

Shabbat Pesach Shalom



by Phyllis Chesler

Here we are, back in Egypt, again. And there we go, leaving Egypt again, yet again. It is definitely a time of miracles and mysteries.

I once participated in a seder in a woman's prison and yes, the women were able to celebrate their freedom while still in a house of bondage. It was a strangely uplifting experience.

And now, we are celebrating our God-given deliverance while still in the midst of a plague. Some potential seder guests have tested positive for COVID, others are suffering from existential angst, or are ill with colds, flus, cancers. Regrettably, Zoom is again an option for the non-Orthodox.

How does one celebrate, even rejoice, with all one's heart at such a time?

In his Shabbos Ha Gadol drash, my rabbi, Ben Skydell, focused on the question of Moshe's almost complete absence, amounting to his erasure in the Haggadah. The sages tell us that Moshe's own humility demanded it (The Chafetz Chaim); that it is crucial to understand that only God and God alone saved us (The Vilna Gaon); that Jews do not have a Messiah who is of woman-born. Whatever view we might hold, we are still obliged to re-tell our story to all those present, of all ages, in accordance with their understanding. As Reb Ben also asked: Are we commanded to eat our last meal "in haste" or to exit Egypt "in haste," which is it?

I hope you will ask these and many more questions at your seder. Here's one more of mine. Did we cross the sea in on dry ground in a disorderly fashion—or in twelve neat tribal rows as has been suggested? Some years ago, my chevruta, Rivka Haut z"l, and I wrote this:

"The sea, says the Mekhilta, divided into lanes, becoming a 12-lane highway, permitting each tribe to stay together. However, the lanes were divided by water, transparent as glass, through which each tribe could view the others. Although divided, they could see that they were part of one nation. Thus, they crossed through the sea."

I wish you, one and all, a safe journey across the high-walled sea; a safe landing on the other side; onions and garlic and savory meats in your desert manna; and an ultimate and eventual redemption.

Next year, in Jerusalem! Next year together in person!