JEWISH CONCEPTS

Passover is a springtime holiday that commemorates the Exodus, the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in ancient Egypt. It is perhaps the most widely-observed Jewish holiday, celebrated by Jews from diverse backgrounds around the world. The story of the redemption and birth of the Jewish nation has resonated strongly with Jewish communities throughout history, in both good and difficult times. In The Passover Cowboy, Jacob’s family is based on real Russian-Jewish families who moved to Argentina in order to escape the harsh conditions and attitudes toward Jews in their native Russia. We can imagine the deep gratitude those families must have felt for the freedom and relief they could enjoy in their new home. Perhaps Passover took on an especially personal significance for them.

Despite the fact that Passover is a distinctly Jewish holiday, it has proven to hold remarkable appeal for Gentiles as well. Its themes of slavery and freedom can be understood and appreciated by all people, as Jacob’s friend Benito expresses in this book. Groups experiencing oppression of many sorts have drawn comfort and inspiration from the Jewish people’s struggle and triumph. The words of the Haggadah (book containing the story of the Exodus) seem to call out in welcome to all people in need of liberation: “Let all who are hungry come and eat.”

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

There are so many things to talk about with regard to Passover, which is why many seders (special meals held at the beginning of the holiday) often go late into the night! With your own family, you can explore the themes of slavery and freedom by asking your children what those words mean to them. Have they ever been in a situation where they felt stuck or uncomfortable? What was that like? When they were released from that difficult place, what was their reaction? Talk about the plight of the Jewish people in Egypt and their liberation in those terms to help children relate to the Passover story.

You might also discuss Jacob and his family in their new life in Argentina. Has your family ever been in an unfamiliar place with different customs and traditions? Jacob was excited about the idea of riding in the rodeo, and thrilled with the cowboy clothes his mother made for him. What aspects of your new surroundings did you like and want to adopt? Beloved traditions and beliefs stay with us, though, even in unfamiliar territory: Over his bombachas (wide pants), Jacob’s father still wore his long, black Russian coat, and the family expressed their strong Jewish connection by preparing a beautiful Passover seder. How did you hold onto the things that make you uniquely you in that new place, both as individuals and as a family?