

Subject: Jewish Holidays

The story of Exodus is one of the most beautiful stories in the Bible. Now you all know that we, as Religious Scientists, look at the Old Testament as being filled with meaning in our own personal lives, and so does Judaism. The story is a personal story of a movement from slavery into freedom. It is even said in the Haggadah, which is the book that is used during the Passover Seder, "In every generation one must look upon him or herself as having come out of Egypt." This is our story! The Hebrew word for Egypt is Mitzrayim, which means a narrow place. And so we can feel the exodus of our own experience when we move from the narrow places in our lives and in our consciousness and into a greater sense of freedom.

According to Rambam, who was a 12th Century sage:

A slave is someone that is forced to do the bidding of others rather than be free to do as he or she chooses.

We become slaves to our own passions and desires when we are forced to do the bidding of the objects all around us. We want a more beautiful house, a more beautiful car or to go on a vacation; and, therefore, we are forced to work much harder in order to afford all these additional luxuries in life. We are then considered enslaved to our constant worldly pleasures.

So this is a time, during Passover, that we remember to make decisions to experience a more personal sense of freedom, of liberation from the enslavement by the things we possess so that we aren't possessed by them, and also of the choices we make, and to re-connect with what our true purpose is, to be the vehicles for the expression of God, and as the Kabbalah puts it, to raise sparks of holy light to bring "Tikkun Olam", the repair of the world.

So you all know the story of Passover, right? It's very difficult to find a beginning to this story. Some begin with the decree of the Pharaoh that the Hebrew male babies be killed. And some take it further back, to Joseph's arrival in Egypt generations earlier, because it was because of his dream interpretation skills that Egypt had food during a great famine, and many Hebrew people came there (and that's why there were so many Hebrews that the pharaoh felt threatened and made slaves of them). Well, of course Joseph has his own story, which you may know from the coat of many colors....and we can go backwards in time as far as we want.

So let's start with the decree. The Pharaoh decreed that all male babies born to the Hebrew slaves were to be killed. Moses' mother and sister placed him in a basket, sent him down the Nile, and he was found by Pharaoh's daughter who claimed him as her own. She named him Moses because it means drawn from the water. Moses' own mother became his nursemaid, and he was raised as a

prince in Egypt. At one point he saw a slave being mistreated and in a fit of anger he killed the man who was beating the slave. He escaped to Midian where he married Zipporah, daughter of Jethro, and he became a shepherd. While walking with his flock he noticed a bush that was burning and was not consumed. As he watched it, he heard a voice calling, "Moses, Moses". This voice has called him twice! Metaphysically, when something is said once it has no extraordinary meaning. But if it is said twice, it is a deeper level of calling. Moses is receiving a calling at this point. He is told to take off his sandals because the ground upon which he stands is holy ground.

Well I don't know about you, but in today's world what would you do if you saw a bush that was burning? Would you even wait to see if it was being consumed? It took a quiet mind to be still long enough to notice this... I think we'd stomp it out or call 9-1-1 before we took the time to notice that it wasn't being burned to the ground.

There's a 9-1-1 humorous dialogue you can use here if it fits for you
:
Here's what a call like that might have been if it happened today:

DISPATCHER -- 911 Emergency. How may I help you?

MOSES ----- Uh, yeah, ah, I'd like to report a fire?

DISPATCHER -- Is a structure fire or a brush fire, sir?

MOSES ----- It's just one bush.

DISPATCHER -- This is a joke isn't it, sir? Well, we've all had a good laugh...

MOSES ----- No! There really is a bush on fire!

DISPATCHER -- For the record sir, may I have your name?

MOSES ----- Um, my name. My name is **MOSES**.

DISPATCHER -- Well, Mr. **MOSES** tell me about this bush that is on fire.

MOSES -----The bush told you to take off my sandals.

DISPATCHER -- Are you all alone?

MOSES ----- Well, I'm not ALL alone. I'm a shepherd. My sheep are here. But they're no help at all. In fact, you should smell what they did when the burning bush started to talk.

DISPATCHER -- of course, the burning bush was talking. Is it talking to you right now, Mr. **MOSES**?

MOSES ----- Well, actually, yes, it is.

DISPATCHER -- And what is the bush saying, sir?

MOSES ----- The bush is telling me to go see Pharaoh.

DISPATCHER -- Well, I'm sure he'd love to see a Hebrew sheep herder with a burning bush.

MOSES ----- I know Pharaoh personally.

DISPATCHER -- I'm sure.

MOSES ----- I could have been the next Pharaoh myself.

DISPATCHER -- Well, you would have had my vote, Mr. **MOSES**. By the way, the burning bush isn't telling you to harm the Pharaoh in any way, is it, Mr. **MOSES**?

MOSES ----- No, I just have to ask him to let my people go.

DISPATCHER--- Go where?

MOSES ----- Through the Red Sea.

DISPATCHER -- You did say THROUGH the Red Sea?

MOSES ----- Yeah, then wait on the other side for further instructions.

DISPATCHER -- Well, I hope the bush doesn't keep you waiting long, Mr. **MOSES**. It's a barren desert on the other side of the Red Sea.

MOSES ----- We'll be there forty years.

DISPATCHER -- And what makes you think Pharaoh will let your people go on a forty year vacation, Mr. **MOSES**?

MOSES ----- Once he sees me turn my walking stick into a snake he'll be convinced.

DISPATCHER -- Well, that would convince me.

MOSES --- hmmm.....I think I'll include this incident in my second book.

DISPATCHER -- Your SECOND book.

MOSES ----- Yes, I'm going to call it Exodus.

DISPATCHER -- So, you're a sheep herder and an author?

MOSES ---- Listen, I'd love to tell you about it, but I have a long trip ahead of me. I have to go now.

DISPATCHER -- Well, have a nice trip, Mr. **MOSES**. And if you don't mind, I'll just call ahead and warn them ...eh, let them know that you're coming. Oh, and give my best to the burning bush.

So Moses returned to the Pharaoh, and miracles happened. He turned the water of the Nile to blood, and when Pharaoh still wouldn't let his people go there were plagues of frogs, insects, cattle disease, hail, locusts, darkness, but the final plague, the 10th plague, was the slaying of the firstborn child of the Egyptian people.

Now there's a balance here. The pharaoh who had decreed the death of the male babies of the Hebrew slaves lost his own son to this plague. What he had decreed upon others was done unto him. Cause and effect.

Finally the Hebrew people were released, they were able to cross the Reed Sea, and wandered through the desert for 40 years, they received the 10 Commandments, and ended up in the Land of Milk and Honey.

I'd like to add one little side-note here: For those of you who have never been to a Passover Seder, the evening is spent re-telling this story in a way that it is internalized, where it is physically taken in through the foods that are eaten.

One thing that we are trying to develop in our New Thought communities is meaningful ritual. So during this Seder evening of ritual, each part of the story is represented by a type of food. Just one example of the many things that happen during the Passover Seder is that a drop of wine or grape juice is taken out of our full glass for each plague that the Egyptians had to experience in order for the Hebrew people to be free. It is said that our full cup is lessened by their experience. This is not a time to celebrate their hardship and loss. There is a beautiful midrash, or parable, of this part of the story that says when the Hebrew people crossed through to the other side of the sea, the angels sang and danced for joy. And God stopped them saying, "Can't you see that my children are drowning?"

The story of Exodus is about personal power and freedom. The movement from slavery into freedom is obviously represented in the story. And we consciously use this metaphor to remind ourselves of a great opportunity to remember our

own freedom. But where does the idea of power show up? Is it in turning the water to blood? Is it in the slaying of the first born?

The power in this story is within Moses himself, when he has a shift in his own consciousness. He had not wanted to take on this job. Don't forget, he had murdered an Egyptian, and the Pharaoh was not likely to be happy to see him. He was filled with doubt about his own ability. Have you ever had that feeling? Where you were compelled or called to a task that you weren't sure that you could handle?

Well, here was Moses, filled with those same feelings. And the power in this story is when he gave up all of his self-doubts and trusted God to express through him. What an enormous task!

And the wonderful thing about this character, Moses, even though he was raised in the Egyptian monarchy, he is really an **ordinary character**, like you and me. He is not the Charlton Heston character in the movie Exodus, he is a man who is a simple shepherd, who has a speech defect. In fact, he may have been chosen so that people would not believe that Moses was a dynamic leader so that they could see God's hand in this.

When he is called to leadership, his reply is "who, me? I can't do that. I'm not capable". But God reminds him that he has given Moses his brother Aaron to support him. Aaron's name means "strength". And it was through the process of liberating the Hebrew people, Moses grows into leadership.

Moses as a you-and-me kind of person...not a flashy leader.

Aren't we all Moses, in our own way? We all have our Aarons that show up to support us, no matter what it is that we have been called to do. And we all have the potential to be grown into leadership. And just like Moses, our job is what Jews refer to as Tikkun Olam, the healing of the world.

(Slowly):

It is within each one of us, as we move through our "I can'ts" and "Why me's" and say, "Here I am, God. Live through me. Do your greatest work that you can do through me. I am here.

(with emphasis):

"I have taken off my shoes, for this place upon which I stand is truly holy ground."

Shalom Aleichem...may you experience peace.