

FROM RABBI RICK RHEINS, OUR LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH PESACH

Recently, at an Introduction To Judaism (ITJ*) class at Temple Sinai, an Orthodox Rabbi and I taught those interested in becoming Jewish. He described one of the significant differences between Reform Judaism and Orthodox Judaism in this way: “For Orthodox and very observant Conservative Jews, when someone mentions Pesach (Passover), they instinctively cringe. Oy, the work involved in this Holiday! The cleaning, the careful removal of the chumetz, the slaving over unusual dishes made with difficult ingredients and, less we forget --- the seder that lasts into the wee hours of the morning. Oy and double Oy! But for my Reform Jewish friends? Well, mention Passover to them and they are all smiles. A great feast, a fun seder, not too long, not too strict, and yummy foods. So, in a nutshell, that’s the difference between Orthodox and Reform Judaism.”

Of course, my Orthodox friend and colleague was exaggerating (a bit) but it is worth mentioning that Passover, the traditional reason and purpose for this time-honored festival is and should always be joy.

For many of us, the warm and wonderful Passover seders of our childhood are among our earliest and most cherished memories. We remember crowded tables and rich smells, our Bubbe’s and Zayde’s loving looks, the excitement of participating in the reading of the Haggadah, finding the Afikomen, singing Dayenu, our first taste of sweet Kosher wine, putting our fingers in that wine and making drops on our plates during the recitation of the plagues and being amazed that we were supposed to put our fingers in the wine!

Indeed, Pesach was truly not like any other night. We dunked parsley in salt water, ate matzah, imagined ourselves freed from Egyptian slavery, and glowed in the blessing of our Jewish heritage. That’s why Passover has always been my favorite Festival. Indeed, I always find it a bit startling to hear some people say that they “hate Pesach.” How could they? I ask and probe and discover that they never experienced a joyous Passover with engaging and exotic rituals. Rather, they told me about the endless drudgery of fanatical cleaning. They regaled me with painful memories of how the Haggadah was read by only one man, the family patriarch or a self-appointed maven who droned incoherently in mumbled Hebrew and made little effort to encourage others to participate. They shocked me with tales of mere gluttony, tables loaded with food, but no time or interest in a Seder. They shared horror stories about misbehaving kids and adults who mocked and talked and robbed the Passover of meaning. No wonder these people hate Passover! What a shame that they have never experienced a real one!

Passover is not about “spring cleaning.” Yes, we clear the house of chametz (leavened products), but the Torah does not command us to clean the garage, the gutters and wash the base boards! Don’t wear yourselves out. Focus your energies on the true purpose of Pesach. Passover is about engaging the children and the whole family in the telling of the story of our redemption from Egypt. The entire Seder is

designed to provoke questions and commentary and stories. Take turns reading, pre-assign parts, plant surprises, remember that the mitzvah is in the telling.

To help make this year's Seder a joyous celebration, I am offering a special class on Sunday, March 25 at 9AM to review the fundamentals of a Passover Seder and strategies for making this year's Seder engaging, meaningful, and fun. Also know that Temple Sinai has a full schedule of Passover services to offer you and your loved ones. We are offering a 2nd night Passover Seder at Temple Sinai so that no one will be without a Passover experience. Though there is a fee that will be charged to off-set the cost of the Seder, no one will be turned away who cannot afford it. Please call me personally and I will guarantee you confidential financial help to ensure that you and your family have a place at our Temple Sinai 2nd night Seder. As a people we went forth from slavery to freedom together. So let no one in this community spend this year's Passover alone.

*God willing, this year each of us will say,
"I love Passover."*

Chag Sameiach,
Rick
Rabbi Rick Rheins

*ITJ is the Denver Jewish community's course for those interested in converting to Judaism and/or becoming more familiar with Jewish thought, history and practice. Temple Sinai is one of the co-hosts for these classes which have taught well-over a thousand students over the recent decades.