

Rabbi Lewis' Message for April, 2011

I can usually manage to put off thinking about Passover until the day after Purim. Then all my thinking shifts to what lies ahead. Pesach preparation takes some time and involves even daily food shopping. The questions begin before we ever get to the 4 questions asked at the seder itself: Shall I buy that box of cereal now or will I have to throw it out if I don't finish it before Passover? When will I do my Passover cleaning, shopping and cooking? Who is coming to seder this year? What recipes should I use if I have guests who are vegetarian, ovo-lactarian or vegan? And finally: Which haggadah should I use?

For years, my family has used a cut-and-paste haggadah taken from many sources. Its origin stems from pre-computer days, so the cut-and-paste is quite literal. I aspire to put it all on the computer some day. It has become quite unwieldy, but I just buy bigger binders. What is worse is that I can't resist adding to it. There are new traditions to incorporate and ever-changing ways of understanding freedom. I share with you one of mine, adapted from the Ma'yan Passover Haggadah.

MIRIAM'S CUP

In every generation, our people have added new traditions to their Seders. Tonight we add Miriam's Cup in addition to that of Elijah. The Midrash tells us that Miriam's Well moved with the Jewish people from place to place as our ancestors traversed the desert after the Exodus. Miriam's Cup is a symbol of our past redemption, when our people were brought out of Egypt and delivered from slavery. Elijah's Cup, which we will speak of at the end of the Seder, represents our future redemption, looking forward to the Messianic age when peace will fill the world.

Miriam's Well was said to hold Divine power to heal and renew. It became a special source of transformation for a people seeking to leave slavery behind them and form a new identity. Throughout our journey as a people, we have sought to rediscover these living waters for ourselves. We remember the sustenance and renewal of God's gift to Miriam with this cup of clear well water, a reminder of the living waters of Miriam's Well.

Tonight at our Seder, let us remember that we are still on the journey. Just as the Holy One delivered Miriam and her people, just as they were sustained in the desert and transformed until they became a new people, so may we be delivered, sustained and transformed on our journey to a stronger sense of ourselves as individuals and as one people. May the Cup of Miriam nourish us and give us inspiration as we embark on our journey through the Haggadah.

Miriam's cup is to be filled with well water. As our ancestors gained physical and spiritual nourishment from the waters of her well, so may we continue to gain strength. We fill her cup now with the waters of our own spirit. Praised are You, Adonai, Who brings us from the narrow places into the wilderness, sustains us with endless possibilities and enables us to reach a new place.

Whatever the new traditions we might incorporate, the goal of the seder and the eternal message of Passover remain the same. Bechol dor va'dor - in every generation, we are obligated to see ourselves as if we personally had gone forth from Egypt. We were slaves in Egypt. With divine intervention, we experienced redemption from that servitude. We now relive the experience in our seders as we move from the degradation of slavery to the freedom we enjoy. Why remember a time that was so bitter? So that, no matter where we live, we can always be voices for freedom in our world.

Have a zissen Pesach, full of sweetness and family.

Rabbi Lewis