

MORASHAH
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 811 Palisade Ave., Teaneck, NJ 07666
www.utj.org 201.801.0707

Rabbi Richard Wolpoe

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Freedom From, Freedom To

In God's original five-part "liberation plan" (see Exodus 6:6-8), *v'heiveiti* – "I will bring them (to the Land)" – was the fifth and culminating step in our total redemption. We pray that speedily we may drink that proverbial fifth cup at our next Seder!

What were the first four steps? Three are virtually synonymous expressions of rescue. The fourth is our focus today: *V'lakachti etkhem li l'am* – "I will take (or acquire) you as a nation...."

Did this happen at the exodus? Not really – it actually occurred at *ma'amad har Sinai* – the events at Mount Sinai. That is when "*asher bachar banu ... v'nattan lanu et torato*" (Who chose us ... and gave us His Torah) occurred.

This is musically reflected in the Qiddush of every Yom Tov! The motif for that qiddush is the melody for Akdamut and it highlights: "*asher bachar banu mikkol am*" (Who chose us from all nations), which is a Shavuot theme, even when recited on other Yamim Tovim!

So Shavuot is the culmination of our *g'ulah* (redemption). And this is because we actually celebrated the exodus only one full day. As *Sefer Hachinuch* notes, on the second day, we counted with our expectations in the direction of *mattan Torah* on Shavuot. Only for the briefest moment were we escaping **from**. For the next 48 days, our escape was **toward** Torah and the fulfillment of *V'lakachti*.

This freedom **to** – freedom for a purpose – is key. So many Jews left Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries to come to America to become full Jews in the open.

Sadly, when Jews fled Europe at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries it was not just to escape the Czar but to escape **from** Judaism. Only an idealistic handful realized how much American religious freedom could enable Jews to find freedom **toward** Torah.

Despite our tragic losses, this remains our goal and focus: to escape tyranny on behalf of a vision not just of Liberty, but of Divine Service. We will be God's People.

Chag Same'ach!

Rabbi Wolpoe is a member of the faculty of the Institute of Traditional Judaism.

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