
 powerlessness and enslavement.

— ERICH FROMM, ESCAPE FROM FREEDOM

Difference is the condition requisite to all dignity and to all
 liberation. To be aware of oneself is to be aware of oneself as
 different. To be is to be different.

— ALBERT MEMMI (20TH C. NORTH AFRICAN ZIONIST THINKER)

An oppressed person must never expect others to hand him his
 liberation... The oppressed person must take his destiny in his
 own hands. My life must no longer depend on any treaty, often
 signed with other ends in mind, by anyone with anyone...
 Better still, no one owes us anything....

We should not have had to ask ourselves piteously and in vain,
 why the Pope was silent, or why the Americans abandoned us,
 why the Russians didn't budge.

And why not the Red Cross? And the ASPCA?

Liberty is not a gift. Bestowed, conceded, protected by someone
 else, it is denied and it vanishes.

Our liberation must depend on our own fight for it....

One never really shakes off oppression except by revolt.

— ALBERT MEMMI

Self-negation is slavery.
 Self-affirmation is freedom.
 We go to Zion to be ourselves.

— LUDWIG LEWISOHN

The first mark of the position of a minority is its complete lack
 of self-determination. Do what it may, the terms of its very
 existence are fixed for it by the mere weight and tendencies and
 habits of the surrounding majority. And this is no less true
 when that majority is friendly than when it is hostile.
 Favor and disfavor are the moods of the masters.

— LUDWIG LEWISOHN

We have continued to celebrate Passover because we have
 always been in the desert and we have always awaited our
 liberation.

— ALBERT MEMMI

When Moses wished to free his people from Egyptian slavery,
 the Jews were the first to rise against him and threaten to
 denounce him to the Egyptian authorities.

— MAX NORDAU (19TH-20TH C. AUSTRIAN INTELLECTUAL AND ZIONIST), 1898