



## PASSOVER – INVITING NEW CONSCIOUSNESS?

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Passover invites freedom from a narrow consciousness. I'm not Jewish but the rituals and journey of Passover restore my balance while wondrously disrupting my spiritual positioning system because it points to freedom from those things that constrain us from being fully alive.

For many Jews, Christians and others, the story of the people of Israel fleeing oppression in Egypt is a touchstone of the narrative in the arc of human freedom. It was a unifying metaphor in the Civil Rights movement, giving sustenance to those on the ground. The Exodus narrative shaped the movement in claiming the higher moral ground of inclusion.

Some commentators have sought to explain the movements for freedom in the Middle East by attempting to connect those aspirations to the arc of the Passover story. It is too early to tell whether the higher moral ground of inclusion will shape the Arab Spring's steps toward freedom. The Passover story led to decades of being in a literal and figurative wilderness. The birthing of a new consciousness is always accompanied by birth pains.

Sustainable freedom engages the questions of what we want to be freed from and what we seek freedom for. The last six decades are replete with triumphant liberation movements resulting in one form of tyranny or repression being replaced by another. Clarity about "freedom from" without imagining "freedom for" is not freedom. It is often an abusive rearrangement of privilege and power. The Civil Rights movement was liberation from Jim Crow laws so that freedom for realizing equality could be created. It was an invitation to a new consciousness about being fully alive for all.

The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzrayim* meaning a narrow or constrained place. The mystics teach that the liberation of the Hebrew people is a metaphor for becoming free of a small vision of you. The destination of that vision is not the solitary you or me. The purpose is to recognize the sacred in others. In this the particularity of the Exodus is an awakening to those things that keep us from oneness with others.

This is the consciousness that leads many Jews to speak of repairing the world – *tikkun olam*. It is the practice of connecting the dots between your personal spiritual grounding and living it out with actions. The Hebrew prophet Micah describes these actions as doing justice, loving mercy and walking lightly or humbly on your journey. I call it polishing the world.

Preparing for my own observance of Passover I'm aware of my frustration and indignation about a few things. I'm saddened by the national politics of a Presidential campaign that speaks of unifying people but in practice creates fault lines between people as if to enclose us from one another. I also have a visceral physical response to the stories of young girls and boys purchased to be slaves in the sex industry. The scale of this human trafficking, abroad and in the USA, makes my mind reel with questions about law enforcement and ending this new slavery.

I could choose to remain constrained by stewing or muttering about those two issues. My Passover practice is to choose to be informed and then act to make my voice heard about human trafficking and recommitting to bridge building that seeks commonality between people. Every action will join with those of others in collectively polishing the world. It is about freedom from devaluing the lives of some in order to give way to freedom for oneness expressed in honoring the humanity of those deemed different or disposable.

My own vision of my self becomes more fulsome in discovering I am one with you, with others. In the Passover story Yahweh did not talk in the abstract about freedom. It was freedom yearned for in the pickle that was Egypt. Liberation from injustice was the presenting cry but moving beyond the physical constraints was about freedom to create a new narrative of what it meant to be a people.

Passover invites me to pay attention to my place within the narrative of spiritual consciousness. My own liberation from the narrow places in my life shifts my spiritual positioning system. Every Passover that attentiveness shift invites me to polish the world in unexpected ways that disrupt the assumed routines of my life.

Freedom, liberation and exodus from Egypt did not come without courage, disruption and surprises. Our own freedom is discovered in the new consciousness of oneness with others.