

## **The Birth of Freedom**

### ***Thought for the Day***

***Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)***

***Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 6 April 2011***

Even if you're not one of the world's worriers, you've probably been too fretful about the potential melt-down of the Japanese nuclear reactors, and the more metaphorical fall-out of the political unrest sweeping across North Africa and the Middle East, to have paid any attention to the story of the French couple who are being prosecuted for being vegans.

Well, that's a bit over-simplified! To fill you in: the state prosecutor has alleged that their baby died because of vitamin deficiencies caused by the mother's vegan diet. That should be a question for medical science, and science deals in generalities: are the children of vegans generally more prone to disease? This kind of question has often puzzled me: we warn expectant mothers to avoid alcohol, but in France or Italy wine is the staple drink with a meal. In America they even put signs on wine labels that seem to mean "no pregnancy". So does human metabolism work differently in the Med, or does speaking English increase the risk of illness?!

I suspect that ultimately the answer is cultural. No choices are black and white, and mostly we have to play off one desire against another, whether personal or social. Vegetarianism is just foreign to the French psyche, whereas British courts have held that it is entitled to all the protections of freedom of religion! Of course, in France, religions are treated equally by being banned from the public arena, whereas here they are equally free to set out their stalls in public.

Perhaps I prefer our model for another reason: this week, Jewish people around the world are preparing for Pesach, or Passover, the festival that celebrates the birth of the Jewish nation. But it is also the birth of the very idea of religious freedom, as they fled Egypt not only to escape slavery, but to be free to worship in their own way.

Your way may not be my way, but with schools breaking up, whatever your plans, have a happy holiday!

*Ephraim Borowski*

*Thought for the Day: Radio Scotland, 6 April 2011*