

What If You Were An Egyptian?

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Recently I read an article citing studies that the more power one attains inside an organization, the less empathetic one becomes to those who have less power. Power, in other words, dulls our compassion. So permit me to slightly reframe a message I wrote about Passover several years ago: This Passover, don't only imagine yourself a slave — imagine yourself an Egyptian.

Many Jews employ other people in their homes, their businesses, to take care of their children. Not slaves, to be sure, but people over whom we have power. Do we consider the Nanny's taking care of our children more important than taking care of her own? Does the desire for a clean house entitle us to be unkind, tyrannical, to pay meager wages, to recall in spirit, if not in fact, Egypt of old? How late did you keep "the help" at the seder — and did you thank and compensate them adequately?

The great moral test of life is not how we treat those who have power over us, but how we treat those over whom we have power. The Talmud teaches a true Jew is known by his or her compassion. It is a *Hillul Hashem*, a desecration of God's name, to treat those in our power cruelly; it is a *Kiddush Hashem*, a sanctification of God's name, to be merciful and kind. Remember Egypt; and for those you employ on this and all other nights, act like a Jew.