

What Does Freedom Bring?

Most studies that have sought to learn how Jews live “Jewish lives” in the last 20 years have pointed to *Pesach* as having a singular place in the ritual lives of our fellow Jews. Whether around the world or in our own backyard, Jews are drawn to the warmth and ceremonial nature of the *Pesach* Seder and meal. For many Jews, however, the Seder is a rare connection with uniquely Jewish foods such as gefilte fish and matzoh ball soup (not to mention matzah itself). So, the question must be asked, with such an assimilated Jewish population, why do so many Jews find the holiday compelling enough to make the relatively significant effort of cooking special foods and wading through a seemingly arcane (even if abbreviated) Seder?

In a truly Jewish response, the answer to this question is found in another question that plays upon the widely understood central theme of Passover: What does freedom bring? In other words, when we obtain the redemptive freedom that the *Pesach* Seder and rituals recall, then what? How does that knowledge change us and our lives? And here is where we discover the real gem of the Passover holiday: *Pesach* (and its unique rituals) is far more about identity than it is about freedom. While others ask, “at what price, freedom?” Jews ask, “for what purpose, freedom?”

Each Jew's identity could not have been born at Mount Sinai with the revelation of Torah if our people's conception had not occurred through our Exodus from Sinai. Freedom is precious to us precisely because it is through our freedom that each of us is able to develop an identity. Jews love to share the *Pesach* Seder together because it is a way, even for the least “Jewishly connected” of our community to remember from whence they came. In an ever quickly paced world, remembering something as important and as grounding as who one is can be difficult. Passover reminds us that, as Jews, we believe in the freedom to be different, the importance of kindness to those who are different from us, and that we are inextricably connected to the experiences – holy and otherwise – of our ancestors.

So, what will *Pesach* bring for you this year? It is my wish for you that you receive an awareness of the blessing of being a Jew, the spiritual healing provided by being connected with our congregation, and the mental comfort of knowing that you belong to a tradition that informed our ancestors' lives with wisdom and meaning. And so we ask for each other that Passover's reminder of our precious gift of freedom bring a renewed commitment to our Jewish identity with all of its most admirable values. (Oh, and of course, the freedom to have an extra bowl of Matzoh ball soup is allowed and even encouraged!)

A Zissen and a Kasher Pesach (A Sweet and Kosher Passover),

Rabbi Gerald R. Fox