

RABBI'S MESSAGE

In Every Generation

As springtime is here, there are two centerpieces that highlight the Jewish calendar this month: Pesach (Passover) and Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day). The former is ancient history, the latter is modern history...and both ever present in our understanding of Jewish identity. Both are essential to remember, retell and understand.

We are taught that in every generation, we are to retell the Passover story, reliving it as if we were personally redeemed from slavery. And in every generation, there seems to be new reminders of why this story is important. With a war raging in Eastern Europe today, countless Ukrainians are living in fear. Many have fled and are now refugees in other countries. The Jewish people are certainly familiar with what it means to be refugees. From the beginning of our existence, our people have been nomadic. Before we were known as Jewish, we were called Hebrews, which actually comes from the Hebrew verb which means to pass through. It seems we were always going from one place to another. In ancient times, we passed through Egypt and the wilderness that led to the Promised Land...and even today, safe life in Israel is still threatened. Our experiences in the diaspora, outside of Israel, faced generations of expulsions, attacks, and oppression, culminating in the worst of the horrors: the attempted extermination of our people during the Holocaust. And today, especially in the U.S., Jewish people maintain arguably the most integrated, comfortable lifestyle in our entire history...but we still see the ignorance of antisemitism from a vocal minority. Through it all, we remain a people who carries on our traditions with pride, reverence and joy. We celebrate the freedoms we have, while never forgetting that times were not always so good.

This gives us all the more reason to be sensitive to the struggles of other people. While Passover is the story of one people's journey from oppression to freedom, as Jews, we are taught to be a "*light unto the nations*" (Isaiah 42:6). A threat against anyone is a threat against all humanity. When we re-live the story of the Exodus, and when we recall the Holocaust, we are also actively saying that nobody should be oppressed as we were.

The Passover Seder is a joyous time to celebrate freedom. We absolutely must sing and celebrate and enjoy the traditions that allow us to rejoice in our heritage. And even while we mourn the victims of the Holocaust, both those who lost their lives and those who suffered the atrocities, we cherish our brave survivors. The most powerful villains of the world *have not, cannot, and will not* destroy the Jewish tradition or the Jewish people.

As we acknowledge our own survival, we also keep faith that our determination can fit for others. We add to our own prayers that the oppressed people in Ukraine and around the world will soon be able to enjoy a freedom without fear.

L'shalom and Chag Samayach,

Rabbi Dan Gordon