

Freedom

I'm [Adam Klugman](#) and you are listening to [AM 620 KPOJ](#), Portland's only Progressive Talk Station. The numbers here are 1-866-452-060, (503) 248-0620 or #620 on your AT&T wireless phone.

Last Monday, I went to a friends [Seder](#). And if you don't know, Seder is a celebration of Passover, which marks the passage of the [Jewish](#) people out of Egypt, out of bondage and slavery, and into freedom. And so my friend asked me to say something about the nature of freedom at the dinner.

And for weeks I didn't know what I would say and I kept rolling it around in my head, formulating all of these half thoughts, but never really getting a handle on what I wanted to say. And then, when it was my turn to speak, something came of my mouth that surprised me. And it was this idea that freedom is more than just political. I mean, I obviously have a political orientation and so I think my friend was expecting me talk about freedom in a political context. But what occurred to me as I stood up was the idea that freedom is more than just the right the right to speak freely, think freely, and act freely in a free society without fear. That is an external kind of freedom but is only one aspect.

Now I'm not saying that political freedom isn't absolutely essential to every other freedom we might consider because it is and we must always insist that none of us are free until all of are free. For example, [Bradley Manning](#), a private first class is being held and tortured without due process in our very own country, and therefore we must insist that as a society are not truly free. And we must demand his release. And we must not relent. Because it is not just his freedom we are fighting for, but our own. Because locked inside his cell is the idea of freedom, and there is nothing more important in the world than this idea. People can live purposeful lives with only a little bit of food. But they cannot do so with only one a little bit of freedom.

But where does it come from? Where do we source this yearning to be free and how can we define it in a way that places the responsibility for what it means to be free on each of us individuals, and not just as political citizens but as human beings, as sentient creatures in a universe that intends freedom for everything alive.

And I don't mean to use to broad a brush here, but I think it is important to understand that freedom pre-dates us, it pre-exists us. It is not something we invented; it is something that invented us. We are made of it and when we look around the natural world and feel awe, we are gawking at an impossible system of laws that do not bind us, that do not confine us, but set forth the conditions that make us free.

So what happens? If what I am saying is true, that we, and everything around us, intends freedom, then how could we even imagine the possibility of slavery and imprisonment? How is it possible to made from the substance, the idea, the principle of freedom and yet be part of a human history marred with the blood of so many innocent people?

This is the question we must ask every day. And for me, the answer is not political, but deeply personal. Because to speak and think and act freely in a free society is not where freedom ends, but where it begins. Because real freedom comes when I take responsibility for how I imprison myself and others every day.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. During the Bush years, I hated [George W. Bush](#). I hated him for starting an illegal war against an unarmed country based on lies. I

hated him for the [Patriot Act](#), for warrantless wiretapping, for presidential signing statements. I hated him for bringing out the worst in Americans and shipping it overseas.

I hated the sound his voice, the ignorant smirk on his face and flight-suited, cod-pieced, bring it on swagger that perpetually sent the message that the world was either with him or against him. And it wasn't just him, it was the whole family - [Cheney](#), [Rumsfeld](#), [Wolfowitz](#), [Ashcroft](#), [Pearle](#), [Kritsol](#), the whole sick, twisted gang of money-addicted white men who robbed this country of its freedoms, its integrity and its treasure without so much as a backwards glance. It was like watching someone I love get beaten, robbed and raped while I was helpless to do anything but watch. And it made me mad. Mad as hell. But then, after years of feeling powerless, I violated my own credo. I crossed over into rage and got stuck there.

And so, what did I really accomplish? In hating them, day after day, year after year for eight years, all I really did was make myself sick, poison the environment with more of what I didn't want, and keep them and myself imprisoned in closed system of guilt and blame and attack. And the sirens song that kept me crashing on the rocks of my own hatred for that decade was how right I was. And I was right. And I'm still right because I'm not saying we shouldn't make judgments about right and wrong. We have to. And we must take bold stands for what is right, just as [Martin Luther King](#) did, and be willing to risk everything for it. But my hatred, my hatred...wasn't about them. It was about me. They don't have the power to make me hate them unless I give it to them. I can't perceive guilt in them unless I perceive guilt in myself. And that guilt and hatred enslaved me, and them and foreclosed on the possibility that anyone inside the circle of my attack will actually get free. Free from guilt and free of hatred and the false, age-old belief that someone out there needs to be imprisoned before I can be free in here.

And so I no longer believe, as I did during that time, that “the highest form of Patriotism is dissent.” It is a form of patriotism, and an important one, and I will always dissent against injustice, but it is not the highest form.

As liberals, I believe this kind of bumper sticker slogan binds us to a mindset of negativity that fulfills the conservative stereotype of us. Because what makes us who really are, as liberals, or progressives if you still stuck on that, is not our dissent, but our optimism, our belief in the fundamental goodness of human beings, and the conviction that freedom is defined by a world where we lead with the best that is in us, where we demand justice for others as passionately as we do for ourselves. And yes, it makes us Mad As Hell when we see that promise violated, as it should. But when we allow it move us into hate and fear and attack, we fail in our mission. We abdicate the most essential aspect of freedom - our personal responsibility to remain free within our own being ...and enslave the world in a prison of our making.

So let's talk about freedom today. Let's define it. What does it mean to you? How do you define it? How are we losing our freedoms in this country? And how do we take stand for political freedom, without losing our personal freedom?

We'll be right back.

You're listening to “[Mad as Hell in America](#),” with [Adam Klugman](#) on [KPOJ](#).

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