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The Jewish Federations[®]
OF NORTH AMERICA

THE STRENGTH OF A PEOPLE.
THE POWER OF COMMUNITY.

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THE JEWISH FEDERATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA RABBINIC CABINET

The mission of the JFNA Rabbinic Cabinet is to unite rabbis of all ideologies in the work of Kiyum ha'umah, Jewish continuity and tezdakah, acquaint and involve the North American rabbinate with the goals and activities of JFNA, and bring the talents, resources and perspectives of the rabbinate to JFNA and the Federation movement.

The cabinet serves as the rabbinic arm of JFNA, the major agency of North American Jewry for tzedakah. It promotes the unity of the Jewish people in its efforts to support the needs of Jews everywhere by including rabbis from every movement in North American Jewish life.

The Rabbinic Cabinet further seeks to inform colleagues about the most current developments in Jewish life, the needs of our people and the techniques for effective utilization of rabbinic leadership within local communities. In addition, the Rabbinic Cabinet endeavors to apprise the lay leadership of the concerns of the rabbinate, infuse Jewish values and content into the work of local federations and serve Israel and the Jewish people with rabbinical involvement and support.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. Raise the level of knowledge about JFNA in the rabbinate and community.
2. Stimulate and support rabbinic participation in, and relationships with, JFNA and local federations.
3. Assist with and participate in the Federation Annual Campaign by enlarging the scope and intensity of synagogue involvement.
4. Upgrade rabbinic giving and increase rabbinic solicitations.
5. Strengthen the rabbinic, congregational, community, agency and Federation partnership.
6. Engage the next generation of rabbis.
7. Continue education.
8. Develop programs and educational materials about Israel, the Jewish tradition and Jewish peoplehood/community.
9. Serve as teachers and spiritual resources to the leadership and constituencies of JFNA, local federations and the Jewish community.

STANDARDS FOR MEMBERSHIP

Members of the Rabbinic Cabinet should:

1. Be involved in local Federation and campaign activities, support federation work and engage synagogues in the community campaign.
2. Pledge a minimum of \$1000. Rabbis who were ordained less than five years ago should pledge at least \$500.
3. Participate in JFNA missions.
4. Attend the Annual Meeting of the Rabbinic Cabinet and/or regional conferences and special meetings.



PASSOVER READING FOR THE SEDER

Tonight we celebrate the festival of Passover with Jews across America, in Israel and around the world. In the best and worst of times in Jewish history, the Seder has provided a sense of family, purpose, peoplehood and hope.

Tonight we eat *matzah* and *maror* to remember that slavery still persists in our world. We eat *karpas* to rejoice in the rebirth of our people. We enjoy *haroset* to savor the sweetness of Jewish life in our time.

We proclaim, “let all who are hungry, come and eat” to remember our obligation to “do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.” In that spirit, we pledge our devotion to *tikkun olam* (the repair of our world through good deeds), to the principle of freedom for all peoples, and to the obliteration of poverty, and hunger throughout the world.

As we relive the Exodus from Egypt at our Seder table, we pledge our commitment to our beloved State of Israel, the national expression of Jewish peoplehood. We pray that our brothers and sisters who live there will continue to build a just society based on the precious values enshrined in our *Hagaddah*, even as it defends itself against every modern-day Pharaoh who would rise to do it harm.

“May this Passover inspire us to renew our commitment to the Torah of Jewish values and learning and to dignity, harmony, and peace for all humankind.”

Amen

The Jewish Federations of North America Rabbinic Cabinet



The Orchard Spring 2015 – Nissan 5775

THE **STRENGTH** OF A PEOPLE.
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**PASSOVER GREETING FROM THE CHAIR OF THE RABBINIC CABINET
RABBI LES BRONSTEIN**

“WORDS”

Within days, our people across the globe will turn to the familiar words of their Haggadot for both inspiration and comfort. Inevitably, they will see those loaded words and images not just as a commemoration of their heritage, but also as an invitation to reflect on the state of the world.

Words matter - both the sacred language of our tradition and the new utterances of anyone who dares to be part of it now.

As such, we rabbis need to play our old but still relevant role. We need to speak in the language of the tradition, and also - somehow - to speak about the present crisis.

The world teeters on environmental disaster. Iran and ISIS compete for control of the militant Islamic revolution. Russia fires away at Ukraine, and our own Jewish cousins in the FSU, caught in the crossfire, suffer immense physical and emotional damage. Israel battles its attackers and hunts for Hamas tunnels, even while it struggles within itself to accommodate competing - some would say antithetical - visions of the Jewish state.

In all of this, our Jews want to hear from us. They want us to speak about making Jewish life meaningful and workable, and they want us to tell them what we think Judaism can give us to make sense of our confusing world.

We rabbis need to keep sermonizing. We need to share our sermons and speeches with one another, to give each other chizzuk as we each try to find our rabbinic voice. We need to help each other find the balance between distorting the tradition's message by overstating it for our own purposes, and cowering in the safety of its confines so as not to risk upsetting our baalabatim. We need to have both integrity and courage.

We need words. The Orchard gives us a place to share each other's words, to learn from each other's skillful framing of the message that binds us all together.

I wish you a joyous Pesach and a successful season of preaching and teaching.

Rabbi Les Bronstein, Chair
JFNA Rabbinic Cabinet

**PASOVER GREETING FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE RABBINIC CABINET
RABBI GERALD I. WEIDER**

An underlying theme of Passover is that of rebirth and growth through the regenerative power of a seasonal change from winter to spring. This certainly ties into the events of the Exodus when the Jewish people emerged from slavery unto freedom. They were a beaten down people reborn through the leadership of Moses and the miraculous power and intervention of G-d.

The Rabbinic Cabinet is the place where all the streams of Judaism can, and do, come together for the betterment of the entire Jewish community. It is the only place where our partisan Jewish outlook is parked at the door as we join together to work for the enhancement of our local Federations and overall Jewish community here in North America and abroad. This truly does make a difference for us as rabbis.

As we enter into the rebirth of spring, I call upon all the members of the Rabbinic Cabinet to join together in support of our Federation movement and of each other as spiritual leaders within our communities. Our rabbinic voices, when raised in tandem, can make a difference in fostering an appreciation for the concept of *k'lal Yisrael* within our local and national communities. If we can do this, we will then be leaders in the Mosaic tradition who lead our people into a promised land of cooperation and acceptance for all of the Jewish people.

Rabbinic Cabinet Mission to Argentina April 26 - May 2

As this issue of the Orchard goes to press the Rabbinic Cabinet is making final plans for the upcoming mission to Argentina. The twenty six participants on the mission will be arriving at a propitious moment in the life of the Argentine Jewish community. Not only will we be meeting with the lay leadership of the Jewish community but we will also have an in depth opportunity to meet with the Argentine rabbinate. Another significant part of the mission will be visiting the work of the JDC and the Jewish Agency as they support and nurture the well-being of the entire community.

We will send a full report to the Rabbinic Cabinet in May about this unique mission.

Rabbi Gerald I. Weider
Director of The Rabbinic Cabinet

PRIDE IN ISRAEL AND JEWISH VALUES

Yom Ha'atzmaut

Rabbi Richard Plavin

In our Torah passage tomorrow, our Father Abraham is commanded by God to take his beloved son Isaac and offer him as a sacrifice. The very thought is horrifying. It seems contrary to everything we know of Torah values. ... But one interpretation appears to be obvious: God does not approve of human sacrifice.

Sadly this idea is as relevant today as ever. The current worst enemy of the Jewish people, and frankly the world, is Hamas and it is guilty of this very crime.

Early this summer I received an email that shook me to my core. It began with these words, "Rabbi, thank you for your ongoing support of genocide against innocent Palestinian civilians. You truly believe in your own propaganda."

That horrifying message arrived in my inbox on July 18, just ten days into the conflict between Hamas and Israel. But as I thought about it, it is no wonder that someone would come to think that way. This entire summer, the media was fixated on Israel as if there were no other trouble spots in the world. The violence in Israel and Gaza took up all the air in the room; there was hardly a mention of the butchering of Christians in Africa, the killing and displacement of civilians in Syria, or the deaths in Yemen and Nigeria. Everything took second place to the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Rather than be ashamed of Israel we should be filled with pride, and I want to explain to you why I am. There is a battle in the world today between the forces of good and evil, and Israel is on the frontline. At a recent AIPAC conference I heard a presentation by Mosab Hassan Yousef. As the son of a Hamas founder, he knows it well from the inside. He told us that the destruction of Israel is not Hamas' final objective. Their ultimate goal, like that of ISIS, is building the Islamic caliphate on the rubble of every other civilization. In other words, in standing up to Hamas the IDF is fighting to protect all of civilization, not just Israel.

We have all been sickened by the recent videos showing the beheadings of James Foley and Stephen Sotloff. In response to these videos, Rabbi Shmuley Boteach and his Values Network published a full-page ad in several newspapers. The photos at the top showed an ISIS beheading victim on the left and a Hamas beheading victim on the right. The victims were in identical, submissive poses. The large print read, "This is the face of radical Islam. If the UN is looking for genocide to investigate, here it is, not in Israel."

Another full-page ad in the *New York Times* was sponsored by the Creative Community for Peace. They expressed so well the kind of thinking that makes me proud of Israel and the IDF. "While we stand firm in our commitment to peace and justice, we must also stand firm against ideologies of hatred and genocide... Hamas cannot be allowed to rain rockets on Israeli cities, nor can it be allowed to hold its own people hostage. Hospitals are for healing, not for hiding weapons. Schools are for learning, not for launching missiles. Children are our hope, not our human shields."

The stark contrast between the morality of the IDF and Hamas is evident in the fact that in Gaza there are neither sirens nor safe-rooms. The fact is, Hamas, the government the majority of Gazans elected, chose to invest the billions they received in international aid money in buying weapons of war and constructing terror tunnels to harm Israeli citizens instead of investing in schools, hospitals and playgrounds.

I am proud of the IDF because I don't think there is a more moral or ethical military force in the world. The IDF lives by a code called Tohar HaNeshek - the purity of arms. It was created by ethicists and guided by the Jewish tradition and every commander and soldier in the IDF must be thoroughly conversant with it.

The most magnificent Torah value comes from a text in the very beginning of Genesis. We are told there that God created humanity - not just Jews but all humanity - in the divine image. What flows from this passage is that all lives matter - Palestinian lives, Israeli lives, all lives. And that belief is reflected in the behavior of the IDF - and that fills me with pride. Do these regulations prevent a young soldier with a machine gun from overreacting when surrounded by a mob of fellows with kafiyas on their faces hurling Molotov cocktails? Of

course it can't do that. Like all armies, the IDF is made up of human beings. What makes me proud is how infrequently that inappropriate and abhorrent reaction occurs, and that when it does, it is swiftly dealt with.

The IDF does everything it possibly can to prevent civilian casualties. But it goes even further. Even in the heat of the conflict this summer, Israel was providing electricity to the people of Gaza and was sending in truckloads of desperately needed food and medical supplies. It is so painful to recognize that Israel is facing an enemy that does not value in the least the lives of its own people. To the contrary, it uses civilian fatalities as a strategy of war. While Israel warns civilians to vacate a targeted building, Hamas forces them at gunpoint to stay in place. How does a civilized nation deal with such barbarism?

Moral philosopher Sam Harris is well known for his atheism. Almost ten years ago he wrote *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*. In a blog this summer he discussed how you can see the moral difference between competing forces. Listen to his words. "All you have to do is ask what one side would do to the other if they could."

He explains, "What would the Jews do to the Palestinians if they could do anything they wanted? Well, we know the answer to that question, because they can do more or less anything they want. The Israeli army could kill everyone in Gaza tomorrow. So what does that mean? It means that when they drop a bomb on a beach and kill four Palestinian children, as happened last week, this is almost certainly an accident. They're not targeting children."

Harris continues, "And the other side? What would the Palestinians do to the Jews in Israel if the power imbalance were reversed? Well, they have told us what they would do. When they tell us they intend to commit genocide, we should listen. ...They've blown themselves up on buses and in restaurants. They've massacred teenagers. They've murdered Olympic athletes. They now shoot rockets indiscriminately into civilian areas."

Harris concludes, "The only thing more obnoxious than denying the Holocaust is to say that it should have happened; it didn't happen, but if we get the chance, we will accomplish it."

I am not proud of the IDF because they are better than Hamas. That is far too low a bar. I am proud of the IDF because they defend the only Jewish state in the world and they do so maintaining Jewish values.

Using my rabbinic privilege to speak on this holy day, I have told you a great deal. But now, the pressing question is what do you do with it? Allow me to make some suggestions.

First, we must share the truth about Israel and the IDF wherever we can: with our government representatives, with our friends and co-workers, with anyone who has been misled by the media blitz of this past summer. We must tell them that we understand the grief, anger and desperation of the people of Gaza. But it is not Israel that is to be blamed. The guilt falls squarely on the Hamas leadership who sow the seeds of hate and tells innocent civilians to be human shields while they hide in 5-star hotels in Qatar, thousands of miles away.

Next, we must support Israel both financially and personally. Let's put our money where our mouth is. There are a myriad of organizations seeking our help. Choose carefully, but choose generously. And money is not all we can give - we can give ourselves. Our community is full of young, healthy retirees who travel the globe. I urge you to consider seriously spending a few months as a volunteer in Israel.

The reality is that some people are not physically able to undertake even a short trip to Israel. The flight alone requires considerable stamina. Consider this: send a shaliach, someone to represent you. Offer an Israel trip to your children or grandchildren. For them, a trip to Israel is just way beyond their budget. If you are in any way able, help them out. Allow your progeny to inherit your values while you are here to enjoy seeing them do it. Now is when they need it most.

Here is another thought: something that can be done by people who are not in a position to be philanthropists or long-term volunteers. Stand up to the BDS movement. There are anti-Israel people all over the world who refuse to buy Israeli products and who want massive pension funds to divest from companies that do business in Israel. Don't stand for that kind of perversion of morality. We can all stand up to the BDS movement. We have to buy Israeli products whenever we can, and tell our shopkeepers we want those products on the shelves.

Too many people have the mistaken notion that a trip to Israel is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Nonsense. If you are fortunate enough to afford it, make your plans to visit - again and again.

I want you to understand my pride in Israel and its IDF. But what I want even more, what I pray for every day, is a world in which no IDF will be needed, when the children of Isaac and the children of Ishmael will be able to live in peace, when the vision of the prophet will become a reality, when every person can sit under his vine or fig tree and none shall make them afraid. *Ken Y'hi ratzon*. So may it be God's will.

AMEN

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Rabbi Richard Plavin
Beth Sholom B'nai Israel
Manchester, CT

THE TEN PLAGUES, THE FOUR PRAYERS OR, PRAYER FOR THE EGYPTIANS?

Rabbi Joel Finkelstein

With all the fuss about the “Ten Plagues,” one can miss an equally impressive subtext; Moshe actually prays for the Egyptians four times. The plagues come as no surprise. We expect there to be an abundance of punishment against the wicked Egyptians who afflicted us so for centuries. But would you think that with all that Egypt had wrought upon us that Moshe would be out there praying his heart out to save the Egyptians? Yet this is precisely what we find. No less than four times, Moshe prays for the Egyptians to be rid of their plague of frogs, wild animals, hail and locust. Moshe is described praying in three ways; *Vaye'etar*, he prayed very hard or extensively; *Vayitzak*, he called out, cried out, shouted out to G-d; and *Vayifros kapav el Hashem*, he stretched out his hands in prayer to G-d. All this was done to help the oppressor, the slave masters!

Can you picture the prayer? “G-d, please remove this plague from the Egyptians, because...?” What is a Moshe to say to convince G-d to help the hard hearted Pharaoh? Yet we find that Moshe not only prayed, but he called out and prayed exceedingly. What was he praying so hard about? Abarbanel, the Spanish financier and commentator, says that Moshe had to pray real hard because while the Ten Plagues were part of the original plan, the 4 prayers are not part of the script. G-d never said that he would remove the plagues. In fact, after Moshe's prayers, it says twice, “and G-d did according to the word of Moshe.” The removal of the plagues, the whole idea of beseeching G-d to help Egypt, was completely Moshe's concoction. Like Elijah at Mount Carmel, Moshe acted first and then prayed really hard later that G-d would listen to his request, and He did.

As remarkable as the Ten Plagues are, the four prayers are equally astounding. As the Netziv, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin pointed out in his 19th century commentary, it is surprising that even as Pharaoh continued to rebel, Moshe's prayers for Pharaoh were accepted. Or, as the Midrash known as Mechilta says in the context of Moshe calling out on behalf of the wayward Jews later on, “This is to Moshe's credit that he did not say, Since they quarrel with me, I will not ask mercy for them.” Moshe prays for the very people he is fighting against. Is this not remarkable?

Why is it important that we take note of what we can now call the Four Prayers? Because the goal of the Exodus was not for the world to see G-d as a vengeful G-d of war only, but also as healer. As Moshe says in his final song, “I put to death and I bring to life, I strike down and I will heal.” G-d is not only a plague-bringer. G-d is also healer, a plague-remover. A friend of mine once said that many of us have an “image of G-d” problem. We picture G-d as the booming voice of the original Ten Commandments movie, and perhaps much less so as the soft voice of this more recent iteration of Exodus on film.

The idea that G-d can afflict and heal was already established by Avraham when he brought about King Avimelech's plague and then prayed for him to be healed. G-d and His Torah are not here only to demand and to rebuke but to heal and to benefit humanity.

The Baal Shem Tov, founder of Chasidut, once said that when the Torah says that the goal of the Exodus was for Egypt to “know that I am G-d,” He didn't just mean that the Egyptians need to learn that G-d is Hashem, the Merciful One, but also those Jews who had become like Egyptians to learn this as well. We can all, at times, fall into the trap of seeing G-d like an Egyptian, a vengeful, demanding, unforgiving G-d. Moshe's audience for his prayers was not only Pharaoh, but also each one of us, to remember that G-d is a healing, loving G-d, even to the greatest sinner. As we remember the Exodus this Pesach and every day, let's remember not only His power but his mercy as well.

Rabbi Joel Finkelstein
Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth
Memphis, TN

CELEBRATING YOM HA'ATZMA'UT ON EREV SHABBAT

Rabbi Paul J. Citrin

Many rabbis across the streams of Judaism agree that our holy days should be observed at the time established by Torah, and reinforced by the Jewish calendar. While there may be some imaginable flexibility regarding minor festivals, Chanukah, Tu Bishvat or Purim, most observe these days at their traditional time as well. That adherence to the calendar is less strictly observed with regard to Yom Ha'atzma'ut seems to be borne out by the fact that in many synagogues Israel Independence is observed not necessarily on the fifth of Iyar, but on the closest Shabbat to that date. Despite the adage "ein m'arvin simcha b'simcha," which would steer the most observant away from a Shabbat celebration of Yom Ha'atzma'ut, Erev Shabbat is frequently the occasion when many of our congregants attend a service. To hope that they would attend say, on a Tuesday evening if it were erev the fifth of Iyar, may be an exercise in self-delusion.

The observance of Yom Ha'atzma'ut is challenging for many of our colleagues these days. Because of political differences and competing opinions of what Israel should do and how its society should be shaped, speaking about Israel is seen by some as the third rail, too career threatening to approach. While the fear of dwelling on Israel is not solely imaginary, yet we are not free to desist from celebrating Israel, examining its problems and challenges, and ultimately rejoicing in its flourishing existence. We rabbis can and should take the lead in supporting Israel's right to exist, to point out Israel's numerous humanitarian accomplishments, to remind people not to confuse the decision of a specific government with the validity and value of Medinat Yisrael. Thus, I would encourage the observance of Yom Ha'atzma'ut. To that end, I include here a liturgy for a candle lighting service for Erev Shabbat to celebrate Yom Ha'atzma'ut. This liturgy could be used around the table in one's home as well as in the synagogue.

Candle Lighting and Sh'hechyanu for Celebrating Yom Ha'atzma'ut on Erev Shabbat

(Please Stand)

Sound the shofar for our freedom!
Blow the horn! (Tekiah)*
The wanderers have come home
Hope for peace is our prayer. (Sh'varim)
Make a joyful sound of thanks and praise. (Teru'ah)
The land and the people of Israel live! (Tekiah Gedolah)

The Shabbat Yom Ha'atzma'ut Candle Blessing

Once, in sunlit days, Zion and her people dwelled together in radiance.

That was before the week of darkness.

Sunday came, and the gray cloud of Babylon cast its shadow over the land.

Monday brought a Grecian wind, and the lamp of Israel flickered.

Tuesday barely dawned, for Zion's light was smothered under Roman sandals.

Zion's lovers took up the staff, forced to wander the globe--- perhaps a return on the morrow.

But Wednesday woke to Arab swords; with Thursday came the Turkish night; Friday brought British tyranny.

Now the dark week of captivity and exile is ended. Israel's redemption is our Sabbath of light.

Kindle lights & recite the blessing.

The Sh'hechyanu

Blessed are the eyes that behold Israel reborn in its ancient land of promise! Blessed the age which has seen our people outlive death's kingdom! Blessed the devotion of Israel's builders and the valor of its defenders! Blessed are those who hold her in their hearts and support her from afar! For every anguished yesterday, let there be a joyful tomorrow. May the Jewish spirit flower on its reclaimed soil.

Recite Sh'hechyanu

Praised are you, Eternal our God, Sovereign of the universe who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to celebrate the independence of the State of Israel.

(Be Seated)

In communities where the shofar would not be sounded on Shabbat, the paragraph may be read without it.

This liturgy was written by Paul Citrin, and was originally included in the ARZA Yom Ha'atzma'ut Shabbat Service.

Rabbi Paul J. Citrin
Taos Jewish Center
New Mexico

JE SUIS JUIF

Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt

I am tempted to deliver my sermon today in French to convey solidarity with the victims of the massacre in Paris.

People in France and around the world people have lifted up their pens and held high placards that proclaim, "Je suis Charlie", I am Charlie as an act of identification with the members of the staff of the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo who were gunned down by Islamist terrorists. They hold them high as a proud defiance of the terrorists and in support for the concept of freedom of the press.

The horrific act is a wakeup call that has aroused many to realize that Islamist fascist groups' intimidation is real and its reach is widespread. Hopefully the reaction to the violence will lead people to recognize that Islamist jihadist terrorists pose a serious threat to values democracies cherish and hold dear. The liberties we in the free world know and take for granted, such as freedom of expression, and even the freedom to laugh and make fun of each other are the very subject of the attack. If there is any doubt as to the intent of the jihadists, the targets of their assault make their objectives obvious.

And yet there are those who attempt to explain or justify these acts as being motivated by anger against discrimination, or that young Moslems who have emigrated to France or who are the children of emigres feel alienated and disenfranchised, or that they are acting out of desperation because they suffer economic depravity. If that were the case, let them organize a protest march outside of the French social welfare office.

Nor does it have to do with the conflict in the Middle East. Just the other week France voted in the United Nations Security Council in favor of the creation of a Palestinian state. French pro-Palestinian policies do not inoculate them from the violent acts of Islamist terrorists. To excuse, rationalize and attempt to find a source based in economic or social conditions misses the point and prevents us from correctly responding to and confronting the real source of the problem.

The world will be better equipped to confront and respond to the horror we just witnessed when we are honest and admit that we are dealing with an ideology that is fueled by fundamentalist extremists who are intolerant of any way of life other than their own. This is why there are attacks wherever people do not practice Islam as defined by these terrorists. This is why targets include churches in Africa, the kidnapping and forced conversion of Christians, and even mosques and other Moslems who do not practice the way they believe they should.

Israelis and Jews are not newcomers to this battle, nor are we surprised by the viciousness of the attacks. We cannot help but wonder if the situation could have been avoided if people would have expressed their outrage earlier, when the targets of their attacks were Jews.

Where was the outrage when terrorists entered a synagogue in Jerusalem and in cold-blooded murder gunned down Jews in prayer? Where was the international outrage when an angry mob went on a rampage in a synagogue in Paris a few months ago? Where was the outrage over the 2012 killing of a rabbi and three children at a school in Toulouse, France, or in May this past year when a gunman in Belgium opened fire at a Jewish Museum?

To be honest, the response to the murder of Jews at a French kosher supermarket feels a little different than the outrage over the attack at the newspaper in Paris. Would it even receive the notice it is getting were it not linked to the attack on the newspaper?

Yossi Klein Halevi said, "There's a certain bitterness in Israel where we have been watching the international community get worked up about terrorism in every part of the world except in Israel. World leaders condemn Islamist terrorism from Indonesia to London, but Jerusalem somehow doesn't get mentioned. It's as if we deserve it."

Is it asking too much for people to also hold up signs that say, "Je suis Juif: I am a Jew," in solidarity with the French Jews who have been killed? The attacks are not just against a free press, but against Jews and anyone who is not practicing religion the way these terrorists believe to be the correct way.

Is it unreasonable to expect honesty in reporting on the incident? The very same media organizations who worry so fiercely about government surveillance and who do not hesitate to advocate for the right to protest and for freedom of the press and who are so quick to decry infringement of freedom of expression and freedom of the press practice self-censorship. When they say they will not publish the offensive cartoons because they have suddenly become concerned about religious sensitivity, we know they are publishing a lie. They are concerned about their own safety, and they are being intimidated. They should be honest enough to tell us that.

I recently re-read a High Holiday sermon in which the rabbi said:

"The attacks upon Israel in the academic world and elsewhere should be viewed in the context of a broader global effort to undermine the Jewish state's right to defend itself and its right to exist. These affronts are a threat not just to Israel, but to the western principles of freedom and democracy.

Throughout history we have been the proverbial miner's canary. Israel was the first country to be the victim and target of international terrorism. Since the world thought the problem was confined only to the Jewish state, it looked the other way. It did even more than that. The Jewish Prime Minister of Austria, Bruno Kreisky freed Palestinian terrorists who had hijacked the Achille Lauro. Later Italy also released terrorists. These nations and all the world now knows no one is immune from extremism, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism.

The situation is reminiscent of Lutheran pastor Martin Neimoller's powerful oft-quoted message from the 1940's: 'First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me.'

What I said is as true today as it was when I first said it on Rosh Hashanah.

In the face of these attacks, there are those who show their defiance and solidarity with the victims by proclaiming, "Je suis Charlie." I join with them. But let us not stop there. Let us defy the terrorists, repudiate their intolerance and reject and renounce their attempts to intimidate us by proudly proclaiming, "Je suis Juif: I am a Jew." For Judaism is the antithesis of the system of the Islamists, which is why it is a target of their fury. The 20th century French Jewish writer Edmond Fleg returned to and re-embraced his Judaism in response to the anti-Semitism he experienced. In an essay he wrote in the 1920's he captured the ideals of our faith when he wrote:

"I am a Jew because, born of Israel and having lost her, I have felt her live again in me, more living than myself.

I am a Jew because, born of Israel and having regained her, I wish her to live after me, more living than in myself.

I am a Jew because the faith of Israel demands of me no abdication of the mind.

I am a Jew because the faith of Israel requires of me all the devotion of my heart.

I am a Jew because in every place where suffering weeps, the Jew weeps.

I am a Jew because at every time when despair cries out, the Jew hopes.

I am a Jew because the word of Israel is the oldest and the newest.

I am a Jew because the promise of Israel is the universal promise.

I am a Jew because, for Israel, the world is not yet completed; men are completing it.

I am a Jew because, above the nations and Israel, Israel places Man and his Unity.

I am a Jew because above Man, image of the divine Unity, Israel places the divine Unity, and its divinity."

This is why I am proud to say, "Je suis Juif: I am a Jew."

Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt
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Potomac, MD

PASSOVER, THE BREAD OF FAITH, AND THE DYNAMICS OF RELATIONSHIP

Rabbi Frederick L. Klein

The Seder operates on many levels. The Talmud speaks of two master narratives that structure the Seder night. Most are familiar with the opinion of the Talmudic sage Shmuel, that we are commanded to tell a story of our journey from slavery to freedom. This story has inspired not only our own liberation, but the liberations of peoples around the world.

However, there is a more subtle opinion brought in the name of the Talmudic sage Rav. We must tell the story that we were once idolaters but God brought us into relationship with Him.¹ In other words, the Exodus was not only the beginning of our freedom from bondage, but the creation of a new and expanded sense of self, the beginning of a relationship with God which has continued until this day. Perhaps for this reason we read on the Shabbat of Passover the Song of Songs. The book speaks of the yearning of a lover for his beloved and the forces which divide them. The book has been understood on allegorical levels as well, and the rabbis saw the poetic work as a love story between God and the Jewish people. It can be embodied in the verse "*Ani L'dodi V'dodi Li*". I am to my beloved as my beloved is to me.

If what I claim is true, then the Seder night can be considered an extended meditation upon the nature of our relationship with God, and upon relationships in general.² Like any relationship in life, ones relationship with God is dynamic, has moments of elation and moments of doubt, and any dynamic relationship must be explored and renewed every year if it is indeed to remain compelling. An unexplored relationship becomes one which is taken for granted, habitual, and ultimately devoid of meaning.

The ancient Passover, consisting of the offering of the Passover sacrifice was clearly a covenantal renewal ceremony, a reenactment of that initial Passover in Egypt. It was an annual opportunity to recreate that initial moment when God chose his beloved Israel and Israel chose their beloved God. Our modern day Seder - our modern day retelling, is also intended to achieve a similar effect. It is an anniversary of sorts, to help us remember why we are in this relationship in the first place. The lessons we learn are not only important with regard to our relationship with the Divine, but with those whom we love as well.

If what I claim is true, the symbols we appropriate on this evening should help us frame and articulate the nature of our relationship with God in particular, and our relationships with others in general. Indeed I believe they do.

To begin our exploration, let us look at the defining *mitzvah* of the modern holiday, the eating of *Matzah*. The Zohar, the foundational text of Jewish mysticism, refers to *Matzah* as 'the bread of faith', the *lechem d'hemnuta*. This is a puzzling phrase. Why is *Matzah* associated with faith, and precisely what kind of faith are we speaking about?

I would like to offer one possible explanation. To understand the meaning of this phrase, let us look at the symbol in context. The Haggadah tells us in the name of Raban Gamliel that in order to fulfill one's obligation one must minimally talk of the symbols of *Pesach* (the Paschal lamb), *Matzah*, and *Marror* (bitter herbs).³ If one looks closely and the first two symbols, one will notice a curious contradiction.

According to the Torah, the Jews were to take a lamb or a goat on the tenth day of the month of Nissan, and slaughter it on the fourteenth of Nissan. The blood was smeared on the lintel and the doorpost, and God "passed over" the houses of the Jews when killing every Egyptian first born. The rabbis teach us that this action was not at all simple, as the lamb was one of the gods of Egypt. Furthermore, this act was done in full view of their Egyptian neighbors. *Doing this was a statement of faith; it was an admission to the world and themselves that their very lives and homes were bound to God.*

¹ If one reads the *haggadah* closely they will notice both opinions are incorporated. The paragraph "*Avadim hayeenu*" accords with the opinion of Shmuel; "*Mitchila ovdei avodah zarah hayu avoteinu*" accords with the opinion of Rav.

² For this reason even if we know the entire story we are commanded to tell it, and the *haggadah* speaks about the rabbis telling the story through the night. Telling the story is not simply an intellectual fulfillment of the study of Torah, but it is an expression of love. It is an exploration of my personal relationship. (Based upon the teachings of Rabbi Chaim Brovender.)

³ There is a rabbinic discussion whether the obligation being discussed is the eating of the three symbols, or the *mitzvah* of *sippur yetziat mitzraim*, recounting the exodus. This discussion is beyond the scope of this essay.

God responds in kind, and announces to the Jewish people that redemption is near, that following the death of the first born Egyptians, the Jewish people will leave. God commands them to be ready for this singular moment for which they had been waiting over two hundred years; it was a time of excitement and anticipation. The way the sacrifice was to be eaten underscores the potency of this moment:

And thus shall ye eat it: with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste (*chipazon*)--it is the Lord's Passover (*Pesach hoo leHashem*) (Exodus 12:11).

The word *Pesach* (Passover) and the word *chipazon* (haste) in the chanting of the Torah syncopate with one another, as to suggest that part of the meaning of the Paschal lamb was that one needed to eat it with expectation and haste. They were to be ready to go into the desert, to begin their sojourn with God after 210 years of slavery!

That redemption was imminent was hardly surprising either. A chapter earlier in Exodus Moshe tells the people that the death of the first born will be the last of the plagues and that Pharaoh will bow down and the Egyptians will *push them out*. For years the Jewish people had seen signs and wonders, had witnessed the finger of God, and experienced God's presence. After two hundred years of silence, the people had experienced God's caring and concern in an undeniable manner.

Given all of this expectation and commotion, it is a great irony that on this very night of the Exodus, the Jewish people were busy making bread. Baking bread is a slow and deliberative process, hardly in the spirit of how one should eat the Paschal lamb. In fact, baking bread expresses exactly the opposite sentiment! While the Paschal lamb and its symbolism represents redemption- a singular moment beyond time, baking bread represents the mundane, the day to day management of an unspectacular life. While the Passover meal of Egypt was a uniquely special and sublime meal, bread is an ordinary staple food eaten on a daily basis. Listen to the words of the Torah:

And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead. And he called for Moses and Aaron by night and said: 'Rise up, get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve God, as you have said. Take both your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also.' *And the Egyptians imposed themselves upon the people, to send them out of the land in haste; for they said: 'We are all dead men.'* *And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading-troughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders....*

*And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry (*l'hitma'ameah*), neither had they prepared for provisions (Exodus 12:29-34).⁴*

From the context it is abundantly clear: the Jews did not walk out of Egypt, but were actively pushed out. In fact, they were pushed out so quickly that they were totally unprepared, and were running out with the dough on their back, not being allowed to tarry. *The implication is clear; if not for being forced out, they would have tarried and made bread.*⁵ Thus, although they were commanded to be ready to leave and had seen the wonders, on a deeper level it seems as if they did not really believe anything was going to change, in spite Moses' numerous exhortations and everything they had seen. Thus, the same people who put the blood on their doors are the same people baking bread! The same people who cry for redemption and freedom are the same people who tarry. What type of person is this?

The key to our ancestors' contradictions can be found in the rabbinic mitzvah of the eating and speaking about *marror* (bitter herbs), the third symbol in the triad of Raban Gamliel. In discussing *marror* we delve into the psychology of those Jews in Egypt. The Haggadah quotes the feelings of these people. "Why the *marror*? For

⁴ While other places the Torah commands them to bake matzot that evening to be eaten with the pesach and marror (see Exodus 12:8), here the context is clear: the Jews were baking bread and not allowed to finish. This contradiction is considered by many commentaries. See for example Nachmanides Ex. 12:39, RaN Pesachim 15a, Abravanel ch. 12.

⁵ The literary parallels to Lot's rescue from Sodom are striking. Both use the uncommon term *l'hitma'ameah*, to tarry. Lot also 'tarries' and the angels force Lot to leave. It is clear from the context there as well that Lot did not really believe Sodom was to be destroyed, or that he needed to leave.

their lives were ruthlessly embittered (V'yimaru) with harsh labor at mortar and bricks and with all sorts of tasks in the field.”

Consider the history of the Jewish people. God had sent them down to Egypt and had been incommunicado for over two hundred years. For all this time they had been traumatized by the Egyptians, possibly even sapped of hope. When Moshe came the first time to announce the redemption, we are told that the people believed that finally God had taken notice (Exodus 4:31). However, these hopes were quickly dashed at the first moment of challenge, when Pharaoh not only refused to let them go, but increased the work load through making them gather the straw for bricks. Following that episode, they cannot listen to Moses, ‘for the shortness of breath and heavy labor (6:9)’. They simply do not have the wherewithal to trust the message. They are a people devoid of faith, and become paralyzed.

In our lives, have we ever felt this way? Have we ever felt so burdened by life, by tragedy, or by trauma that we cannot see our way to alternative futures? If we have, we can glimpse into the psychology of our ancestors, and empathize with their plight. Like the sweet *charoset* intended to be a balm for the *marror*, there are times when we need to heal from the pain we feel inside. We are afraid to trust or believe, only to be disappointed again. Better the reliable meal of bread and water than the promise of the Paschal lamb.

With the plagues, God slowly begins to show them His protective Hand. Slowly, wonder by wonder, sign by sign they begin to believe, their confidence increases. Still, a gnawing doubt remains. God deserted them before, will they be deserted again? They love but yet cannot completely sacrifice for love. The slaves ask themselves, “Can we trust the process, can we believe? Do we have the faith, the courage to walk straight into the desert, into the unknown? Who is this God? Is this not the God who was silent for centuries? Who knows what will happen tomorrow. Maybe God will desert us again?” Doubt upon doubt upon doubt. Maybe it’s not worth the risk. The *marror* mediates the contradiction between *Matzah* and *Pesach*. It explains their ambivalence.

Jeremiah, thousands of years later, poetically described the commitment they ultimately were asked to make. “Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: “This is what the Lord says: “I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown.” The Exodus is the beginning of the relationship between the Jewish people and God. It was the event that created the very fabric of who we are as a nation, but taking that step was terrifying.

In our own lives to live in relationship and to love is to take great risks. We open ourselves up to another and live vulnerably, with no assurances. We are exposed and can be betrayed or hurt. We may choose to stay at home at bake bread. However, like the Jews who journeyed forth into the unknown and thereby became transformed, to live in dynamic relationship can be the catalyst to actualize ourselves as human beings. The rabbis were wise in penning the pithy statement, *l’fum agra sechara*, the reward is [proportional to] the risk.

Here we arrive at a deeper sense of what faith means in a Jewish context. *Faith is an act of will, to believe in possibility and to embrace that destiny. To have faith is courageous and heroic.* It is not that we throw out prudence and circumspection, but we do not let that dictate the entire gamut of our actions and emotions. Like Rav said, we once were idolaters like everyone else. However, we took a chance on God and God took a chance on us, and in the process we became who we are. To quote the Canadian poet Dionne Brand in her essay “Nothing of Egypt”

Revolutions do not happen outside of you, they happen in the vein, they change you and you change yourself, you wake up in the morning changing. You say this is the human being I want to be. You are making yourself for the future, and you do not even know the extent of it when you begin but you have a hint, a taste in your throat of the warm elixir of the possible.⁶

The *Matzah*, the bread of faith, is this taste in your throat of the future, it is the hint. It is true that for the first year, the baking of *Matzah* was an accident, as the *Matzah* had intended to be baked into bread like every other

⁶ My thanks to my colleague Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz for referring this to me.

day.⁷ However, every year thereafter, the *Matzah* became integral in its own right. The accident of history became the key to living. In Devarim, God commands

You shall not eat with it (the Paschal lamb) any *chametz* (leavened bread). [Rather] for seven days you shall eat *Matzah*, the bread of affliction, for you left Egypt in a rush (*chipazon*). In this way you will remember the day you went forth from Egypt every day of your life. (Devarim 16:3)⁸

In our own lives we each have our own Egypts which we need to leave behind. We each have tasted the *marror* and are well aware of them. However, the taste that lingers with us at the end of the night is the taste of the *Matzah*, the bread of faith. May we experience new horizons within ourselves, with one another, and among the entire Jewish people.

Chag Kasher V'Sameach.

Rabbi Frederick L. Klein
Miami, FL

⁷ While beyond the scope of this essay, in halakha the Passover in Egypt was only practiced for one day, the fourteenth of Nissan. The seven day festival of *chag hamatzot*, with the obligation to eat matzah and avoid *chametz* was commanded the next year, referred to as *Pesach dorot*, Passover of generations. See Pesachim 96a.

⁸ While the traditional reading of bread of affliction is it is the bread that was eaten in Egypt by the slaves, one might read the phrase as a description of the quality of the bread. That is to say, the matzah is a bread which is impoverished because it did not have time to develop and would be the type made by poor people without time. (See for example Chizkuni Devarim 16:3) If this is true, the verse supports the thesis I have been arguing.

YOM HA'AZTMAUT - "ISRAEL'S HOME COURT ADVANTAGE"

Rabbi Jonathan Berkun

This past Wednesday night, I surprised my sons Jeremy and Jonah with tickets to the Miami Heat basketball game. It was game five in the playoff series against our biggest rival, the Boston Celtics. If we won - which we did - it would end the Celtics' season and the Heat would advance to the next round.

As you might imagine, everyone in the American Airlines Arena was on their feet. We were rooting and chanting and shouting and dancing. We rejoiced whenever our team scored and fell silent whenever they scored. We yelled "Let's Go Heat" whenever our team had the ball, and screamed "De-fense" whenever they had possession. We passionately called out to our favorite players by name, and spared no emotion whatsoever in an all-out effort to encourage our beloved home team to win the game.

Unfortunately, the best seats I could find were high up in balcony. Truthfully, we would have had a much better view of the game had we watched it at home on television. But because we were situated so high, we also had a glorious view of the entire arena. It was easy to see just how much team spirit was in the building. And that view, those feelings, those sounds and those sights, that is what made the game so meaningful and memorable for my sons and me.

It was because of all this that I decided to bring my sons to the arena. I wanted them to experience those fervent fan feelings. I wanted them to be one of the thousands of frenzied fans who collectively constitute the "home court advantage." I wanted them to believe, as do many who attend sporting events, that our physical presence matters. When we bring to the arena our voices and our cheers, our loyalty to the team and our devotion to our hometown, we can actually have an impact upon the outcome of the game itself.

In every sport there are different rules and objectives, uniforms and playing fields. But there is one thing that always remains the same - everyone always prefers to play at home. No player likes to be surrounded by people rooting for the other guy. No athlete wants to play in front of people who want to see him lose. Playing away - on someone else's field or on someone else's court or on someone else's turf - is always a disadvantage. Playing at home is always the goal.

The excitement surrounding this particular game began to swell this past Tuesday, a day that just happened to be *Yom Ha'atzma'ut*, Israel's Independence Day. While the local sports media was hyping the importance of this game being played at home, Jews all over the world were celebrating the rebirth of their national home in the State of Israel. And then it occurred to me. For two thousand years, the Jewish people were a traveling team.

For two thousand years, the Jewish people had no home field advantage. Everywhere we lived and everything we did was on land that was sovereign to someone else. Everywhere we settled, we settled as a minority. Everywhere we went, we were subjected to the whims of the majority.

For two thousand years, no one wanted us to win. For two thousand years, we were surrounded by enemies cheering our demise. For two thousand years, we wandered from place to place, uprooting ourselves from one hostile environment only to find ourselves in another. We were exposed and unprotected. Living in foreign lands, we suffered persecution and harassment, discrimination and destruction.

Not having a home is the worst kind of disadvantage. It makes life dangerous and difficult, onerous and tiresome. It makes it impossible to find rest and impossible to find refuge. No one understands these truths better than the Jewish people. No one can understand the importance of having a home more than a people deprived of it for so many generations. Since the year 70 of the Common Era, the Jewish people have been homeless upon this earth.

So on May 14, 1948 - according to the secular calendar, sixty-three years ago today - David Ben Gurion stood in the holy city of Jerusalem and proclaimed the independence of the State of Israel. In the text of the official declaration, Israel's founding Prime Minister declared, *Hakamat Medinat Yehudit B'erezt Yisrael, hee Medinat Yisrael*, "the establishment of a Jewish State in the land of Israel, to be known as the State of Israel."

At that very moment, the national home of the Jewish people was reborn in the ancient land of our ancestors. The very home that was promised to Abraham and his descendents in the Torah was, again, sovereign Jewish land. It would be a home for the Jews all over the world. It would be a home for those who survived the Holocaust. It would be a home for those who abandoned property and wealth as they were cast out of surrounding Arab nations. And it would be a home for all those Jews who never stopped praying for one.

Three times a day, generations of traditional Jews have been praying that God would *kabtzeynu yachad m'arba kanfot ha-aretz*, "gather our dispersed from the four corners of the earth." For two thousand years, we never gave up hope that God would *tolicheinu ko-me-mi-yut l'artzenu*, "return us in dignity back to our Holy Land." Even in today's Haftarah, chanted by our Bar Mitzvah Adam Cohen, we are reminded of God's original promise to our ancestors, *latet lahem eretz zavat chalav u'dvash*, "to give us this land flowing with milk and honey."

And yet, sixty three years after the rebirth of our homeland, there remain large populations of people who believe that the Jewish people do not deserve a home. Every war that Israel has fought since the day of her Independence has been a War of Independence. We call them by different names - the Sinai Campaign of 1956, the Six Day War of 1967, the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the multiple Wars in Lebanon and Gaza - but all of them were ultimately over Israel's right to exist as a Jewish homeland.

Our enemies want us to wander the world all over again. Others among them want to push us into the sea. Sadly, the date of May 14, 1948 that Jews commemorate according to the original Hebrew date of *hey b'lyar*, is being observed by Israel's enemies today in what they perennially refer to as *Nakhba*, meaning the "catastrophe."

For them, Israel's rebirth in 1948 was nothing short of a disaster. It does not matter to them that in 1917, a legal document called the Balfour Declaration "gave international sanction to the historic connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel" as well as "the right of the Jewish people to rebuild its National Home." It does not matter to those who seek Israel's destruction that on November 29, 1947, "the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish State in the land Israel."

And yet, just last week, we learn that Hamas, now a full partner with Fatah in a newly formed Palestinian government, continues to refuse to recognize Israel's right to exist. According to militant leader Mahmoud Zahar, Hamas would be, quote, "willing to accept a Palestinian state within 1967 borders" but that "recognition of Israel would deprive future Palestinian generations of the possibility to 'liberate' their lands."

Perhaps Mahmoud Zahar needs to be reminded that there are fifty countries in the world with an Arab majority, most of whom have Islam as the official state religion. The Jewish people do not have a majority in any country except for one - Israel. And even that, according to our enemies, is one country too many.

Today, protests are happening throughout the Arab world, as they have been happening throughout the so-called "Arab Spring." But these protests are not so that Arab populations can enjoy greater freedom and democracy. They are protests commemorating the *Nakhba*, the so-called "catastrophe" of the Jewish State.

From Gaza to East Jerusalem and from Egypt to Jordan, there are those who want to roll back the clock. There are those who want Jews to be homeless, dispersed again among the nations and left to survive against all odds. But anyone who has been to Israel knows how central it is to the survival of the Jewish people.

For two thousand years, we had lost that feeling of being at home. We could not walk down the street knowing that most everyone around us is Jewish. We could not speak to vendors and policemen and shopkeepers and businessmen in the language of our ancestors, the language of the Torah. We could not behold the places where our forefathers lived and loved and prayed and died and know full well that those sacred sites belonged to us and were protected by us. We could not know what it felt like to live in the majority, to live in a country that brilliantly swirls together our common faith and our collective values, our shared history and our mutual aspirations.

The State of Israel is our home. Having her gives us the Jewish people the necessary advantages we need to survive and thrive. May we continue to cheer her on, visit her often, and help her to be strong and triumphant.

After two thousand years of exile, we never lost our hope. After sixty-three years of Statehood, we proclaim that we will never lose our home.

Happy May 14th to everyone, and Happy Birthday to the State of Israel. May she always be blessed with prosperity and peace.

Ken Y'hi Ratzon. So May it Be God's Will. And let us say, Amen.

Rabbi Jonathan Berkun
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“AMERICA IS THE BIBLICAL ISRAEL”

Rabbi Emeritus Amiel Wohl

This is the 360th anniversary of American Jewry. Who would have thought that from the 23 penniless Jews who landed in New Amsterdam in 1654 (5765) it would have come to this.

When you enter our sanctuary under the stained glass windows of the American “experience” there is a plaque:
“Jewish Ideals of Justice and Liberty in America”

The Jewish People found refuge from oppression. They encountered liberty and justice in whose presence they flourished. They found the ideals of Jewish Scripture and the New Land to be one and the same. They brought zeal, creativity and discovery to every field of endeavor in America. They were a blessing in the land and the Almighty prospered them.

It is no accident that America has been the nation of our flourishing. From the Puritan beginnings, the Hebraic mortar was placed in the foundation stone of our country. At Valley Forge asking for God’s providence General George Washington said, “Put only Americans on guard tonight!”

Already there was developing the Biblical faith that became Americanism that all human beings are created in the image of God, that they are to be free, and that America has a mission to the world!

This American faith propelled Lincoln to free the slaves and insist that the Union be preserved. Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, F.D.R., Harry Truman took America into the world to shore up democracy and overthrow tyranny and totalitarian regimes.

It was this Americanism undergirded by the Judeo-Christian faith in God – the faith grounded in our Hebrew Scriptures - that guided Ronald Reagan as he faced down Communism and the Soviet Union and won the Cold War.

If you want to know why anti-Americanism is rampant fostered by radical Islam it is because Americanism is a faith and a nationalism very much influenced by Judaism. No wonder that anti-Semitism has reached a crescendo pitch from Pakistan to Paris.

We are facing a global surge in anti-Semitic passion and shocking anti-Semitic propaganda. Across Europe Skinheads and Neo-Nazis are joined by angry Muslim youths, pro-Palestinian sympathizers, politicians, and media outlets who have created an environment outrageously hostile to us. Anti-Jewish violence, vandalism and rhetoric are now rampant in almost every European country. Israel remains embattled - fractious within, threatened from without - Palestinian and Pan-Arab - hostility unrelenting. And a new and growing phenomenon on at least 20 major American campuses - anti-Israel musterings by Islamic students and faculty and leftist and rightist students. “Politically correct” anti-Israel rallies becoming anti-Jewish. It has happened at Columbia, Vassar, Duke, UC Berkeley, and Wayne State. This has been documented by Alan Dershowitz and Natan Sharansky. The ADL, the Wiesenthal Center, the AJC are on the scene. But we need to stiffen the resolve of our Jewish students and faculty for it is a time of testing.

How ironic at a time when Jewish studies and Jewish chairs have been created at almost every university, anti-Semitism should be gaining ground.

Yes we are a precious asset. We who believe we are created in the image of God, that we are born to be free. We who believe in our America as the nation of hope for the world, as the Biblical Israel, “a light to the nations.”

As the American founders knew, America is a new kind of society that produces a new kind of human being... human beings that are confident, self-reliant and tolerant.

Let us continue to be among those who are future-oriented for a better world.

Rabbi Emeritus Amiel Wohl
Temple Israel of New Rochelle
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A MODERN PASSOVER TALE

Rabbi Morley Feinstein

Rabbi, what can I eat for the seven days of Pesach? Lentils, rice, potatoes, green beans? This question is about little things called in Hebrew kitniyot, from the Hebrew word katan (little). Ashkenazi Jews who grew up in Europe didn't know from rice! So their staple was the potato. And Sefardic Jews who grew up in North Africa and the Middle East knew about rice...not potatoes!

The prohibited grains which can ferment and become Hametz- leavened products and foods we don't eat during Passover - are wheat, barley, spelt, oats and rye. Surprisingly these are the only grains from which we can make Matzah. So we stay away from pastas, cereals, and breads made from these products for a week. With quinoa we can eat a grain-like product and have no difficulty whatsoever, as it can be made into noodles and other products.

So what's the only reason to maintain the custom? We've always done it this way! Our Reform practice can be understood best by this statement of the Central Conference of American Rabbis: "Reform practice, following the standard of the Talmud, permits the eating of rice and legumes during Pesach. The Talmud clearly rejects the suggestion that rice and legumes are chametz, and the likelihood that our people will confuse legume dishes with leavened dishes is too remote to be taken into serious consideration." If you've always done it this way, you don't have to abandon that practice. "As a matter of Reform communal practice, our 'standards of Pesach kashrut' allow the observant Reform Jew to eat rice and legumes during the festival."

But if these are the major concerns about Passover, aren't we missing the key story of our liberation from Egypt? Have we exchanged our concern for freedom, at the heart of our story, for the concerns about what's in the kitchen? Where should we really sharpen our focus? Our Haggadah teaches that each of us must look in the mirror and see a soul personally redeemed from the oppression of slavery. We should not turn our focus from the great teaching, handed down from generation to generation, into a focus on beans and peas. Our story is an ever new story, a tale that brings meaning to our lives, because we remember.

An engineer stumbled on a story about the Japanese tsunami which taught him that "Collective memory, as much as science and engineering, may save your life." Koutaro Ogata, a communal leader from a fishing village called Murohama, told this tale. He and his neighbors were well aware that a large earthquake would generate a large tsunami and they knew exactly what to do, because "a thousand years ago" a massive earthquake and tsunami had all but wiped out Murohama.

This is what he said. A millennium ago, the residents of Murohama, knowing they were going to be inundated, had sought safety on the village's closest hill. But they had entered into a deadly trap. A second wave, which had reached the interior of the island through an inlet, was speeding over the rice paddies from the opposite direction. The waves collided at the hill and killed those who had taken refuge there. To signify their grief and to advise future generations, the survivors erected a shrine.

Researchers discovered the records of a tsunami 1142 years before. Some 50 generations later, on March 11, 2011, the Murohama tsunami warning tower - which was supposed to sound an alarm - was silent, toppled by the temblor. Without the benefit of an official warning system supported by modern science, the locals relied on the lesson that had been transmitted generation to generation for 1,000 years. "We all know the story about the two tsunami waves that collided at the shrine." Instead of taking refuge on the closest hill, the one with the shrine, they took the time to get to high ground farther away. From the safety of their vantage point they saw two tsunami waves colliding at the hill with the shrine, as they did long ago. The engineer heard the old story and the new one again: A community remembered what it had been told and did the right thing. Reaching out from the distant past, long-gone ancestors - and a deeply embedded story - saved their children.

During the Passover Seder we proclaim: *Let all who are hungry come and eat.* Why do we say these words? Because we have a long embedded memory in our collective Jewish DNA. "We recall moving from the degradation of slavery to the liberation of journeying to the Promised Land. We celebrate our freedom by eating a bread of affliction, *Matzah*. This "poor bread" reminds us of how we were once strangers in a strange land. With that knowledge, with that memory, we are to be good, kind and generous to the stranger because we know what it is like to be a stranger. (Fred Greene)

And the story does not stay at the table, forgotten; the *Matzah* for the Seder table is neither covered in caramel nor chocolate. The *Matzah* reminds us of how we escaped from pain and suffering, and helps us ally our hearts and souls with others in dire straits. People are still in a variety of “Egypt” today in our world. The Egypt of poverty, hunger, homelessness is more than most of us can even imagine. As we celebrate Passover this year, let us tell the story and take to heart the words of our ancient and ever new story of freedom.

Rabbi Morley Feinstein
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WHEN WE ARE IN PAIN

Rabbi David J. Zucker
Rabbi Bonita E. Taylor

The Romantic poet, William Blake (late 18th-early 19th century English) wrote:

"It is an easy thing to triumph in the summers sun . . .
It is an easy thing to talk of patience to the afflicted . . .
When the red blood is filled with wine & with the marrow of lambs.
It is an easy thing to laugh at wrathful elements . . . While our olive & vine sing & laugh round our door & our children bring fruits and flowers." (*Vala, or the Four Zoas*)

Yet what of when we - as *rabbonim* or as health-caregivers - who are the perceived comforters of others, are the one afflicted? When we like the ancient Israelites are in the wilderness, what then? When unexpectedly our physical health is in jeopardy, when we find ourselves suddenly hospitalized, it seems a long way from the thought that life is good. Then the "triumph of the summers sun, when the red blood is filled with wine & with the marrow of lambs" is far from us. How do we cope when we are in what seems like an endless wilderness, when God seems distant and barely accessible from our bed of pain? One traditional answer when all else fails is to *zog tehillim*, recite Psalms. So we turn to the psalter and read: "Give ear, O God, to my prayer; do not ignore my plea; pay heed to me and answer me. I am tossed about, complaining and moaning . . . my heart is convulsed within me . . . fear and trembling invade me . . . Evening, morning, and noon, I complain and moan" (Psalm 55:2, 3, 5, 6, 18). Yet, unlike this psalm that assures that God "will deliver" that God "hears my voice [and] redeems me unharmed from the battle against me" (vss. 17-19), what if I feel no such succor? *B'yado afkeed ruhi* . . . *Adonai lee v'lo eera*, explains the closing words of *Adon Olam*, I place myself within God's power, God is mine, I shall not fear. Yet, I do fear. I fear, and I am lonely, and I am bereft.

How then does the comforter find comfort? Or who then comes to comfort the comforter?

One answer is to pray to God to be with one, even in the pain. Be my support God, be with me, even in my sorrow. Even if I shall not be redeemed unharmed from the battle against me, nonetheless do hear my voice. "*El na, r'fa na la*," Moses pleaded for Miriam (Numbers 12:13), Please God, *heal* her, please. God's presence can bring healing, if not a cure. Yet, surely that need not be our only hope. When we are the afflicted, we need the presence of others, even if that may mean that we are embarrassed to be seen as vulnerable, lying on a bed of pain. Yet, as we in our time offered comfort, as we in the traditional language of the Talmud took away one-sixtieth of the pain from those we visited (BT *Nedarim* 39b and elsewhere), so may we be open to being helped by others.

Life is precious. Life is also fragile. We are all vulnerable. We draw great personal contentment from being of help to others, but realistically, we never know when we may be the one who is in need. Taking the time to consider our responses when we will need comfort will be time well spent.

Rabbi David J. Zucker, PhD, recently retired after eighteen years as Rabbi/Chaplain and Director of Chaplaincy Care at Shalom Park, a senior continuum of care center and hospice in Aurora, CO. Presently he is serving as the Interim Rabbi at North West Surrey Synagogue, Weybridge, Surrey, England. He contributes to many journals, www.davidjzucker.org

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PESAH YIZKOR

Rabbi Wayne Allen

In his response *Arugat HaBosem*, Rabbi Moshe Greenwald (*Orah Hayyim*, No. 211) addresses the question whether the memorial prayer we know as Yizkor must be recited for each individual or may all the names of all those being memorialized be included in just a single prayer. Taking into consideration the impatience of the congregation in listening to a litany of memorial prayers, he rules that one “master” prayer including all the names is permitted. Besides which, he argues, the longer the Yizkor service takes, the greater the likelihood that idle conversation will disrupt the service.

Underlying Rabbi Greenwald’s response, it must be noted, is the assumption that every name must be mentioned despite the fact that in congregations where such memorial lists are read the service will be longer and tiresome. Each individual - whether alive or dead - is precious, unique, and worthy of special attention.

The Passover narrative is, in fact, confirmation of this very idea. To the English reader, the Passover narrative is part of the Book of Exodus. To the Hebrew reader, however, the celebration of Pesah is described in Sefer Shemot, literally, the Book of Names. It is called the Book of Names, presumably, because it follows the traditional pattern of naming books or sections of Scripture after the opening words. But here, the title of the book takes on added significance. The ancestors of those enslaved in Egypt are long dead, but their names live on. The rites, customs, and sagas of the Israelites were passed down by each of those notables who had preceded the generations of slaves. And these very traditions helped sustain our ancestors through four hundred years of slavery.

At Yizkor we recall each and every name because they, too, have endowed us with the tools of survival as Jews as well as given reason to proud of our heritage. They may be recently departed or long deceased yet are recalled with equal fondness and revered with equal respect. They are more than just our kin. They are our namesakes. Their lives and lessons have made us what we are. There is nothing that we can do to repay them entirely for what they have bequeathed us. The least we can do is to lovingly pronounce each name and thus assure them a piece of immortality.

Rabbi Wayne Allen
Toronto, Canada

FRANCE LOSES IF JEWS LEAVE

Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso
Rabbi Dennis C. Sasso

The stunning march of a million French citizens (January 11, 2015) led by dozens of world leaders in response to rising anti-Semitism was evocative of the civil rights marches led by Martin Luther King in the United States decades ago. At this season, it also reminds us of another march out of bondage into freedom, the biblical Exodus. Had the Civil Rights movement been unsuccessful, it would have meant a defeat not only for blacks, but for American democracy, for the principles enshrined in the Bill of Rights. Without the Exodus narrative, generations of our people and others struggling for liberation, would have been bereft of its radical idea and inspiration.

The murderous assault on Charlie Hebdo and the kosher grocery in Paris (January 7, 2015) were brutal attacks on basic human rights and on the democratic ideals of the French Republic: liberty, equality and fraternity. For French Jews this was the most recent incident of anti-Semitic violence on places of Jewish gathering, from day schools to synagogues. These deplorable events have led to calls for French Jews to leave France. Of course, it is up to French Jewish families to decide what is best for their own safety and security. But if the majority of the 500,000 Jews in France were to decide to leave, the loss would not only be for Jews, but for France. It would not only mean the dismantling of the second largest Diaspora community after the United States, but a weakening of French democracy. As the French Prime Minister stated, "France without Jews is not France."

From the time of the French Revolution in 1789, France led European countries in affirming the full citizenship of its Jews. Looking back from the twenty-first century, this does not seem like a revolutionary idea, but it was. Until the eighteenth century, Jews were not citizens of the countries in which they lived. They were a minority without civil rights, living at the pleasure of the government. They were not allowed to vote nor hold political office. They were banned from certain professions and from universities. Then came this "radical idea" of the Enlightenment that Jews would be judged not as a group but as individuals. Jews were promised that if they would assimilate into French culture, they would be treated as equals. This ideal was tested many times, most dramatically in the Dreyfus Affair. In 1894 Alfred Dreyfus, an assimilated Jew and an officer in the French army was falsely accused, tried and imprisoned for treason. The French novelist, Emile Zola, wrote an open letter to the President of France accusing the army of anti-Semitism for which he also was tried and convicted. The Dreyfus affair led Theodore Herzl, an assimilated Jewish journalist, to conclude that despite the European Enlightenment, historic religious and racial anti-Semitism would hinder the integration of Jews into European society. Herzl's ideas, developed programmatically at the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, led a half century later to the birth of the State of Israel, whose sixty seventh anniversary we celebrate this year.

Today, France and the European continent continue to work toward a nationalism which embraces all citizens, regardless of ethnicity or religion. This ideal is once again being tested. New emerging ethnic communities are questioning this model of national identity. The growth of separatist Islamic militant fundamentalism threatens the fabric of democracy and European societies.

The recent events in Paris and other European cities are attacks on all freedom loving people. They are a call to those who cherish civil liberties and human rights to unequivocally denounce intolerance, hatred and violence. They echo the Exodus' call to freedom made millennia ago. The biblical journey entailed many challenges and struggles. The cowardly attacks of Amalek could have intimidated our ancestors and persuaded them that freedom was not worth the risks. But they journeyed forward and prevailed. In our times, we are also faced by an implacable Amalek who attacks journalistic offices and worshippers in synagogues, kosher markets, trains, subways and buses. This Amalek hates freedom of the press and of belief; it is threatened by equality of the sexes and by pluralism; it fears democracy and participatory citizenship.

The future and security of democracy depend on communities and governments educating their people for civic engagement, affirming the rights of individuals and celebrating the values of cultural diversity. As

we fill our Seder cups with wine and begin the journey from Pesah to Shavuot, let us vow to protect our cherished values of the season: freedom and covenant; liberation and obligation; independence and interdependence.

(Adapted from a column by the authors that appeared in the Indianapolis Star January 19, 2015)

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THE REVELATION: WE WERE THERE THEN, WE ARE HERE NOW

Rabbi Andrew Bossov

A few summers ago while relaxing on our backyard deck, I overheard a spirited conversation coming from our neighbors' yard. Everyone was talking about the Ten Commandments, and how, for all the fuss about whether or not they should be displayed in court rooms and other civic venues, hardly anybody can name them all from memory - just like people not being able to name all Seven Dwarves. They set about proving their point as, between them all, they couldn't do the former - and nearly missed the latter until someone suddenly remembered "Dopey" which made everyone else shriek with laughter at the irony.

For the significance they play within Judaism and generally, for their prominence at Shavu'ot and/or Confirmation services as the Festival Day's *parasha*, for the worshippers who rise during their chanting, it is indeed ironic that the majority of people who acknowledge their importance as a whole still cannot recite all Ten - nor do they possess even a decent understanding of them!

Over the years, I have found that many people (other than true "learners") have difficulty relating to the language of prayer and scripture due to translations and explanations that do not use more contemporary parlance. The typical use of King James wording - particularly with the Ten Commandments - and theological *drasha* are not accessible enough for the average "Jew in the pew" seeking clear applicability of Judaism's time-honored teachings to contemporary life. Therefore, even Divinely-revealed *mitzvot* such as the *Aseret Dibrot* often do not get absorbed by people who otherwise remember and assimilate a whole range of statistical and technical information.

What follows, then, is not an entire pedagogy on the subject of making the Ten Commandments more accessible (and therefore more observable), but rather a call to those of us who have heard a call to put the life into "living Judaism."

- I. I am God.
The Start of it all, about which (Whom) we may never have complete knowledge or understanding. Beyond being Creator of everything – whether by Big Bang, Intelligent Design, or any other method of creating a whole universe! - it seemed to our ancestors that this same God might even have had a "hand" in delivering them from Egypt, from slavery, from living as chronic foreigners. If the Creative Source is not fully knowable, it is certainly possible that It gets involved in our personal lives. But if someone were to just dismiss the "omniscient, omnipotent" descriptors out-of-hand, maybe they can still accept that God is the blessed Name for what got us all here in the first place - and it's THAT Power that we ought to revere, be in awe of, and, yes, worship as The One. No human advancement will ever exactly duplicate the wondrous reality of the seemingly infinite life forms on this planet. Perhaps it was THAT level of knowledge that was forbidden to Adam and Eve?
- II. Don't make any false gods.
If I then II? Not necessarily, as people who look to a human-like God to intervene in their lives and are then "denied" their wishes often turn to other sources - not unlike a child who, refused something by one parent, might petition the other instead. Many might say that there are no real consequences to making "false gods," and yet people who worship things of their own creation often discover that their admiration and reverence might have been better directed elsewhere - like to God and God's creations.
- III. Don't utter God's name needlessly.
Whether via profanity or by swearing an oath to God that one might not keep, one should be cautious about "throwing God's name around." Will one be struck down by lightning for doing so? No, but cheapening the Source of all life won't lead you toward a better life or any component thereof. Even as we abhor being shunned or ignored or devalued, so should we strive to maintain God's dignity - one way of understanding that we are created in God's image.

- IV. Take a Shabbat once a week!
This SHOULD be the easiest commandment to follow: chill, relax, take a breather, appreciate what you have and have been given in the natural world for a little while. Be proud that God/Judaism invented the weekend! But maybe show some respect for this weekly phenomenon and for the community that has been encouraging it for millennia!
- V. Honor your father and your mother.
We've all heard about the abusive or absent parent which makes it impossible for some to understand or follow this commandment - and what about children who have two dads or two moms? The understanding and acceptance of this commandment must include honoring one's identity, one's community and background, our ancestors, all the mothers and fathers who, with God's "help," brought us into the world and help shape our souls.
- VI. Don't murder.
Many substitute "don't kill" here and get all tangled in a web of misunderstanding. Even the most traditional interpretations allow for defensive or punitive killing, but pre-meditated destruction of one of God's "children" is like destroying property loaned you by a friend and not caring at all about the consequences.
- VII. Don't commit adultery.
While this should be obvious, again it is a form of debasing another human being and providing more evidence that human beings aren't really advancing at all when lust can still overpower moral commitment and legal contracts. The urge to "get away with something," a clear manifestation of *yetzer ha-rah*, indicates a lack of maturity that bespeaks a horrible malaise in human nature which needs to be confronted perpetually.
- VIII. Don't steal.
Don't rob someone of their possessions, sure, but also of their childhood innocence, of their reputation in the community, of their ability to love and trust another person.
- IX. Don't abuse others by lying about them.
Falsifying information about others in a legal setting is bad enough, but in a modern context we also find an increase in bullying techniques and other ways of conducting *lashon ha-rah*. Parents who try to control or poison their children's thoughts and feelings about themselves and their self-esteem (by using phrases like "you'll never be good at that," for example) are also lying - about their children's potential.
- X. Don't excessively crave what others have.
It's OK to admire, but don't go to extremes and stomp on other people on your way to acquiring the types of possessions or relationships enjoyed by others that seem appealing to you.

Again, this one article is certainly not an exhaustive study, but simply a *petikhta* of sorts for all those who instruct about Judaism (including parents!) toward the goal of making the Ten Commandments more relevant to contemporary daily life for students of all ages - and Shavu'ot provides just the spark for doing so!

Andy Bossov currently directs the Mt. Vernon Senior Programs for Westchester Jewish Community Services (New York). He served congregations in Baltimore, Sarasota and Mt. Laurel (New Jersey), and was "that rabbi" who received a kidney transplant from a minister friend in 2007. He resides near the Yonkers, NY, waterfront and regularly performs as a pianist and vocal accompanist.

VALUES AND MEANINGS OF PESACH

Rabbi Sergio Bergman

About Freedom

What are we liberating ourselves from?

When we speak about *Pesach*, we refer to the Festival of Freedom, based on the biblical story of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and their liberation from the bonds of slavery and the yoke of Pharaoh.

The *Hagadah* asks us to understand this tale not as an episode of the past, but as a continuing tale which indicates "*Bechol dor vador*" in each generation, each one of us must see himself/herself as if we had come out of Egypt". This means that we are the ones who have to leave Egypt, even today wherever we may be.

From our own idolatry

Idols today are no longer the clay sculptures or large stone sphinxes. The current idols are others, so incorporated into our reality that we don't realize that we are worshiping them. Identifying models, fashion, relationship styles, clothing, and appearance... these are aspects that we have to be liberated from.

From our own bonds

To what things are we bound? To aspects that repress our creativity. Getting rid of them will allow us to expand our being, to grow, to create, to be able to become.

We also liberate ourselves from today's Pharaohs

Everyone can easily recognize ourselves in history when a Pharaoh is pressing on us: through money, status, or power. But there is not always an oppressor, the one who oppresses and enslaves us. Many times we are facing other types of oppressive situations like unemployment, or a lack of impunity.

Liberating oneself from **oppression** means getting to salvation - *Geula*, redemption - Freedom is an expression of Redemption. We should be grateful for the liberation from Egypt because it links us with the *Geula*. This redemption is not "heavenly" as G-d will not actively break into our history. We redeem ourselves by the work of our own hands, as we are the ones who are active protagonists of our salvation.

So in the end, it is we who liberate ourselves from alienation: the contemporary shape of slavery.

What do we liberate for?

Liberation in itself would have been enough had there not been the remaining question of: "what for" were we liberated.

The *Geula*- Redemption is what provides meaning to this remaining question about liberation. That question being: Where did I come from and where I'm going to. On *Pesach* we must remember that we were liberated to **make a pact** (*Brit*) in history. Our liberation from Pharaoh led us to the pact at Sinai, the constitution of a People, through the Law, the Torah.

In our personal lives, we speak about freedom to love and to be a person. But on *Pesach* we liberate ourselves to become a part of **Torah** and **Mitzvot**.

That means, we must try to translate the values of Torah through our daily behaviors based on that which

is written in the Torah because Torah is not text, but **Life itself**. *Mitzvot* replace the “yoke of Pharaoh”, with “the yoke of the fulfillment of the *Mitzvot* (precepts)”.

The fulfillment of the *Mitzvot* should be accompanied by the awareness of “why I’m doing what I’m doing”. But this awareness does not liberate us from doing mitzvot

The legislation is not a matter of debate and is not subject to human reasoning or conviction. This is so because there is a divine pact between G-d and the Israelites (the Jewish People). In addition there is another underlying issue called Tradion wherein we are children of the pact made at Sinai. When we accept our freedom for a life with rules (Torah and *Mitzvot*) we give meaning to practice and we pledge not to neglect these same rules of our Tradition.

With whom do we liberate ourselves?

In order to sustain any pact, we need to “be with”. That means being in a like-minded community wherein we are united in common purpose. This is what it means **to belong and to gain a sense of transcendence**. **Even though we are subjective and have only our** personal experience, being with others allows us to gain transcendent liberation. In this state of consciousness: being aware of my being, of the light that I have, of the eternal, the light I give and receive from others. This allow for transcendent liberation which allow us to uncover the mystery of life.

Rabbi Sergio Bergman is an Argentine rabbi, politician, pharmacist, writer, and social activist. He serves as rabbi of the synagogue of the Congregación Israelita Argentina. He is CEO of Judaica Foundation and president of Argentina Ciudadana Foundation, as well as Executive Director of Action Network and Community Initiatives for Social Enterprise. He is a member of the Argentine Parliament

"LET MY PEOPLE GO: FREEDOM, SLAVERY, WORK, AND WORSHIP"

Rabbi Neal Joseph Loevinger

Most children or adults who've had even a little bit of Jewish education remember that that Moses went to Pharaoh and said, "let my people go!" We tend to think of the Exodus story is seen as a struggle between freedom and oppression, between the liberator Moses and the despotic Pharaoh, who becomes emblematic of all the tyrants, dictators, slaveholders, demagogues and corrupt authorities who have abused others from the dawn of history until today. It's such a familiar story that we take it for granted, but it's quite astounding that the basic text of the Jewish story is about God on the side of the poor and powerless, the broken and afraid.

This is hardly typical of either ancient or modern texts: think of the ancient myths that valorize heroes, kings, majestic beauties and extraordinary people with godlike powers. It's not just an ancient problem: think of all the books and magazines you might see in a drugstore or supermarket, and think of who they put on the cover to get your attention. Very few popular magazine covers show us the image of the poorest of the poor, servants and slaves, the suffering and scarred, in order to proclaim the message: these are the people to whom attention must be paid!

If telling the Exodus story at Passover did nothing more than focus our conscience on those who are most often forgotten, *dayenu*, it would be enough. Yet that's not the only message of the Exodus and Passover, as seen in the Torah itself. The beginning of Exodus 5 has Moses pleading with Pharaoh not only to let the people go, but to let the people go in order that they may worship God in the desert wilderness. In response, Pharaoh issues new orders to his slave masters, telling them to increase the workload of the Israelites, since wanting to go worship God is an obvious sign of their laziness and sloth. (Cf. 5:8)

The psychologist and theologian Richard Beck points to this as illustrating another polarity in the Exodus story: not only is there the contrast between slavery and freedom, but also, in the mind of Pharaoh, between *work* and *worship*. If Pharaoh is symbolic of all those who abuse others, making people into mere instruments of economic or political or military value, then the countervailing force is not only freedom, but worship, which I understand as not just ritual and prayer but as the development of a powerful spiritual consciousness. Knowing that there is a Source of hope greater than our current conditions can lead to courage, perspective, dignity and purpose. The last thing Pharaoh - or any abusive authority- wants is for the people to realize that there is a power higher than Pharaoh!

Of course, Pharaoh can see none of this: to him, spiritual consciousness is just frivolity, nothing that his servants need. In this day and age, when we are constantly pulled towards distraction by our devices and media blaring out from screens all around us, this contrast between work and worship takes on a whole new urgency. It's not laziness to pray, meditate, study sacred texts and develop our deeper consciousness; in fact, it's probably a necessary precondition to the really hard work, which is redeeming those still caught in oppression and despair.

The point of Passover isn't just a nice meal with a good story. The point is to remind us who we really serve. The rituals, narratives, songs and foods of the *Seder* take us out of our ordinary routines into the realm of "worshiping God in the wilderness," or seeing the world in a new way, refusing to be scared of Pharaoh anymore. Leaving Egypt- the "narrow place" of restricted vision- means imagining a world wherein the poor are important and the king is not, where meeting the Divine is our greatest goal rather than turning out more bricks and widgets. "Let my people go" ultimately means "let all people go;" Passover is a recommitment to that vision of a redeemed world, which we can only bring about by thinking new thoughts, to see the world and ourselves in a new way. We see the world as it really is by telling the oldest and best story we have, as we have always done.

Rabbi Neal Joseph Loevinger
Poughkeepsie, NY

POEMS

Rabbi Adam Fisher

SEDER GUESTS

As I carried Pesach preparations
from Commack Kosher
A woman I hardly saw, offered
a sign language card asking
for money. I waved her away, hesitated,
then remembered, " Let all
who are hungry come and eat," took out
a dollar, but she had already gone.

After the Goldstein family Seder,
David, a guest from the orphanage,
asked the fifth question:
"Will you
adopt me?"

A SEDER

"This year we are slaves; next year may we be free."
(Passover Haggadah)

Anna has just been released
from the hospital;
no one knows the cause
of her depression.
Robert, out on a pass
sounds confused.
Both celebrate Pesach freedom,
but they are still enslaved
and no one,
from Moses 'til now,
know how to free them.

PESACH DEATH, PESACH DEMANDS

While we celebrated,
ate the Pesach lamb,
God killed first-born Egyptians.
We heard cries in the village,
screaming mothers, sobbing fathers.
Some stopped eating, grew quiet.
Soon we heard people run
frantically toward us,
so we hid from yet another pogrom -
this one (or so we thought) for revenge,
but they demanded, "Leave now!"
We grabbed what we could,
ran in joyous panic.
Some saw their fear,
demanded jewelry and clothing.
A few refused to accept.

Later, God told us,
“Separate out
your first-born
for Me.” (Ex. 13.12)

SPECIAL PASSOVER SEDER

“We will all go, young and old;
we will go with our sons and daughters,
our flocks and herds;
for we must observe the Lord’s festival.” (Exodus 10.9)

Daniel manages to say thank you,
when prompted.
Sharon looks off forehead knitted;
the aide holds her curled-up hand.
Paul shuffles, his tongue hanging,
speaks thick syllables.
Richard sways, drools.
An aide wipes his chin,
speaks softly.

Ribbono shel olam,
watch over them,
let them have some joy,
bless their aides -
they do Your work.

AN ELIJAH STORY

The man who managed on food stamps
juggled electric bills with welfare checks
asked me for Passover money:
“For a few matzos and gefilte fish
so we wouldn’t forget
what it’s like to feel free.”
When I gave him a check
he told me,
“You’ll be Elijah
at our house this year.”

EXODUS MEDITATION

“With Pharaoh chasing them,
the sea a barrier, Israel’s children ask,
“What have you done to us,
taking us out of Egypt...where we
sat by fleshpots?” (Exodus 14.11, 16.3)

Our children raised
with camel races
and game shows after work;
strangers without memory
of Jacob, or yearning for holiness.

How do they learn
that the Unseen One leads us?
How do we answer
when this journey
is what we are,
not something to be explained?

Rabbi Adam Fisher
Rabbi Emeritus
Temple Isaiah
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JDC.ORG

Aiding Jews in Turbulent Ukraine

For more than 100 years, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) has been a lifeline for Jews living in dire circumstances overseas, fueled by the generosity of Jewish communities and philanthropists across North America.

Today those Jews include the growing number of elderly, children, and families in war-torn Ukraine who have nowhere to turn but to JDC to fulfill the invitation we extend at the start of every Passover Seder: “Let all who are hungry come and eat; let all who are needy come and observe Pesach with us.”

Embodied in these words is our people’s unshakeable adherence to the principle of *areivut*—our global responsibility to help fellow Jews in need and to nurture a strong Jewish future.

In 2,500 locations across the former Soviet Union (FSU), that sense of responsibility translates today into food, medicine, home care, and winter heating for over 144,000 elderly and impoverished Jews struggling to survive on meager pensions; material and social support for some 32,000 at-risk children and families; innovative Jewish programming that is reaching the unaffiliated; and dynamic training activities that have nurtured a new generation of leaders.

And today, faced with thousands of Jews whose lives have been upended by Ukraine’s ongoing crisis, JDC is bringing its programs and expertise to bear to help families who never thought they would need economic assistance and elderly whose chronic difficulties have worsened with each passing day.

They are people like Marina Kasyanov, in the southeastern Ukraine city of Melitopol, who is fighting her own battle with cancer while struggling to raise a daughter with chronic respiratory issues on a \$121 monthly income. Each winter, Marina worries that her modest apartment isn’t warm enough to keep 12-year-old Michel from developing one of her frequent infections.

To ease their plight, the Kasyanovs received a new space heater this winter from their local Hesed - one of 32 JDC-supported social welfare centers serving 60,000 Jews in need in more than 1,000 locations across Ukraine. They’ve also been getting vitamins, fruits, vegetables, and other winter supplies.

JDC expanded its Winter Relief Program in Ukraine sevenfold this year, responding to a harsh winter worsened by the country’s energy crisis, skyrocketing costs, ongoing violence, and the growing needs of displaced Jews.



That aid has been delivered by a corps of unsung heroes, Hased workers and volunteers who have been traversing cities under fire to care for frail, homebound Jewish elderly and others who simply cannot leave. Their selfless devotion to their tasks is awe-inspiring; “without their visits,” said JDC’s FSU director, “people would die.”

“Caring for these people gives me strength and courage,” said 66-year-old Sophia, whose work delivering vital care to desperately needy Jews has taken her to some of the most dangerous parts of war-torn Donetsk. “I understand I can be killed or injured, but I try not to think about it. I just run and pray. So far it’s worked.”

Sophia has braved months of shelling to reach elderly Jews like Mark, who lives close to Donetsk’s ruined airport and has no gas, water, electricity, or phone in his tiny apartment. The only way to reach him is on foot, and Sophia has been carrying all of his food and medicine to him by herself. Together they’ve taken cover in his basement when incoming fire came dangerously close, and Sophia has even spent some nights there. “During the shelling we support each other so we aren’t as scared,” she said.

Providing a modern-day example of Hillel’s teaching, Sophia sees Mark’s dire need and feels compelled to respond. “It’s as though he were a child of mine, who needs caring for,” she says. “If not for me, who will come and help?”

Top: Sophia and Mark, Donetsk.

Bottom: Marina Kasyanov and daughter receive a space heater.

We are grateful for our network of philanthropic partners in this life-saving work: JFNA and Jewish Federations across North America, Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein and the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, World Jewish Relief, and numerous foundations and private funders who have stepped forward to assist the Jews of Ukraine in their time of grave danger and need.



Building A Nation and A People Since 1929:

Passover Wishes from The Jewish Agency Family

After a difficult winter here in Israel and for Jews around the world – the spring blossoms bring a promise of hope and of new beginnings. As the holiday of Passover approaches, Jews gather in synagogues and at their family Seder to recall the miraculous Exodus from Egypt, and to celebrate the continuation of the Exodus in our present time.

There's the teen in Dnepropetrovsk taking ulpan classes in anticipation of his Aliyah. The Ethiopian immigrant in an absorption center in Beersheva, surrounded by her grandchildren. The businesswoman in France planning her next career move in Tel Aviv. The outgoing Russian-speaking couple, building a life for themselves in Sderot.

Each one with his own story. Each with her own connection to the land of Israel and to world Jewry. Here at The Jewish Agency, as we put out the Matzah and pour the first cup of wine -- one united global Jewish family -- we're working hard to make modern Aliyah a reality for Jews everywhere. Because for us, "If you will it, it is no dream", isn't just a catchphrase. **It's our mission statement.**

Since 1929, we've been building a nation and a people - committed to securing the Jewish future with its heart in Israel, and dedicated to making the Diaspora-Israel relationship ever stronger.

As we celebrate the first instance of our people's freedom from foreign lands, the first instance of a mass Aliyah to the holy land, we reflect on the vast numbers of Jews who continue in this vain to make a home for themselves in Israel. From nearly one million olim from the FSU in the 1990's to the 26,500 new immigrants in 2014. Jews around the world from France to India to Ukraine are choosing to go home. In 2014, economic crisis and an increase in anti-Semitism led an Aliyah surge in France, to 7,231 people. As the political situation worsened in Ukraine, 17,500 people contacted The Jewish Agency to learn about Aliyah. **Ukrainian Aliyah is expected to reach 6,500 people by the end of 2015 and French Aliyah up to 15,000.**

This Passover, as we come together to reflect on the miracle of returning to Israel, whether it was in ancient times or our present day, we are also looking forward to the hard work that lies ahead. Here's to a time of peace, freedom, and new beginnings.

Blessings and warm wishes for this Passover to our entire global Jewish family - from your Jewish Agency family.