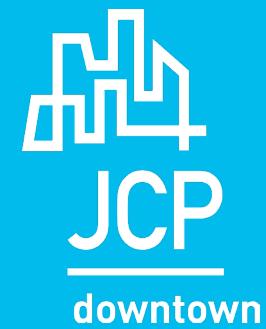


PASSOVER HAGGADAH SUPPLEMENT

Thoughts & Reflections



GIVEN ALL THAT WE'VE LIVED
THROUGH SINCE MARCH 2020, HOW
HAS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF
THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM
CHANGED OVER THE PAST YEAR?

This past year we had our physical freedom restricted by external forces, which was an entirely new experience for most members of our community. But this time showed us that even with these limitations, **freedom can be something of a state of mind.** We had to push through to find our own freedom. And where one kind was impossible — going out and about, visiting in-person with extended family and friends — another version presented itself. With so much time to spend at home, we had freedom to be with our immediate families and grow even more deeply connected. Through technology, we found a way to fight isolation, to connect and gather, albeit virtually, and we chose to make it a priority. Latching on to this limited freedom and choosing to live in a meaningful and connected way amidst so many barriers — both physical and mental — empowered us, and, as an added bonus, gave us an even greater appreciation for the importance of human interaction, community, friends and family.

So this past year, our concept of freedom hasn't really changed. Maybe it actually has expanded, to include ideas that once would have seemed unimaginable. Of course we still would rather live entirely freely, subject to our own decisions about when and where to go and with whom to spend time. But understanding that agency over our choices and freedom can be found even under some tighter conditions makes us feel hopeful that freedom still exists even if it feels constricted.

- Stacy Pollack, Board President

Freedom
Is a word we all want
Sometimes we taunt
Because we don't have the justice
That is against us
Birds migrate when they feel too cold
People want to migrate when they feel too much coldness
in their body from hate
We want to escape
Hide in a cape
Wrecked from fights
Blacked out cities
Damaged lights
But freedom is a thing we all want
And we shall receive it

- Zara Wierzbowski, Middle School Student

Passover is a story about freedom. It is also a story about reckoning. For 40 years, the Jews wandered the wilderness before they found freedom. For 40 years, they reckoned with God and their surroundings; they reckoned with each other and with themselves. It's the reckoning part that fills the pages of Exodus because, as this last year has reminded us, it's the reckoning that freedom requires. It's the moment when the Jews escape Pharaoh's army in that dramatic, seemingly climactic scene on the shores of the Red Sea, only to realize that wasn't actually the climax of the story. There was still a long way to go. That's when their journey to freedom deepens because that's when their reckoning begins. Consider the chance, as Jews and as Americans, for reckoning again. Not a moment, not a quick escape to the land of milk and honey, but **an entire journey, an entire generation of reflection and work and struggle** for us and the stranger to find true and lasting freedom together.

- Drew Warshaw, Community Member

In the last year, I realized just how much **I took various aspects of freedom for granted**. The freedom to spend time with people; the freedom to go where I want to go.

I also learned of a different freedom. The freedom to sit still, to not live at a frantic pace. To be slow and to be present.

I painfully grappled with the lack of freedom that so many people experience based on the color of their skin.

And I gratefully appreciated the freedom we have to express ourselves, to dream and to hope.

- Rebecca Wertkin, Community Member

Those who don't want to wear masks during this pandemic often invoke the concept of freedom to justify their choice. I'm sure many of us have read about, or spoken with, folks who say: "It's a free country, which means no one can tell me what to do. If I don't want to wear a mask, I don't have to."

I think that we, as a nation, need to complicate the idea of freedom. It can't be as simple as the permission to do whatever we want, whenever we want. Think about the Passover story. God and Moses work together so that the Israelites can leave the institution of slavery behind. Once they cross the Red Sea, they are free people, able to do whatever they please with no taskmaster to stop them. But God knows that freedom without boundaries is dangerous, so God gives the Torah to the Israelites. This sacred text, with its rules and laws, serves as a moral container for their newfound freedom. The purpose of God-given freedom is not to permit all action, but rather **to build a society where we take care of each other** and in which we can all be proud to live.

- Rabbi Deena Gottlieb

I always understood freedom as one end of a binary. On one side we have biblical slavery in Egypt, or slavery in America from 1619-1865, and on the other we have freedom. Since March 2020, however, living through a pandemic and a nation-wide response to systemic racism, I've learned that **the spectrum between slavery and freedom contains much smaller gradations**. For the Israelites, that looks like wandering the desert before receiving Torah, lost and recovering from 430 years in Egypt, physically free but searching for meaning and purpose. For American slavery, that looks like the policies that have kept formerly enslaved African Americans and their descendants from complete freedom, emancipated from slavery, but without land, resources, or autonomy to fully be free. In each of these contexts, Passover is a reminder that the journey from slavery to freedom is long, challenging, gradated, and it is our holy responsibility as humans and as Jews to work toward absolute freedom for all people.

- *Jacob Leizman, Student Rabbi*

THE HEBREW WORD FOR EGYPT, MITZRAYIM, COMES FROM THE HEBREW WORD TZAR, MEANING NARROW. IN THE PASSOVER NARRATIVE, THE ISRAELITES BEGIN THEIR PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL JOURNEY IN A PLACE OF NARROW DARKNESS AND END UP IN A PLACE OF SPACIOUSNESS AND EXPANSIVENESS. AFTER THE “NARROWNESS” OF THIS PAST YEAR, WHAT KIND OF **EXPANSE** ARE YOU HOPING FOR BETWEEN NOW AND NEXT PASSOVER?

We are hoping for openminded thinking, where communities of people truly listen to each other, without judgment, where we are all willing to consider different perspectives, discussing ideas without shutting others down, respecting where we have all come from, where we are philosophically, politically, and why. With that, we all grow, **we move forward**, to a more inclusive and accepting society.

- Shari Coats, Community Member

Since September, I've been singing and praying three, four, and sometimes five days a week on Zoom. Our adaptability and flexibility to move community life to the virtual realm have continuously amazed me. At the same time, hearing my voice on its own, due to the limits of Zoom, has been a narrow experience compared to communal singing and praying in person. **I miss the moment when I can no longer distinguish my voice from those around me**, as we join together in harmony. This symphony always reminds me of how our lives can expand when we come together. As the COVID-19 vaccine becomes increasingly accessible, I look forward to the expanse of singing together in person once again.

- Jacob Leizman, Student Rabbi

This might seem like a small "expanse," after this difficult year, but I'm thinking about **a transformation in our society's relationship to physical touch**. Its absence has been profound: for a whole year, we've gone without handshakes, hugs, pats on the back, communal plates of fries at a table. While these limitations have been a great loss, I also think they can help us reflect on how we will interact with each other going forward. Perhaps even when we go back to a new "normal," we can still take a moment to pause before assuming someone's comfort level with a hug or kiss. Showing respect for physical boundaries is a wonderful first step toward building a society where we implement the Jewish version of the golden rule: Treat others as they wish to be treated.

- Rabbi Deena Gottlieb

CHAG SAMEACH FROM JCP!

