

God Does Not Bring Plagues – or How is this Pesach different from all others?

In the spirit of cheering ourselves up and bringing laughter into dire moments, we have relished the countless emails poking fun at Seder moments: all the hand-washing, the four children who are on Zoom, etc. But this Passover is one for the history books – and this Seder will be like no other. Most of all, we will be without friends and family sitting around our tables, in what has always been a carefree celebration of the festival of our liberation.

Oh yes, we included memories of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising; we have put a pair of shoes on our doorsteps to focus on the plight of immigrants and refugees; we added a tomato on the Seder plate to note the injustices endured by farmworkers.

This is all important.

But this year poses a serious challenge to our theology. We tell a story about how God inflicted plagues upon the Egyptians, both as punishment and as a means to force the recalcitrant hand of Pharaoh to finally loosen its grip on our people's bondage.

This year, do we want to tell a story that God brings plagues upon people?

Even the Torah – all those thousands of years ago – included a note of worry and pain in telling this story: "In the middle of the night, the Eternal struck down all the male first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on the throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon. And Pharaoh arose in the night, with all his courtiers and all the Egyptians – because there was a loud cry throughout Egypt, for there was no house where there was not someone dead." [Exodus 12: 29-30]

Oh yes, this is definitely a year to talk about plagues. We understand, probably for the first time, the terror that other people have felt.

But where is God in this part of the story?

I've included eight reflections/poems, all written by Rabbi Naomi Levy. Some of us studied them over the past week. Some are beautiful cries from the heart; some are profound reflections; some are gorgeous hopes from the wellspring of our souls; **all of them name what we are feeling this Pesach**. You may want to look them over before your Seder.

In the last reading, she notes that Elijah the Prophet is the only one we can safely invite into our homes this year.

"Come Elijah, bless us our hearts with love and forgiveness.

Come Elijah, now more than ever we are aware of how precious life is and how fragile.

Come Elijah, enter this home, enter every home and drink from your honored cup.

Redeem us Elijah, free us from resentments, heal us from anger,
Bring an end to all war and bloodshed.
Let a new time of healing begin tonight.

Welcome Elijah, pull up a chair.
We need you tonight more than ever
Come Now, Elijah,
Heal our world.
Amen.”

-Rabbi Shira Milgrom