

B'KHOL DOR VADOR - בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדוֹר

“In Every Generation”

As Pesach approaches - and the State of Israel prepares to celebrate its 61st anniversary - it is appropriate to reflect that amongst the State of Israel's greatest achievements is the absorption of an unprecedented number of immigrants including more than a million Soviet Jews released from economic and religious oppression and more recently numbers of Darfuris fleeing Sudan via Egypt. The welcoming of Jews under the Law of Return and of other refugees escaping persecution roots the Jewish people - and the State of Israel - in the Biblical story of a motley crew of Hebrew slaves and others fleeing slavery in Egypt, crossing the Reed Sea, and heading for a promised but unknown land. The Midrashist (Megillah 10b) reminds us that as the Israelites reached the dry shore the ministering angels wanted to sing a song of praise but God restrained them saying: 'My creatures are drowning in the sea and you would sing before me!'

The modern State of Israel is made up of indigenous Jews, immigrants, and indigenous Israeli Palestinians, and each of these groups must play - and be assisted to play - its full role in a Jewish democratic state. Israel's very Declaration of Independence itself envisages that 'The State of Israel will be ... based on freedom, justice and peace as conceived by the Prophets of Israel ... will uphold the full social and political of all its citizens...'

It is no easy task to absorb large numbers of immigrants and to balance their interests with those of two indigenous peoples but, as the angels at the Reed Sea were rebuked by God who demanded of them care and compassion for each human being, so shall the merit of the State of Israel be earned by its just and generous treatment of each and every one of its citizens regardless of origin or faith.

Rabbi Danny Rich, Chief Executive of Liberal Judaism

The Haggadah, which tells the story of our ancestors' journey from slavery to freedom, was written when Jews had lost their freedom and were struggling with Roman occupation. That struggle endured for 1900 years but, in my own lifetime (only just!), a radical change has taken place. The dream of being am chofshi b'arzeinu, a free people in our own land, has been realised.

I was in Israel very recently. As always, I was amazed and inspired by the creativity and vitality of am Yisrael. But I was also aware of the intolerable pressures created by the violent opposition to our presence in our own land. The pressures are so real that they are making some people forget the purpose for which Israel was reborn and the values which Judaism taught the world. We must remind ourselves of those values and of our obligation, here in the Diaspora, to stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel in defence of Jewish values whatever the provocation and however great the threat. Here are four questions that we must address at the Seder and in the coming year:

Q How do we maintain our respect for the Arab population of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza? How do we resist the racist attitudes? As it says in Israel's Declaration of Independence: "[Israel] will devote itself to developing the land for the good of all its inhabitants. It will maintain complete equality of social and political rights for all its citizens, without distinction of creed, race or sex. It will guarantee freedom of religion and conscience, of language, education and culture."

Q How do we continue to reach out to our neighbours inside and outside Israel and engage with them? How do we maintain our security but not build walls of separation? As it says in Israel's Declaration of Independence: "We extend the hand of peace and good-neighbourliness to all the states around us and to their peoples, and we call upon them to co-operate in mutual helpfulness with the independent Jewish nation in its land. The State of Israel is prepared to make its contribution in a concerted effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East."

Q How do we maintain our democratic tradition and values in the face of a flawed electoral system and a yearning for 'strong leadership'? As it says in the Haggadah: It happened that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarphon were recounting the story of the departure from Egypt [debating what it meant in their own times and what they should do in pursuit of freedom]. Debate and respect for different views, l'shem Shamayim, for the sake of Heaven, is a cornerstone of our tradition.

Q How do we eliminate poverty, make poverty history, amongst our own people when the gulf between rich and poor is growing alarmingly? As it says in the Haggadah: "Whoever is hungry, let them come and eat." Poverty is a characteristic of slavery. It has no place amongst "a free people in our own land."

Rabbi Tony Bayfield, Head of the Movement for Reform Judaism

Throughout the Haggadah there is a tension between the particular and the universal. The particular sees, with Ibn Janah, the story as primarily about God redeeming *us*, Israel, bringing us to the land that was promised to our ancestors. The universal message elevates the idea of freedom from oppression, enabling the story of Pesach to have become the universal story of freedom in western culture. If we are to take on the values of the God who frees, then we must seek universal freedom from oppression for all, whilst never forgetting how that impulse comes from our particular story. As the Pesach narrative is rendered personal memory by this passage, we should not forget the power of the particular to inspire the values that lead us to campaign for the freedoms and rights of others.

Daniel Lichman, Mazkir of RSY-Netzer

Sitting down together and reading the Pesach Haggadah is one of Judaism's oldest traditions. We are instructed to remember the story as if we ourselves had experienced it; that we ourselves were once slaves. In the same way, the state of Israel was built on the principle of remembrance, safeguarding the rights that we were deprived in our past. Yet, in Israel today there are many members of society who face discrimination for various reasons: Ethiopians, Muslims, migrant workers, refugees and more. How ironic it is that we have protected our own rights but forgotten to protect others from the atrocities we once were victims of. Especially on Pesach it is our role as progressive Jews to insure that Israel is guided by the morals and ideals of our ancestors. We may no longer be slaves, but how can we comfortably sit at our Seder tables telling the story knowing that there are people in Israel whose freedoms are under threat?

Noa Marom, Shlichah of Liberal Judaism and LJY-Netzer

The recent elections in Israel provide serious challenges to the attainment of building a state that ensures "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; (and) guarantees freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture". Proposed policies and discriminatory rhetoric that the recent elections brought into the foreground threaten the basic democratic rights of Israeli-Arab Citizens. The foundations of this *realpolitik* are based upon factors, both internal and external, which promote the spectre of insecurity and enhance inequality; this is a severe threat to the concept of the Jewish State. The extreme right-wing policies are, to quote the great Zionist thinker, Ahad Ha'am, "(seducing) us from our loyalty to spiritual greatness" and are leading us down the wrong path of "glory in the attainment of...political dominion". Learning, as we have done this Seder night, that we must remember that it is as if we were once slaves in Egypt, demonstrates that the policies which directly threaten peoples' freedom breaks, as Ahad Ha'am concludes "the thread that unites us with the past, undermining our historical basis". Zionism must be based on a reaffirmation of Jewish values as the basis of the Jewish State. On this Seder night let us show our support to those groups, like the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, who are working towards achieving this. Israel's story is an inspiration, and long may it continue to be so. This is something we must all work towards. *Lo alecha hamlach ligmor v'lo at bein chorin l'hibateil mimena* - it is not our duty to finish the work, but neither are we free to desist from it.

Charlie Gluckman, co-Chair of Pro-Zion

Every people can be chosen for a history, for a share in the history of humanity. Each is a question which God has asked, and each people must answer. But more history has been assigned this people than to any other people. God's question speaks stronger here... The word of the One God penetrated this people from its beginning. When the commandment of God awakes in man, freedom also opens its eyes; and where freedom commences, history begins.

Leo Baeck



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