

When the Sea Has Not Yet Parted

A Passover Reflection from Rabbi Weiner

Each year, as Passover approaches, I find myself returning to the same question: how do we speak of redemption in difficult and unsettled times? By redemption, we do not mean something mystical or distant, but the stubborn belief that change is possible — that the world as it is can move closer to the world as it should be. We sit at our Seder tables, surrounded by symbols of affliction and redemption, and we tell a story of liberation as if it is happening now. “In every generation,” we say, “each person must see themselves as if they personally went out from Egypt.”

And yet, some years those words feel harder to say than others.

The world does not always look redeemed. Our nation faces political and social strife. Our Jewish community carries its own unique challenges and concerns. Our families shoulder private burdens. We know too well that history does not move in a straight line from darkness to light. Sometimes it feels as if we are standing not at the far shore of the sea, but still somewhere between Pharaoh and freedom, with the waters not yet parted.

And still, we tell the story.

Passover has been celebrated in times far more uncertain than our own. Jews have gathered for Seders in lands of exile, in hiding, in ghettos and displaced persons camps, in moments when redemption felt impossibly distant. They ate matzah that was truly the bread of affliction. They asked the Four Questions with trembling voices. And they concluded, stubbornly and defiantly, “Next year in Jerusalem.”

That is not naïve optimism. It is covenantal hope.

The Torah does not present redemption as easy. The Israelites leave Egypt physically, but emotionally they are still learning how to be free, a process that I have come to understand that no community or nation ever truly masters. They panic at the sea. They complain in the wilderness. Freedom

is not a single moment of triumph; it is a long and uneven journey. The narrow place —*Mitzrayim* (Egypt)— does not release its grip all at once.

Perhaps that is why the Haggadah insists we see ourselves in the story. Because we know what it is to move forward while still carrying fear. We know what it is to hope and doubt in the same breath. We know that redemption rarely arrives fully formed. More often, it unfolds in small steps: in courage gathered quietly, in faith practiced imperfectly, in kindness extended even when we ourselves feel depleted. Holiness, after all, is not only in the heavens. It is woven into the everyday.

Passover does not ask us to deny the brokenness of the world. It places *maror*, the bitter herbs on our Seder plate and tells us to taste them. It commands us to remember suffering. But it does not allow bitterness to have the final word. We dip the *maror* into sweet *charoset* not to erase the pain, but to remind ourselves that sweetness and sorrow coexist, and that even in hard seasons, something redemptive can take root and grow.

Judaism teaches that hope is not passive. It is not waiting for miracles. It is the quiet, steady refusal to surrender to despair. It is choosing to open the door for Elijah even when the world feels closed. It is feeding the hungry before we begin our own meal. It is feeling the pain of others, even our enemies, whether ancient or current. It is telling our children that change is possible and then living in a way that makes that promise credible.

Each mitzvah is a chance to begin again.

This year, as we gather around our Seder tables, perhaps we might ask not only, “What does this story mean?” but “What would it mean for us to embody it?” Where are the narrow places in our own lives that require courage? Where can we be agents of redemption for someone else? Where can we take even one small step toward the freedom we pray for?

We may not control the larger tides of history. But we can contribute to the moral excellence of our homes, our synagogue, our community, and our world. We can practice integrity when it is easier to look away. We can choose compassion when cynicism would be simpler. We can hold fast to one another when the world feels unsteady.

For generations, our people have told the unique Passover story and found strength in it. Not because every generation saw immediate redemption, but because every generation held on to the belief that redemption was possible.

May this Passover renew in us that stubborn, sacred hope. May it give us the courage to walk forward even before the sea has fully parted. And may we merit to see, in our time, days of greater peace, deeper compassion, and a world more worthy of the freedom we celebrate.

Chag Pesach Sameach - I wish our entire community a joyous Passover.

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