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Freedom: Liberation from False Desires

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Study

FREEDOM. MONASTICISM LEADS US AWAY FROM BONDAGE AND TOWARD THE FREEDOM OF THE TRUE SELF. At times it can be difficult to uncover all that binds us. But monasticism is designed to liberate us from false desires and toward the soul's freedom of choice, a reality that the ego-self and the material world are simply unaware of. Being driven by self-will, we experience this unbinding as loss.

We are in bondage to material things that we believe are important, necessary, and give life meaning. We are in bondage to an idea of what we have to do, be, and perform, and what the spiritual life is supposed to consist of. The desert monastics called these worldly illusions "demons," the shadow side of personality, where we are trapped by subservience and subjugation to temporal desires. These cultural demands are inferior to the luminosity of being that is already within us. Every day we trade the glorious for the mundane.

To achieve freedom requires a continual reaffirmation of our sacred existence in the midst of all that denies its validity. And certainly there are many things that refute the dignity of life—domestic violence, terrorism, war, starvation, and the misery of those who've been forced to flee as a result. Yet, if you succumb to this kind of thinking—the demons of despair—then you have given up on life, really. Abraham Joshua Heschel, who barely escaped the Holocaust (in Hebrew, Shoah, "catastrophe"), said his greatest fear was that humanity would succumb to despair and believe in the death of God. But despair is also the collapse of the self, and the destruction of hope. This is how we lose freedom. The freedom of being cannot be achieved in one lifetime because it is infinite. Thus monks work to eradicate the little demons of despair that constantly tug at faith. That is the goal of their effort: to be closer to the Ultimate.

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