

CHILDREN

Freeing Your Inner Pharaoh

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Freeing Your Inner Pharaoh

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How can we use the story of Passover to find freedom in our own lives?

For many, Passover is a time when we gather to re-tell the most famous narrative of the Jewish people. We read and remember the familiar story of how the Hebrews move from bondage in Egypt to freedom: the mighty Exodus. At the Seder, we eat matzah - the unleavened bread - to remind ourselves of the haste in which we left. We taste bitter herbs to remind us of the embittered state of slavery in which our ancestors lived. We dip foods in salt water to remind ourselves of tears shed. On Pesach, we use many symbols to invite us into the space of the enslaved. The Seder rituals of reading the Exodus story, sharing a meal, singing songs, allow us to travel to a place of freedom and spaciousness.

Throughout the Seder, we are reminded of the great leaders of our history: Moses, Aaron, Miriam. We reflect on their bravery, wisdom, and faith. We can use this story to call our attention to how we are leaders in our own lives and in our communities. The Hebrew word for Egypt, Mitzrayim (מצרים), literally translates to "narrow space." The holiday of Passover is an opportunity to think about how we are moving ourselves and others through narrow and constricted places.

Let's start in our own Egypt or constricted place. Go around the table and each person can say one way that they feel held back in their own lives (examples: "I'm too busy and don't have enough time in the day," "I don't feel fulfilled by my job right now," "sometimes I feel trapped in my routine and responsibilities," etc).

What can Pharaoh teach us about moving from a constrained space to a place of freedom and openness?

Pharaoh, the all-powerful Egyptian leader, sits on the other side of the Exodus narrative - he is the antagonist, the bad guy. He's unreasonable, rigid, and, honestly, nobody wants to be like Pharaoh. But, wait! What can we learn about Pharaoh's experience of the Exodus?

The story goes that before the first plague befalls Egypt, God tell Moses, *"I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and I shall multiply my signs and my wonders"* (Exodus 7:3). Interestingly, through the first five plagues Pharaoh hardens his own heart against liberating the Hebrews: streams turn to blood; everyone is covered in frogs, lice, flies, and then all the livestock dies. After each plague Pharaoh is ready to relent and then changes his mind. He's stubborn and doesn't want to let his slaves go. *"Pharaoh saw that there had been relief and kept making his heart stubborn"* (Exodus 8:11).

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How-to for the JMC Passover Haggadah insert:

Print it. Hand it out. Email to your seder-mates before the big night. Read online and go on a personal

journey. Or just print it out and literally insert it into your haggadah(s) at a spot that works.

The glory of an insert is that you can make it work for you. Some might want to just keep it to themselves – using it as a personal prompt to prepare for Pesach from the inside out. Others might find it engaging to print out copies and rotate taking turns reading sections and asking one of the four questions embedded within the insert.

Knowing your table mates preferences, and willingness to explore the questions, you could also pick and choose one or more of the questions to investigate, inviting everyone to take a turn responding. Truly, the options are limitless.

Finally, you can play with the concepts presented and come up with your own questions or interactive approach.

Enjoy!