Let me ask you this: “As a child, what did you most associate with Christmas? What about Hanukkah? Easter? Passover?” (If the answer does not include the plagues, ask if they remember the song frogs here, frogs there)

Wait one minute. Think about the images you associated with these holidays. Then think about what an evergreen tree has to do with the birth of Jesus; or why eight gifts represent Hanukkah. And how about connecting jelly donuts with the victory of Maccabees over Assyrian King Antiochus and the Hellenistic influence over the Israelites. Better yet, what does a bunny and chocolate eggs have to do with the crucification of Jesus? And even more interesting, how does the happy tune of the Frog song reflect on the horrifying experience of the 10 plagues - which caused so much suffering among Egyptians?

It is obvious that these childhood icons, from Easter bunnies to potato latkes, that we have always relied on to symbolize significant holidays, have very little to do with the message of the events or their religious role in our lives.

That brings me to this week’s Torah portion - Va’era. I would say that it is one of the bestsellers among all the portions in the Torah - The Old Testament. In this portion this week we read about the first seven plagues which include water of turning to blood, frogs, lice, flies, livestock pestilence, boils and hail), which God sent to curse the Egyptians as punishment for the Pharohs’ refusal to let the Israelites leave his country.

Now, who was the carrier of the “bad news” about the plagues? That’s right, - it was Moses. Moses was chosen by God to lead the Israelites to their freedom. (Although it took God some convincing because Moses wasn’t too eager to take on the role).

In both last week’s portion Shemot, and again in this portion, Moses tells God that he has a speech impairment and thus he can’t be the most effective House speaker - I mean the most effective spokesperson for the Israelite slaves.

But God is adamant about His choice and he offers some key reassurances until Moses is finally convinced to take on the job.

House speaker jokes aside, after thousands of years of reading the story of the Exodus from Egypt and Moses’ role in the saga, as well as his guidance throughout the Israelites’ wandering in the wilderness on their long way to the Promised Land, we understand that there could be no better person than Moshe.

Why was he the perfect choice for this difficult role? Not because he was good looking, although if he looked like Charlton Heston in Ten Commandments then maybe; but not for his connections, although he did grow up in Pharaoh’s palace, clearly; and definitely not for his oratorial talent. So why did God want only Moses to take on this responsibility?

What do you think?

I think that it is precisely because he did not consider himself above others.

Moses, we can say, was a humble person. But along with his sincere humility, he had some very important qualities. God noticed these important traits – the characteristics that made Moses, Moses.

What Moses had was courage and an acute sense of justice.

These are the exact qualities that we think of when we remember Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

He, too, had great faith in God – he believed God was the one who would deliver the oppressed to freedom.

Throughout all of his life, Dr. King courageously spoke against injustice. He spoke out during the time when any expression of segregation and injustice toward the African American community would lead to severe consequences, perhaps even death. But no matter what the challenge, time and time again, Dr. King would preach at podiums throughout United States, inspiring people to stand up for their rights.

Unlike Moses, Dr King did not wield a staff that would bring on miracles - but what he did have was an unwavering passion that inspired not only the African American community, but people of all races. His message was, and still is, relevant and universal to all of us.

When weJews, gather around the table for Passover and recall the story of Exodus, we not only rejoice in the Israelite’s gaining their freedom, but we also express our hope for the freedom of all people around the world. We pray for freedom for everyone who suffers from oppression and injustice. Today that list includes the people of Ukraine and Iran.

We have learned from both Moses and Dr. King that freedom never comes without persistent conviction, courage, and strong faith.

Moses did not live to see the Israelites enter the Land of Israel. Similarly, Dr. King did not live to see his prophecy fulfilled either. And yet it was his prophecy and his inspiring leadership that enabled so many to finally achieve their freedom.

Friends, the fact is that we continue to commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King’s legacy, and I believe we will never stop doing so for thousands of years, just as we will continue to read the story of Exodus to our children and grandchildren, Both of these leaders, and the lessons they taught us, will always serve to remind us that light prevails over darkness.

To show how true this statementis, just take a minute to look around you! Our skin color, our religious affiliation, and even the sacred text we read may be different, but yet, in the most important way, we are all the same. We are all human beings, created in the image of God.

And we are here today, and we enjoy being together, don’t we? And that is the real proof that Dr.King’s sacrifice was worth it.