

## Passover and Freedom

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For Jews, Passover is a “feast of freedom.” For Christians in America, especially Evangelical Christians, Passover represents rebirth and resurrection. Whether The Last Supper was a Passover Seder remains a historical debate. What is clear is that both great religions celebrated Passover as a time of departing from tyranny and entering a place of physical as well as spiritual freedom.

Passover is so rich with imagery and meaning that it has become, for the majority of Jews, the quintessential family celebration. The order of the Seder, called the Haggadah, has been published in dozens of languages in thousands of different forms. One of the unique qualities of the Seder is that it can be performed by laypeople in the comfort of one’s individual castle, the home. While in modern times it has become more common to celebrate Seders at the Synagogue, it is still a holiday encouraging innovation. In most Jewish homes throughout history, the Passover Seder made the home an individual sanctuary.

So great is the power of Passover that the Founders of America saw themselves as Hebrew slaves coming to the Promised Land. None other than Benjamin Franklin wanted the seal of the United States to reflect Moses splitting the Red Sea. While the Passover Haggadah is full of miracles, challenges and triumphs, it is above all else a connection between the eternal people and truths which have withstood the test of time.

The Haggadah recites that in every generation a tyrant will arise to destroy the people of the Book. Today, we see terrorist groups and demonic nations thirst for the blood of Israel. Fifty-seven (57) nations in the United Nations control the so-called non-aligned block. This enables the United Nations to become the tool for those with minds that hate rather than an instrument for peace and stability in the world.

We are told by the Rabbis of the Talmud, the authoritative interpretive work of the Jewish people, that the Jews were saved at the Red Sea because of the merit of the women. It was the women in Egypt who saved the babies from the royal decree to kill the males. It was Miriam’s well that followed the people for 40 years of wandering that nurtured the former slaves. We learn in the Talmud that the women refused to permit their gold jewelry to be used in the creation of the Golden Calf; rather, it was seized from them. The Haggadah is therefore to some as a feminist book, to others a liberal creed, and there are even those who see it as vengeful. We read at the end of the Seder, “Pour out thy wrath upon the nations that know thee not.” In many Seders, particularly on the college campus, these words are strangely omitted. After all, who has more reason to be angry at mistreatment than the Jewish people? Every form of torture and malice, not to mention outright murder, that the world has ever invented has been utilized against the Jewish people.

At the same time the Passover Festival is a time of forgiving, and an opportunity to disregard one's own personal "chometz." For those of a spiritual turn of mind, getting rid of wheat products before the start of the holiday is analogous to disregarding one's own negative attributes.

Each family and each community will celebrate Passover differently. There will be those who remember that Passover was originally the beginning of the new year. It is still an opportunity for renewal, rebirth and regeneration. As my late mother used to say at the time of Passover housecleaning, "Clean your room and clean your mind." I am not sure that either one was cleaned as well as it should have been, but the message was not lost or forgotten in our household.

As we drink our four cups of wine, we will note the one for Elijah, the prophet who will usher in the Messianic age. In Judaism, the Messiah does not follow war and Armageddon. Rather, in the Jewish tradition the Messiah will come to a world perfected by mankind. Our wisdom and literature teaches that each brick upon which the Messiah will walk represents a good deed performed by us. We have to make our homes, our community and our country a place where the divine spirit would want to dwell.

Regardless of one's religion, the Passover season can be enjoyed by anyone who believes that there is an important connection between release of egocentric beliefs and a better, more fair world. The freedom that we talk about on Passover needs to be replicated throughout the year. In coming out of slavery in Egypt, we hopefully will all enter a nation in which tolerance is a religious obligation wed to a political mandate. Whether your feast is an Easter dinner or Passover Seder, we need to remember that our job is to collect the sparks of goodness around us and to appreciate that the journey from slavery to freedom is trod by those with the will and self-discipline to make the journey.

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