

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Passover Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

Welcome to the month of Nisan, 5785. This year, the lunar, Hebrew calendar aligns well with our Gregorian calendar. Nisan begins at the end of March, and Passover begins in the middle of April. Passover is always in the spring, because it represents the new life we embraced when we left Egypt on our 40-year journey in search of the Promised Land. The Hebrew calendar corrects itself to make sure that Passover remains in springtime, celebrating that newness that comes with growth. We are Jewish because of Passover. And we always will be, for several reasons.

First, there is the **story**. We read a *Haggadah*, which means the telling. But the Passover Haggadah is not the original story. Asking, "Why is this night different from all other nights," is as much about the rituals related to a Passover seder as it is about the biblical story of the Exodus from Egypt. The entire Book of Exodus tells the famous tale of being enslaved, being freed, and then setting out onto a journey of liberation.

The Torah tells the story, and the rabbis created ritual that help remind us of the key elements of bondage and of freedom. This powerful story includes horrific moments. We were tortured for hundreds of years. The Holy One heard our suffering over the generations, and performed dramatic actions to demonstrate His power. He plagued our adversaries ten times, each plague worse than the previous one. We spent forty long years travelling through a mysterious desert, struggling with hunger, thirst, rebellion and uncertainty. The Passover story is filled with suffering. And thousands of years later, we turn it into a fun night of celebration.

It is the defining time of the Jewish people. We learn about suffering so we can be sensitive to the suffering of others. During our journey, we receive the Ten Commandments, solidifying our relationship with God, and our mutual commitments to each other. "*I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God.*" (Exodus 6:6-7) **This is an eternal covenantal relationship** – heavy stuff. So, when we observe it, why do we make it so fun?

I think it is because we have to. Suffering doesn't end. This year, we have human beings who were kidnapped on October 7, 2023, and tortured. Many have been killed. The war efforts to try to release the remaining hostages have devastated the land. Families of those hostages who are still in captivity are being tortured every day with the mystery of whether or not they will see their loved ones again. It makes it difficult and ironic to hold a freedom festival while some remain in captivity. Our Passover celebration must be a joyous reminder of hope. We spent hundreds of years enslaved in Egypt. We lost 6 million in the Holocaust. We endured the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition and so many other moments that could have meant the end of the Jewish people. ***And we have endured, survived and thrived!*** The popular joke that some may feel lacks humor: "They tried to kill us, we're still here, so let's eat."

We don't forget those who have suffered and those who are still suffering. And we give today's generation and future generations so many reasons to live.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon