



Oh, freedom over me . . .

It has been a week of "freedom" conversations! For Christians, of course, Easter is the celebration of freedom from fear of death. For Jews, Passover celebrates the freeing of the Jewish people from an oppressive empire. And, as an extension of that, the Freedom Seder we observed at DU on Monday evening we talked about the common features of many peoples who have been liberated, or freed, from oppressive situations or regimes. The

individual stories we told--whether religious or ethnic--all had common features. Freedom is universal desire.

I was at a conversation yesterday with members of different religions (we meet monthly). Yesterday (April 8) happened to be the celebration (among Japanese Buddhists) of the Buddha's birthday. And, of course, at the core of the Buddha's teachings was the issue of freedom. Inevitable suffering is caused by desire/attachment, the Buddha taught. Freedom from attachment brings freedom from suffering.

So, yesterday, we talked a lot about attachment. And one of the questions that the facilitator raised (a Zen priest) was whether we were more interested in being "free" or in being "Jewish/Mormon/Muslim/Lutheran/etc."? That is, could we give up our attachments to our religious traditions/stories in order to be truly free? That was a very difficult question for most of us to answer. We correlated our freedom WITH our traditions. The stories that we tell which define us are hard to relinquish; without them, some of us objected, we would be rootless. "Ah", implied the Zen priest, "rootless -- without roots -- free of attachment to"?

I'm still grappling with the question of letting go of the attachments I have to my stories. But I'm beginning to wonder about how we think of "freedom". Does freedom mean "freedom **from**" or "freedom **to**"? While it may mean both, I think that many of us (like me) gravitate toward "freedom **from**": "we're free from the shackles that bound us"; "we're free from the fear of the night-stalker"; "we're free from outmoded superstition"; etc. But in focusing on our new-found freedom **from**, do we simply then put ourselves in bondage to something new.

What might it mean to focus on freedom **to**? No longer bound by oppressive systems, I can be free to try a different cuisine? talk to someone new? travel down a new road? sleep on the other side of the bed? listen to country-western music (that'd be a stretch for me!)? The problem, of course, is that I might find the "new" so attractive that I build a "new house" there. Maybe a better image is the two-week limit on camping in state parks. Freedom **to** might mean pitching tents, and moving on to new discoveries.

Oh, freedom over me!

Blessings,

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