

Standing up

Contributed by [Nate Auerbach](#)

Source: Rabbi Joachim Prinz / A Different Night Haggadah

Rabbi Joachim Prinz recalls that in Nazi Germany, Jewish holidays assumed a new importance:

No longer were they perfunctory observances of the day. They became part of the context of danger, fear, death and hope in which we lived. Passover was now the great day of hope for delivery from our own Egypt. The whips which beat the naked bodies of Jewish slaves in Egypt were the very same that struck our bodies. Slavery was no longer an abstract term, foreign to the world of the twentieth century. We could now identify with the slaves for we, ourselves, were third-class citizens, and therefore slaves. Those people who had been taken from their homes and whom we no longer saw, but about whose fate we knew, illustrated the Haggadah in colors much more telling than those of the most graphic illustrations we had ever seen.

The Passover slogan, "From slavery into freedom," became the song of our lives. If the slaves of Egypt could be delivered from their fate, so would we. All the songs at the seder table were sung with new emphasis and new meaning and great religious fervor. When we read that "in every generation one is obligated to see oneself as one who personally went out from Egypt" and "it was not only our ancestors whom God set free from slavery," the identification was complete. It was not historic memory. It was not history at all. It was the reality of every day and the hope of every person. Some day, we said, we shall be free.

But the greatest identification came when we read: "Not merely one persecutor has stood up against us, but in every generation they persecuted us to destroy us, but The Holy One saved us from their hands." What more did we want? How much deeper could Jewish identification with the people go? Here it was. The persecution was upon us. But some day we would be saved.

I did not then know that I was later to sing, "We shall overcome some day," with Martin Luther King. But when I did, I remembered the songs of the seder table under the Hitler regime.