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ON PASSOVER WE NEED TO THINK, "WHAT IS OUR MESSAGE?"

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MAD MEN AND THE AGE OF ADVERTISING



"Advertising might properly be defined as the art of determining the will of possible customers. . . . Our acts are the resultants of our motives, and it is your function in commercial life to create the motives that will effect the sale of the producer's wares."

-Walter Scott, The Psychology of Advertising, The Atlantic, January 1904

EXPERIMENTS IN THE LABORATORY OF CONSUMERISM

BY: ADAM CURTIS, DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER

The widespread fascination with the Mad Men series is far more than just simple nostalgia. It is about how we feel about ourselves and our society today.

In Mad Men we watch a group of people who live in a prosperous society that offers happiness and order like never before in history and yet are full of anxiety and unease. They feel there is something more, something beyond. And they feel stuck.

The central idea of advertising was to encourage people to be "different" - and what that led to was a new dynamic in society. If you want to be different you are always running away from the others who are also trying to be different - and thus become like you. So you are continually searching for something newly different, something Hip.

And that required an endless stream of new - different - products. As Thomas Frank puts it very eloquently in *The Conquest of Cool*:



"The idea of 'difference' became the magic cultural formula by which the life of consumerism could be extended indefinitely, running forever on the discontent that it itself had produced..."

But one could argue that it is precisely that continual search for difference that has led us into the static world of today. If consumerism continually scours the margins of society for rebellious or contrary notions and then immediately turns them into stuff to sell - it ironically becomes very difficult for new ideas to change society. Instead they tend to end up reinforcing it.

FINDING OUR TRUE PERSONAL FREEDOM

RAV KOOK ON FREEDOM

The difference between a slave and a free person is not merely a matter of social position. We can find an enlightened slave whose spirit is free, and a free man with the mentality of a slave.

True freedom is that uplifted spirit by which the individual — as well as the nation as a whole — is inspired to remain faithful to his inner essence, to the spiritual attribute of the Divine image within him. It is that quality which enables us to feel that our life has value and meaning.

A person with a slave mentality lives his life and harbors emotions that are rooted, not in his own essential spiritual nature, but in that which is attractive and good in the eyes of others. In this way, he is ruled by others, whether physically or by social conventions.

Vanquished in exile, we were oppressed for hundreds of years by cruel masters. But our inner soul is imbued with the spirit of freedom. Were it not for the wondrous gift of the Torah, bestowed upon us when we left Egypt to eternal freedom, the long exile would have reduced our spirits to the mindset of a slave. But on the festival of freedom, we openly



demonstrate that we feel ourselves to be free in our very essence. Our lofty yearnings for that which is good and holy are a genuine reflection of our essential nature.

VILNA GAON ON THE HAGGADAH



ויהי מש לגוי גדול

“And he became there a nation”

מלמד שהיו ישראל מצינים שם

This teaches us that the Jews were distinguishable there.

’These are the sons of Cham, by their families, by their languages, in their lands, by their nationalities”
(Breishis 10:20)

This verse lists four characteristics which distinguish nations. Families, languages, and lands are self-explanatory. “Nationalities,” refers to those customs which are particular to distinct nationalities. The verse quoted here by the Haggadah says that the Jews became a distinct nationalities. The verse quoted here by the Haggadah says that the Jews became a distinct “nationality” distinguishable by a unique pattern of behavior – adherence to the commandments of Hashem.

WHAT ARE YOU ADVERTISING?

WE LIVE IN AN AGE OF UNPRECEDENTED MARKETING AND ADVERTISING. MOST OF OUR LIVES WE ARE BEING SOLD PRODUCTS. WE ARE THE PASSIVE CONSUMER LISTENING TO THE SELLER.



We have the freedom and the will to have a voice, so what are we selling? If you had to think of a status update for your spiritual message or the spiritual message of the Torah, what would it be?