

Dear Friends,

Unlike Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, we prepare for the advent of Pesah daily. Both in evening prayers and in morning prayers, we recall the origins of the Jewish People – the moment when we traversed the Sea of Reeds to safety. Indeed our history begins with our People as refugees. Nor following liberation did we immediately settle in the land that was promised. To the contrary, we were forced to wander through the Sinai wilderness for forty years, during which time God sustained us.

This seminal experience of our People's birth informs our laws and guides our sense of justice. We are commanded to take care of the stranger, because we were strangers. We rehearse our sufferings as displaced people not because we are neurotic or as an excuse to act unsympathetically, but as an imperative to give sanctuary to refugees, to take care of them by feeding and clothing them, and by providing shelter for them.

The Pesah *seder* is supposed to be a re-enactment both of our liberation as well as of our enslavement. The Haggadah tells us that we do not fulfill the *mitsva* of Pesah unless we experience both. But even at this time of heightened alert for Jews and for all other minorities in our country and abroad, it is difficult for us to fully feel what our ancient ancestors felt. I suggest that you adopt a contemporary refugee narrative this Pesah eve. With sixty-five million (!) people on the move in the world today, there are many from which to choose. An excellent place to begin is with HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. HIAS has published a supplement to the Haggadah that compares the story of the Jewish flight from Egypt to the narratives of modern refugees fleeing from places including Syria, the Congo and El Salvador. You might also consider tithing your *afikomen* money and making a contribution to HIAS, which recently sponsored a rally at Battery Park in support of immigrant rights. (RSNS also sponsored the event as did the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association.)

Political theorist, Michael Walzer, saw the Israelite exodus as the paradigm for all subsequent immigrations. He concludes his treatise, *Exodus and Revolution*, as follows: "Pharaonic oppression, deliverance, Sinai, and Canaan are still with us, powerful memories, shaping our perceptions of the political world. The "door of hope" is still open; things are not what they might be – even when what they might be isn't totally different from what they are We still believe, or many of us do, what the Exodus first taught, or what it has commonly been taken to teach, about the meaning and possibility of politics and about its proper form:

- first, that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt;
- second, that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land;
- and third, that "the way to the land is through the wilderness." There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching."

With freedom comes responsibility. This year, use your *seder* to aid those still in need of liberation.

Marching forward together,
Lee

P.S. Consider closing your seder using Walzer's words.