

On Passover, family and friends retell the story of the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt 3,300 years ago, after hundreds of years of slavery.

HOLIDAY INSIGHTS

**HAPPY
PASSOVER!**



INTERNAL PHARAOHS

Often we think of slavery only in its *concrete* dimension – being physically oppressed by an evil tyrant, being imprisoned. However, there is another kind of slavery that so many of us experience: the bondage to our *internal* Pharaohs. These are not wicked taskmasters who oppress us.

Rather, these Pharaohs are in our psyches and manifest themselves in many self-destructive forms: low self-esteem, fear of the unknown, addictions, bad habits, and more.

By courageously freeing ourselves from internal prisons that lead us to despair about the possibility of change, we are able to live healthier, more fulfilling lives.

FEELING AND EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

One popular song during the *seder* (service) is *Dayenu* (it would have been enough). But would it really have been enough if, as the song says, G-d had split the sea for us but not led us through on dry land? In his commentary on the Haggadah (story of the Exodus), *From Bondage to Freedom*, Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski offers beautiful insight into this song's important lesson: "We must learn to be grateful for every favor we receive, even if at the moment we cannot see its ultimate good. As we advance in spirituality, we should advance in acknowledging the kindnesses we receive, and promptly express our gratitude for them."

COMPASSION

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in his commentary of the Haggadah, talks about the Jewish people's responsibility to have compassion for the weak and vulnerable: "The Torah leaves no doubt whatsoever as to the lesson Israel was to learn from this formative experience [slavery and dehumanization in Egypt], stating it no less than 36 times: You shall love the stranger, because you know what it feels like to be a stranger. You shall protect and respect one who is different, for you, more than any other people on earth, know what it is to be different."

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SENSITIVITY TO SUFFERING OF THE EGYPTIANS

In his commentary on the Haggadah, Elie Wiesel cites a *Midrash* (rabbinic commentary) about the crossing of the Red Sea, addressing how *not* to respond when our enemy is suffering: “The Children of Israel are saved at the last moment, while their oppressors drown before their eyes. It is a moment of grace so extraordinary that the angels themselves begin to sing, but G-d interrupts and scolds them: What has come over you? My creatures are drowning in the sea and you are singing? How can you praise me with your hymns at a time when human beings are dying?”

MEMORY

One famous line at the end of the Haggadah is “In every generation one must look upon himself or herself as if he or she had personally left Egypt.” For Jewish people, Passover is not ancient history; rather, it is a memory, something from the past that lives on as an integral part of who they are now. At the Passover *seder*, Jewish people taste the harshness of slavery by eating bitter herbs and dipping food in salt water, symbolic of the Jewish people’s tears, along with many other such rituals. This is done to make the story vivid by *experiencing* the memory, not just *reciting* the story.

There are many traditions in preparing for Passover and celebrating this Festival of Freedom. If you would like more information about these traditions, please visit hofstrahillel.org/vje.



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THINGS TO DO:

- ▶ **Think about one internal Pharaoh and work toward liberating yourself from it.**
- ▶ **Celebrate new beginnings.**
- ▶ **Make simple acts of kindness a part of your daily life.**
- ▶ **Get involved in organizations that help alleviate human suffering, work for justice, and enhance human dignity.**
- ▶ **Express appreciation more often.**
- ▶ **Write a thank-you note to someone who has had a meaningful impact on your life; consider delivering it in person.**