

PASSOVER FEATURE

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home. One day, if we do not eject him from our ranks, he may even try to take over our synagogues.

How did he get so powerful?

Alas, he has thrived on freedom! Just as we are free to worship, we are free to reject worship. We know that freedom presents problems today -- just as it did in the ancient Israelites in their flight from Egyptian bondage.

CONDEMNED TO FREEDOM

Mankind, said Jean-Paul Sartre, is "condemned" to freedom. He meant that to be free, implies the agony of making personal decisions in a world where nothing is certain. According to this view, freedom is a glorious burden that we proudly shoulder. To do otherwise, would be to live like a domestic animal who is driven by whip and lured by the carrot.

The Passover story surely illustrates how highly the Jewish people have valued freedom. Yet freedom, which makes Jewish existence worthwhile, may also turn out to

be the very instrument that facilitates its decline. Judaism has endured inquisitions and pogroms, but there is some question whether or not, ultimately, it can survive the genial climate of liberty.

Yet, we should remind ourselves that there is no simple co-relationship between freedom and survival. History shows that in various times and places, the Jewish people succumbed both to good treatment and bad. In some countries cruel oppression uprooted every vestige of Jewish life, and in others, the same results were achieved mildly, painlessly, gradually through assimilation.

For instance, it is estimated that perhaps as many as 90 per cent of the descendants of the Jewish families who

settled in America in Revolutionary times, are now lost to the Jewish community. Their children, or their children's children, entered the non-Jewish world mostly through intermarriages.

THE CASE OF SPAIN

The beneficent atmosphere of American democracy quietly accomplished what the lash, the noose and forced conversion could not achieve. But freedom, of course, is not, in itself, the cause, of this assimilationist trend. We know that Jews enjoyed a great measure of freedom in Spain in the Middle Ages -- yet this was one of the

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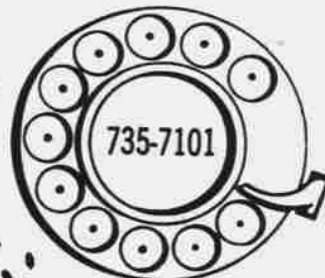


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