

Preparation for S82 – Passover: A Tale of Liberation

And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt... “Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month they shall take every man a lamb according to their fathers’ houses...and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs in the evening. Then they shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat them...In this manner you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord’s passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all of the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance for ever”...Thus did all the people of Israel; as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. And on that very day the Lord brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.

-- *Exodus 12:1 through 12:50*

It is one of the mysteries of Jewish life that events that have happened to a single small people have had a disproportionate impact on the moral imagination of mankind. That is true of the exodus of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. Though we alone are commanded to remember, every day, the going out from Egypt, we have not been alone in sensing its significance. So too did Oliver Cromwell, Thomas Jefferson, and the blacks of America who sang, ‘Let my people go.’ This event and the Passover festival that commemorates it have inspired many people in their fight for freedom.

-- *Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of Britain and the Commonwealth*

...freedom in and of itself has little meaning unless it is contrasted with a situation in which one is not free. It is the passage from slavery to freedom which gives meaning and feeling to what the essence of freedom really is, be it being a slave under a harsh regime, or a slave to a problem one

has in one’s daily life. The main point here is to be aware, acknowledge, and feel grateful for whatever freedom one has in life, as opposed to what one might have otherwise been ‘enslaved’ in, and to use that freedom to enhance oneself, and in turn, both you and the world around you will also be enhanced in the process...Passover’s concept of personal and collective freedom is not only a cause for celebration, but a strong lesson in the value of proportion and balance in how a person should conduct him- or herself or how a group should conduct itself in relation to other human beings.

-- *Jewish Webring,*

www.anglefire.com/pa2/passover

Today’s Pharaoh

We are descended from slaves, from people who staged the first successful slave rebellion in recorded history. Ever since, our people has kept alive the story of liberation, and the consciousness that cruelty and oppression are not inevitable ‘facts of life’ but conditions which can be changed. The Exodus message is revolutionary: the way the world is not the way it has to be. Everything can change once we recognize that the God who created the world also creates the possibility of transformation and liberation.

This task may seem more overwhelming to us today than in previous times. Today there is no longer some easily identifiable external evil force playing the role of Pharaoh. Instead, we live in an increasingly unified world economic and political system which brings well-being to some even as it increases the misery of others...

It can seem overwhelming to confront this world system, but the Exodus story teaches us to have faith in spite of our fears. When Moses first brought the news of impending deliverance to the Hebrew slaves, they refused to listen to him because they were so deep in despair. Yet a major teaching of Judaism and of the Seder is that powerful realities can be changed—there really is a Force or Power (we call it YHVH or ‘Adonai’ or ‘HaShem’) in the universe which makes it possible to move from ‘that which is’ to ‘that which ought to be.’ That Force (and not some big man pulling all the strings) is what we celebrate when we talk about God.

-- *Rabbi Michael Lerner and Karen Van Hoek.*

© *TIKKUN Magazine, www.tikkun.org*

Unitarian Universalism has deep roots in “Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves.” (Sources of the Living Tradition, UUA) Rabbi Lerner and the others quoted here help us understand the relevance of the ancient festival of Passover today, and inspire us to use its lessons in our own ethical and spiritual lives. These questions cover a wide range of issues relating to Passover. Please select any that speak to you.

1. Can you recall an instance in your life when you went from oppression to freedom? Who or what helped you attain that freedom?
2. What lessons from the Passover story could be applied to transform your own life? Is there anything or anyone that oppresses you? How might you begin the path to freedom? Who might help you?
3. What freedoms in your life are you thankful for? Which do you feel might be threatened, and why?
4. Have you, or has anyone you know, ever experienced personal or political exile? What has that experience meant in your/their life?
5. Do you ever experience despair like that of the Hebrew slaves over the injustice in this world? How do you cope with this feeling?
6. Do you believe in the power of world transformation that Rabbi Lerner describes? If so, do you see a way to personally contribute to the transformation?
7. Is there any suffering nation or group of people that evokes more of your compassion and concern at this time? What have you done, or might you do, to help?
8. Talk with some Jewish friends about how they view the Passover holiday. Do they focus on more on ritual and history or do they bring in current events and ideas? Do they see any relevance for non-Jews?

Resources

If you are interested in learning more about Passover:

- ***Our church will host a Passover Seder (commemorative dinner) on April 17. The Haggadah (like an “Order of Service”) that we use is very inspiring and informative; a copy could be obtained from Rev. Lilia Cuervo.***
- A layperson’s explanation of Passover history and ritual can be found at www.angelfire.com/pa2/passover
- The TIKKUN reading was taken from the “TIKKUN Passover Supplement 2002” (Adobe PDF format) available on the TIKKUN website.