

I don't know about you, but I am exhausted. I love Passover, but it is a lot of work. Cleaning the house, cooking for seder, moving all the furniture, preparing the hagaddah.... Whew! But I love it. I love having so many family members and such good friends, I love that our guests are willing to trust Richard and me enough to be playful with the seder, mixing games and discussion. I love that my friends Scott and Gary and their two sons, 5 & 7 were there, kids raised at Temple Emanuel who knew all the songs. I love that Veronica, an African American woman who converted to Judaism with me years ago was there, as was her aging mother who just recently converted. We're a diverse group, the little boys, family in their 20's and 30's, old friends of my parents in their 80s, Jews by choice, and non Jews.

Every year at our seder we ask four new questions. This year the questions were prompted by the changes in our world and my curiosity about what makes change possible and where change begins. And because what makes Passover so powerful

is that it works on four different levels simultaneously, we asked four different kinds of questions. The first level is historical/or Biblical: we came out of Egypt. The second is political: every generation has its Egypt and politics is about coming out of contemporary Egypts. The third level is psychological: each of us has a personal Egypt, a narrow place we struggle with. And finally, the spiritual level: what is the Promised Land we want to build with our lives?

So the first question focused on the Biblical story. We were slaves for over 200 years. At what moment did liberation begin? We first asked why the Israelites waited so long; what was it about slavery that is preferable than to struggle to be free. We talked about how hard it was to change... and to believe that change was possible. And then we looked closely at the Biblical story...when did the change begin? Was it the moment the midwives first defied Pharaoh, understanding that there is a higher moral authority than government? Or was it the moment Moses was protected by the conspiracy of women

who protected him, his mother, his sister, the daughter of Pharaoh---all working together to save a Hebrew baby? Or was it the moment a person in power, the daughter of Pharaoh, reached across race, class and religion, empathizing with a person she had been taught was an enemy, and saw him instead as a child of God. Or was it when Moses emerged as a leader, and put in place a team of advisors (his brother Aaron)? Or was it when the king died, and, as Exodus says: “the people cried out to God and God remembered the covenant.” After so many years of slavery, why did they suddenly cry out? Was it because the king’s death made it suddenly clear that everything changes---and that the way things are not the way they have to be. Circumstances can be different.

That first question led right into the second...what can we learn from the Biblical story about the changes that have happened in our country over this past year? Did change happen because a new charismatic leader emerged? Or did we

make room for that leader because ordinary people came to believe that some of what our government was doing was wrong. Or did enough people finally come to understand that the way things are not the way they have to be.... and so change became possible.

As you can imagine, the political discussion was quite lively. And since our family and friends are pretty diverse, lots of different opinions were offered... with great intensity!

When we got to what is for me the essence of the seder, “B’kol dor v’dor”, we asked the third question. “In every generation each one of us is obligated to look upon ourselves as though we really had come out of Egypt.” Each one of us is still coming out of those narrow places. So the third question was more personal. What is an example of a change you have experienced since last Passover and when did it begin?

This part of the discussion was very moving, as people shared some of their struggles and successes over the past year. My nephew described the tension between freedom and

commitment, and how commitment, in his case to a wonderful girlfriend and to a new business, was actually freedom. One friend spoke about the challenge of responding to new economic realities. Another spoke about the difficulty coming to terms with her brother's death.

We left the fourth question for after dinner, for the moment we open the door for Elijah and Miriam, the door of hope for the future. We asked: "What are your hopes for the kinds of changes you would like to see in the world between this Passover and next Passover, and what do you have to do to make it happen?" In a way, this was the hardest question of all. We all had hopes for the future, but understanding that those hopes depend on our work made it more difficult. In these tough times where many of us are so anxious about our own situations, what are we really ready to do to reach out to others who are hurting as well? And how do we keep being hopeful when times are tough and change seems so difficult?

We can't just wait for Elijah...we have to work together to bring that Promised Land we want.

Sometimes it feels far away, that Promised Land. But at the very end of the seder something happened that made it clear to me the Promised Land is within our grasp. Nina, the African American 80 year old mother of my friend, was standing on the stairs waiting for Ethan, the five year old son of two gay fathers, to come back up the stairs in the chair lift we have to help people who can't manage the stairs. (Kids love to play on it...even though it goes so slowly.) Nina was standing behind me, Ethan was looking up at us, and pointing at Nina he suddenly asked me: "Is she your mom?"

This five year old didn't see race; he didn't see difference. He only saw family.

Maybe Elijah did come after all.