

IDENTITY

Before Kiddush, from Tikkun Passover supplement 2005

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KIDDUSH

Before the blessing over the first cup of wine, say:

We are gathered here tonight to affirm our continuity with the generations of Jews who kept alive the vision of freedom in the Passover story. For thousands of years, Jews have affirmed that by participating in the Passover Seder, we not only remember the Exodus, but actually relive it, bringing its transformative power into our own lives.

The Hebrew word for Egypt, Mitzrayim, means "narrow straits." Traditionally, Mitzrayim has been understood to mean a spiritual state, the "narrow place," a place of confusion, fragmentation, and spiritual disconnection. There are many ways in which all of us, individually and collectively, may be trapped in Mitzrayim. Fear of the other, fear of our own true selves, fear of losing control. All of these can become "false gods" to which we may be enslaved. Even some of what passes for "spiritual growth" may lead us into a narrower, more constricted place as we attempt to cut off parts of ourselves that we don't like. It is only a short step from abusing facets of our own selves to abusing others as well.

The way out of Mitzrayim is through chesed, compassion—through embracing that which we have been taught to scorn within ourselves and others and through attempting to understand those who seem very different from us. Israel left Egypt with "a mixed multitude"; the Jewish people began as a multicultural mélange of people attracted to a vision of social transformation. What makes us Jews is not some biological fact, but our willingness to proclaim the mes- sage of those ancient slaves: The world can be changed, we can be healed.