

Passover Reflections

Not everyone will be able to celebrate Passover this year with friends and family in a home environment. For those facing the holiday in a hospital bed, away from home, the imagery of liberation and the yearning for an exodus from struggle and oppression may hold new meaning.

-- adapted from The Spirit of Passover (Haggadah), Bay Area Jewish Healing Center

Everyone present at the Passover seder is commanded to see themselves as slaves in Egypt, to live and relive the experience of the Exodus, to feel both the terror and exhilaration as we start out on a journey into the unknown wilderness. Passover eve is a night of waiting, a time of anticipation. Who of us knows where or how the journey will end?

For those who are ill or in pain, Pesach can take on a bittersweet meaning. Illness is, in itself, a journey into the unknown wilderness—the past when we enjoyed good health is easy to recall, the present is often difficult, and the future can loom as an abyss. Being sick can mean that we are always in Egypt, always wandering in the desert, that we cannot find our way into the Promised Land. Just like the ancient Israelites, I'm not sure I want to go on this trip that was certainly not my idea. How can I think of liberation when my body is enslaved by pain? Why do I feel that the ten plagues were visited upon me, and not the Egyptians? How can I feel redeemed from bondage when illness is ever present? With illness as a cruel and demanding taskmaster, can I still savor the meaning of freedom? When we arrive at Sinai for the giving of the Torah, will I be able to stand there and watch the miracle?

Yet I know that even as matzah is the bread of affliction, it is also the bread of redemption, for it holds out the promise that, like our ancestors, we can anticipate the exhilaration of spiritual freedom even in the midst of physical bondage. As we sit together each year at the seder table and recite these words which link us to every generation, we can draw strength from one another to relive the past, to be here in the present, and to make our way into the future. Somehow, this helps to turn the night of waiting into a time of gathering strength for whatever lies ahead. In one way or another, I know that I will be standing there at Sinai.

-- Dr. Tamara Green, Reprinted with permission from *The Outstretched Arm*, Issue II, Spring 1999/5759

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