

Karpas

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Source: Rabbi Michael Lerner

The saltwater on our table traditionally represents the tears of the Israelite slaves. The green vegetables we dip in the water suggest the possibility of growth and renewal even in the midst of grief.

The greens on the table also remind us of our commitment to protect the planet from ecological destruction. Instead of focusing narrowly on what we may “realistically” accomplish in today’s world, we must focus on what the planet needs in order to survive and flourish. We must get out of the narrow place in our thinking and look at the world not as a resource, but as a focus for awe, wonder, and amazement. We must reject the societal story that identifies success and progress with endless growth and accumulation of things. Instead we will focus on acknowledging that we already have enough; we need to stop exploiting our resources and instead care for the earth.

We are descended from slaves, people who staged the first successful slave rebellion in recorded history. Ever since, our people has kept alive the story of liberation, and the consciousness that cruelty and oppression are not inevitable “facts of life” but conditions that can be changed.

The task may seem more overwhelming to us today than in previous moments. Today there is no longer some easily identifiable external evil force playing the role of Pharaoh. Instead, we live in an increasingly unified global economic and political system that brings well-being to some even as it increases the misery of others.

We are in the midst of a huge spiritual and environmental crisis. Our society has lost its way. Yet most of us are even embarrassed to talk about this seriously, so certain are we that we could never do anything to transform this reality, and fearful that we will be met with cynicism and derision for even allowing ourselves to think about challenging the kind of technocratic and alienating rationality that parades itself as “progress” in the current world.

The Exodus story teaches us to see that all this could be changed.

The ancient Jewish idea is that our task is to be partners with God in healing and transforming our world—Tikkun Olam. We know that the world can be healed and transformed — that is the whole point of telling the Passover story. Our task is to find the ways to continue the struggle for liberation in our own times and in our own circumstances.

Some of the steps include:

- a. Recognizing each other as allies in that struggle.
- b. Pouring out love into the world.
- c. Rejecting the cynical view that everyone is out for himself or herself, that there is nothing but selfishness.
- d. Taking the risks of being the first ones out in public to articulate an agenda of social change — even though being that person may mean risking economic security, physical security, and sometimes even risking the alienation of friends and family.
- e. Allowing ourselves to envision the world the way we really want it to be — and not getting stuck in spiritually crippling talk about what is “realistic.”

The story of Passover is about our people learning to overcome the “realistic” way of looking at the world.

Tonight we want to affirm our connection with a different truth: that the world is governed by a spiritual power, by the Force of Transformation and Healing, and that we are created in Her image, we are embodiments of the Spirit, and we have the capacity to join with each other and transform the world we are in.

Affirming that, we dip the greens on our Seder plate in joy at the beauty and goodness of this earth and its vegetation, and recommitting ourselves to do all we can to stop those processes in our society that are contributing to the destruction of the earth.

Dip some parsley or celery or some other green vegetable into the salt water, symbolic not only of tears our past suffering from oppression, but also of our tears for the suffering of the earth, the suffering of all on this planet who are caught up in systems of oppression:

Brukha at Yah Shekhinah, ru'akh khey ha'olamim, boreyt pree ha'adamah.

Some communities have the custom of affirming spring as the eternal return of life to the earth through the symbol of eating a hardboiled egg, which is dipped in salt water to remind us of the suffering of slavery that continues even when the earth is rejoicing and reclaiming life! If you wish to do so, first say the blessing:

Brukha at Yah, Shekhina, eloheynu melekh ha'olam, sheh ha'kol nihyeh beed'va'roe (Blessed is the Goddess... who creates all things through Her words).