

A Teaching That Rocked Your World:

Since last Passover, what teaching, text, or idea changed the way you think about Judaism, the world, or yourself? What shifted for you, and why did it matter?

Monica Osborne, PhD, MFA in Creative Writing Student

Pesah is about freedom: from exile, from bondage, from pain. I've always found the notion that we can ever be truly free to be complicated. Emmanuel Levinas says that our responsibility for others precedes our freedom. But we realize this only in a face-to-face encounter, when a person's vulnerability places a demand on us that exists before we consciously choose anything. So it's responsibility, not freedom, that comes first. If we are free, it is a freedom that is shaped by our responsibility to others. The irony: We talk about escaping bondage, but to be free we must acknowledge that we are held hostage to this responsibility. And we are ethically obligated to fulfill it.

I've been thinking about what this means as Pesah approaches and as images of the stranger, the vulnerable, are everywhere. What does it mean to be responsible for them? People, innocent and guilty, are taken and sent away; we have conversations about what is right and what is fair as we watch it unfold. Often we disagree and we stop talking to each other. We forget that we're also responsible for the person we disagree with. The political conflicts with the ethical. We are angry on all sides. Everyone should be free, we say, without understanding what it means

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and what it requires of all of us. And I think to myself: **This Pesah, can we not all take one step back and hold space for everyone, for people on both sides of the fence?**

