

“Are You Really Free?”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

In *The Count of Monte Christo*, the prisoner Abbe Faria digs through solid rock for years and finally gets somewhere: he finds himself in another cell.

Do we seek real freedom? The Roman historian Sallust was a skeptic: "Only a few prefer liberty — the majority seek nothing more than fair masters." We believe we are escaping prison, but we only end up in another one. Freedom frightens us: Rabbi Samuel Mohliver wrote that the Red Sea closed behind the Israelites less to drown the Egyptians than to ensure that the Israelites would not run back to Egypt.

The flight from freedom, intentional and inadvertent, is all around us. People enslave themselves to drugs, to foolish ideologies, to work. The opposite of such enslavement is not chaos, but chosen servitude. To serve something that requires the best within us is true freedom.

Perhaps that is why Mount Sinai is in the desert. The desert represents absolute freedom, without structure, rules, or hope. Sinai is the possibility of choosing loftiness over barrenness, freedom with a purpose over anarchy and emptiness.

Our nation blesses us with an abundance of possibilities. But too often it does not teach us that freedom is not simply the absence of bondage, but also the presence of genuine service.