



**From
Rabbi Weber:**

*One morning when Pharaoh
awoke in his bed
There were frogs on his bed, and
frogs on his head.*

*Frogs on his nose and frogs on his toes –
Frogs here, frogs there, frogs were jumping
everywhere.*

We've come a long way from the Passover seders of old, when grandpa droned on for three hours in Hebrew, pausing only to say "Shal!" to any child who dared utter a peep. From child-friendly *haggadahs* to "bags o' plagues" to liven up the story, we have lots of ways to keep our youngsters involved and connected to the *seder*.

But we need to remember that Pesach is an *adult* holiday, not a kids' holiday which adults just observe. Adult themes and adult concerns are the center of our observance, and we must not ignore them while we entertain the youngsters.

Pesach is about the struggle between good and evil. It is about the triumph of freedom over slavery. It is about justice, even if that justice is a long time coming. It is about *hope*.

Pharaoh was not just someone with a different-but-equally-valid-world-view. He was a tyrant who saw human beings as expendable tools, valuable only for the work they did. He enslaved the Israelites, and many other peoples, for generations. When he felt threatened he ordered the murder of their children. He was *evil*.

Is it any wonder that "The Song of the Sea," the majestic poem the Israelites sang when they came through the Reed Sea safely and saw the Egyptian soldiers drown, is a war poem? "I will sing to the Eternal, for God has triumphed gloriously / Horse and driver God has hurled into the sea!" In later generations, our rabbis who lived among gentile majorities sought to minimize the Israelites' celebration, writing a *midrash* which says that when the Egyptians drowned, the angels in heaven started to sing. God is said to have rebuked them saying, "How can you sing while My children are drowning?" But why *wouldn't* they sing? A tyrant's army had been destroyed, and his slaves were getting their first taste of freedom.

My friend and colleague, Rev. Mike Riley, recently described one of the challenges facing those of us who consider ourselves religious moderates, as opposed to fundamentalists. He

said we often turn ambiguity into an idol, and he is right. Yes, it is important to acknowledge that those with whom we disagree are not necessarily evil; that is a lesson we Americans could stand to learn these days. But it is equally important to acknowledge that some people really, truly *are evil*, even if they themselves don't feel that way.

The Islamic fundamentalists who close schools, whip women who dress "immodestly" and kill those who disagree with them are evil. Governments that censor books, newspapers and the Internet in the name of "stability" are evil. The racists and bigots in our own country who call for the expulsion of everyone who is not racially pure in their eyes – and who back up their threats with stockpiles of weapons – are evil.

At times, the forces of evil seem to be so overwhelming that we choose to rationalize their actions rather than face the cold, hard truth that there really are bad people in this world. Not every idea is equally valid, and those of us who understand this need the strength and courage to stand up to those who teach hatred. When people refer to Jews as kikes, or our Arab neighbors as sand niggers, or gays as faggots, we are not free to say, "Well, everyone's entitled to their opinion." Because yes, within certain limits people in our country *are* free to say what they want, but that means that we are free to say they are wrong... and we should. *That* is what Pesach is really about.

By all means, let's help the children at our *seder* feel involved and excited about Pesach. But let's also remember that there is still work to be done, still people who yearn to be free of tyranny and fear. As good as things are for us, let us rededicate ourselves to working for a better tomorrow. As the very last line in the *haggadah* declares, "Next year may *all* be free!"



**From
Rabbi Stern:**

I love the model seders we do at TRT, but they also present me with a dilemma. I think there is something magical and wonderful in rediscovering holiday foods only when it is appropriate to eat them. I eat *hamentashen* on *Purim*, *latkes* during *Hanukkah*, blintzes on *Shavuot* and yes, matzah on *Pesach*.

That first bite that we taste just before the meal takes me back as surely as a trip in a time

machine. I can see the Egyptians bearing down on us as we run for our lives toward the Sea of Reeds. I can feel the dough baking in the hot sun. I can hear the resonance of a frightened people who think they will die in the desert, with just manna to sustain them. I can taste our communal story in every single bite of matzah.

But preparing for *Pesach* also brings me back to when our boys were small, and they wondered why we were turning the house upside down, changing dishes, boiling silverware, scrubbing the cupboards and throwing out their favorite cereals. I would tempt them with "matzah pizza" and "matzah lasagna," allowing each one to choose a favorite layer of vegetable. We would make sheets of chocolate-covered matzah and roll dozens of matzah balls for the soup.

When we did this together, it didn't matter that we had exhausted ourselves: in the end, we had woven memory into every smell, every taste, every texture. Family memory with a Jewish theme.

Sure, anyone can make "matzah pizza" in June, but it doesn't taste the same. And it doesn't feel right to me to recall *why* the food is tied to a specific holiday in a specific season, when we are months away from celebrating it and the story underlying the holiday hasn't unfolded yet this year.

Our students learn that there is a time and place for everything, and we reinforce the message when we look forward to the smells and tastes and rituals of each Jewish holiday. It actually makes the relatively short period of eating festive foods special, or sacred. And sacred time is worth preserving - within families and generations of families.

This March (!), as you prepare for the holiday that marks our journey from slavery to freedom, whether you are doing so with children young or grown, let your taste buds be surprised by that first delicious bite. If your grandmother made gefilte fish that was extraordinary and you remember her smile as she saw your first taste, find a recipe that will elicit a similar reaction in your children or grandchildren, nieces or nephews. Years from now, when they first sip a soup with knaidlach whose special recipe you thought up, they will not only relive the journey from Egypt into freedom, they will bring you with them.

Happy Pesach!

MARCH HIGHLIGHTS



Friday, March 1



6:30 p.m. – Rock Shabbat! featuring Steve Dropkin



Sunday, March 10th

1:00 P.M. – Rock Shabbat Fundraising Concert
featuring Sheldon Low

Ticket info available at concert.trt.org, in the temple lobby or through the temple office
at 732-308-0055.

Friday, March 15th



8:00 p.m. – Shabbat service with a special presentation:
“Torah Turnings” – a unique look at the Torah portion of the week



Wednesday, March 20th



7:00 p.m. – Sisterhood presents a free nutrition event,
“Making Better Choices for a Better You” with acupuncturist, herbalist and
health coach Lisa Abramson



Monday, March 25th

First seder for Passover – Happy Pesach!

Sunday, March 31st

7:00 p.m. – Service for 7th Day of Pesach/Yiskor

