

A Pesach teaching, curated by Rabbi Josh:

This teaching from Rabbi Aryeh Hirschfield (z'l) is really speaking to me this year. It's dense, deep, but also very practical--for it speaks to the specific ways we all create narrow places for ourselves in our day to day lives. It's definitely something to return to throughout the Pesach holiday. I feel like if I could just fully live this teaching, Dayenu!

[In addition to viewing the seder as a story of political, social, and economic freedom], one might also view the seder as the story of the bondage of the eternal soul as it is born into the narrowness, the constriction, of the finite body. This is suggested by the symbolic descent of the Israelites into "Mitzrayeem" – Egypt, the meaning of which is the "narrow," the "tight" place. In fact it is the "double narrows," because the "eem" ending is a plural ending. So not only is Mitzrayeem the "narrow" place, suggesting the journey through the birth canal or the confinement of the infinite soul in the finite body, but it also suggests the consciousness of duality, the place of "either/or," a place where we lose contact with our original home, our original consciousness of the oneness of all. The descent by the Israelites to Egypt is, then, the symbolic representation of the journey of the soul out of its bondage to sleep, to unconsciousness of its true nature, to habit, to social conditioning, to fear, to its belief that the limits it has set for itself are real.

What one person experiences as joyous and challenging might be experienced by another as sorrowful and frightening. To be stuck in "Mitzrayeem Consciousness" is to see only one possible response to any given situation. In the Jewish mystical tradition this is called "mocheen d'katnut"--constricted consciousness or "small mind." "Y'tzee-at Mitzrayeem," the Exodus from Egypt, represents "mocheen d'gadlut"-- expanded consciousness or "great mind." In this state we realize there are infinite possible responses to every situation. In such a state we are liberated by the knowledge that it is possible for us to be the masters of our own responses.

Every aspect of the exodus story represents some part of our inner, archetypal world. Pharaoh and the Egyptian taskmasters represent that aspect of ourselves that keeps us in bondage, asleep--the inertia that can keep us from getting out of our self-imposed slavery. Moses is that enlightened part of ourselves which is driven to wake up and, in so doing, gains access to the miraculous. The Israelites represent those parts of ourselves which are fearful and insecure. Even after they have experienced great miracles which give them the taste of freedom, they continue to find comfort in the past no matter how awful it was because at least it was familiar. The challenges of new, God-conscious, life in the desert, however, continually lead them to the edge of the unknown and they are, therefore, fearful of what lies ahead of them. In their insecurity they often look for someone to blame – generally Moses and Aaron--for bringing them into what they perceive as their unfortunate situation. Ultimately, true liberation comes from taking full responsibility for one's condition and one's responses to it. To be free, then, means having to work very hard--but in the service of God, awareness, awakening.

-From *The Ladder of Freedom: A Passover Haggadah*, by Rabbi Aryeh Hirschfield