

Making *Pesach* Meaningful Beyond the *Seder* Experience

As you opened this email, it is safe to say that the *sederot* are a thing of the past. Some of us may have one more lingering for out-of-town guest who could not be here or for friends who made Seder with family but now have time to make it with families-of-choice. For most of us, *Hagadot* have been emptied of *matzah* crumb and packed away. Dishes have been cleaned and stacked. What is left for many of us are focusing on what we can eat and what we shouldn't eat for another few days. But there is something MORE that we can capture over these intermediate days, known as *Chol Moed Pesach*. Rabbi Lauren Tuchman defines the holy days as a chance to move spiritually and temporarily from "degradation to praise." She notes that we don't really recount, we experience the Exodus from Egypt. Playing with the Hebrew word for Egypt as *Mitzrayim*, she feels that we move from a narrowness [*Min-Tzar*] to a wide expanse. We are not onlookers, but ones who participate/experience/journey.

Rabbi Tuchman writes: "In *Mishnah Pesachim* 10:5, it is taught that in every generation every single one of us is obligated to see ourselves as though we too went out from Egypt. We are not only recounting the story.... We are part of the holy collectivity."

Now is the time to move beyond our narrow mindedness and expand into the creative realm of what we can potentially be. We do so communally as we open the door for Elijah to usher in a different, more sacred age. We do so by starting to count the *Omer* to mark our journey to the Revelation of Torah on *Shavuot*. We do so within ourselves as we focus not on a myopic trend that yields self-centeredness or arrogance but what we can be! As our people transformed from slaves into free-people, we too can shed the shackles that binds us to bad behavior or self-absorbed personas.

Noam Elimelech is a third generation Chasid, a student of the chief disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov—the *Magid* of Mezeritch. He wrote a pamphlet called *Tzeitel Katan* [which means small pamphlet in Yiddish]. In it he wrote: "when a bad trait begins to develop within you, such as arrogance or false modesty, immediately recite the names of the seven Canaanite nations who sought to destroy Israel and you will be saved. You will realize that Israel needs to push back against those who destroy us and those are not just our enemy nations but *yetzer harah* [the evil impulses] that exists within us...." For Rabbi Elimelech, *mitzrayim* is a narrowness within us that can control us, preventing us from reaching our fullest divine potential. RaSHI noted that the same style of bricks that built the store cities in Egypt, were used to build

the Tower of Babel which is the symbol of our arrogance when our ancestors thought they could reach God.

In the Talmud [Tractate Sotah], we read a *midrash* about “little” Mount Sinai and the “little” burning bush. God could have chosen a bigger mountain and a sturdier tree, but the Holy One chose one who demonstrated humility by not boasting about being the biggest or the strongest. Modesty is a great virtue--- it brings our arrogance into check.

How do we make that transition from *Mitzrayim*/a narrow place into *Rakiah*/a wide expanse? Start with viewing a spiritual life not as a passive encounter. Like our *sederot*, don’t view life as a rote recitation of daily activities. Find a new challenge each day to broaden your sense of being. See that everyone you encounter as one created in the Divine image and must have something worthy of praise that you notice. Keep your anger in check but defining overarching sanctity of an encounter, one that will shift a need to degrade but instead praise with true sincerity. Finally—remember the balance between a sense of real importance and the fact that one day each living thing will die. Balance these thoughts constantly in your mind’s eye—

Pesach is a journey that starts at the *seder* table but does not end when the books are gone and the guests leave. It continues for 8 days, then for the days of the *Omer*, then unto *Shavuot*, and then... well, it never stops!

Chag Same’ach!