

A Freethinker reflects on Passover and Easter



Highland Views

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Guest columnist

To all my Jewish and Christian friends and family, I wish you health and happiness in these holidays. I realize that may sound hollow during these difficult times, yet, aren't these religious celebrations specifically about the most difficult times human beings face? Slavery to liberation, death to life, humanity takes risky action to force changes in thinking and living. Times of struggle often get transformed into "holy days" commemorating heroic events, however tragic.

I strained my eyes to watch a hawk circling high up near a thundercloud. A speck against the darkening sky. I won-

dered what that bird was doing so high up there. Surely it couldn't see a rabbit or roadkill from that height. Was it simply enjoying the ride on circling thermals of air? Did it merely stretch out its wings, close its eyes and float? Makes my imagination float too.

Closer to earth, I stood in the flight-path of a carpenter bee hovering in the air near my face. I was mesmerized by the beauty of this small creature's buzzing wings and amazing aerodynamics.

What does a highflying bird and a lowflying bee have to do with Passover and Easter? The connection for me has something to do with the highs and lows of the natural world we share with even the smallest of other wildlife and, how much our storytelling matters.

I recall fond memories of sharing seder meals with Jewish friends who welcomed me into their home. The story (haggadah) is timeless, transcending

human history and any one religion. A story of oppressed people—the least powerful—finding their power, to seize their freedom and create a nation.

When I recall leading Easter services and sharing Sunday dinners with family and friends, I can still sense the good feeling of togetherness and hope. The "triumphalist" message (Jesus is King) and confusing elements of the crucifixion and resurrection texts were ignored; the mood was celebration of life.

The hawk and the bee. Two images I carry while reflecting on Exodus and Easter. One leader, Moses, leads his people to freedom and ascends a mountain into the light. Another leader, Jesus, descends into a dark tomb of death. For the faithful, both heroes of faith offer a message of comforting promises of enlightening liberation.

A freethinker hearing or reading these ancient stories may be perplexed

by some of it, especially when we bring the mythology down to earth—when theology meets a real sea, a real grave.

We rarely hear natural explanations or rational origins for the stories. Though the ancient texts present tragic, even horrific stories, we don't seem to hear much questioning of these disturbing moments in sacred history. Maybe that's because it's "sacred history" handed down in "sacred scriptures."

I've always been troubled by these questions: What about all the people of Egypt who suffered with the plagues sent by God? How about the innocent Egyptian children who died at Passover? Why wasn't Pharaoh alone punished? Who thinks of the Canaanites (like Native Americans in this country) who were displaced, killed, enslaved by the liberated slaves of Israel? Shouldn't

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these questions be asked, and answered? I'm not saying the story is literally true, and I know many Jewish people who are bothered by these disturbing parts of the story along with me. Placing a story in a realistic context seems a good way to see if it's truly meaningful and practical for our day, regardless of our religious perspectives.

As I often ask: What if it occurred now, today? Would we accept it or believe it?

Many believe "Good Friday" to be the day sins were forgiven. Others view it as a bad thing that happened to a good person, or a symbol of sacrifice. But what about every one else crucified by Rome on that day? And what about all the graves in that cemetery that didn't open on Sunday morning? Where's the "victory over death"?

What if the story told of an extraordinary teacher in long ago Palestine whose message challenged the authority of the government; he was arrested and nailed to a tree – end of story? As with the killing of Martin Luther King Jr., it becomes a story of violent injustice, leaving us with the responsibility to learn the lesson and the opportunity to create a more just society.

If the Exodus and Easter stories are borrowed from one exclusive group of storytellers and universalized to address many people in many lands over time who long for liberation in body and mind, free-thinkers can join Jewish and Christian communities to pass along aspects of these timeless tales.

Hawk and bee, Exodus or Easter, we can learn from our world, to participate in change and celebrate the good even when thunderclouds appear.