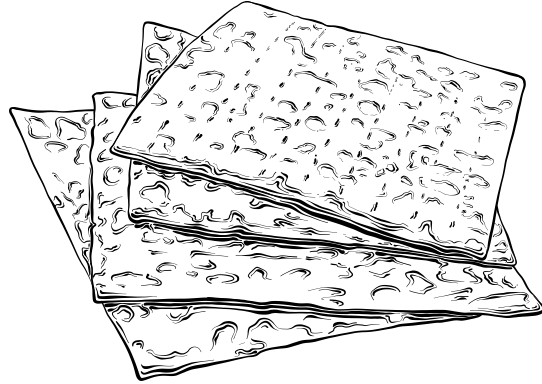


# *Passover 2024* | 5784 פסח



*Dear Friends,*

How different it will be when we sit down at our seder tables this year.

Jews are held hostage by Hamas terrorists. Millions in Israel and Gaza suffer the plagues of war. Israelis feel insecure, thousands are displaced, and all are hurting, angry, and exhausted. In a completely different context, we American Jews hold similar feelings.

On my recent trip to Israel, however, I met people of hope with resilient spirits and a resolve to renew their lives and their country when secure and able. I hope we'll come to hold these attitudes, as well.

We in the Diaspora respond to the complicated events in the Middle East with differing thoughts and deep concerns. We monitor the situation in and around Israel. We react to the vexing antisemitism and nasty bullying we confront.

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Perhaps we'll set an extra empty seat at our table to symbolize the plight of hostages, who we hope are still alive as they are held captive. We'll think of their families who will not know joy this holiday.

Perhaps we'll ask this fifth question after the traditional four.

**For on all other seder nights we celebrate in comfort and security,**

**Why on this seder night do we celebrate uneasily?**

שבכל הלילות אנו חוגגים בנוחיות ובטיחות. הלילה הזה בעצבנות?

***Sh'b-khol ha-lei-lot anu hog'gim b'no-hi-yut u'vti-hut, ha-lailah ha-zeh b'atz-va-nut?***

I imagine many of us will want to discuss our thoughts and feelings about these circumstances and our Jewish sensibilities at our seder celebrations. The Passover Haggadah is ready made for facilitating this conversation. (*For more about this, please see Haggadah Note below*)

If discussion about current events is to be part of your seder gathering, consider these guidelines. Why? Because, according to the Pew Research Center, 26% of all American Jews (and 47% of younger Jews) have stopped talking to someone because of a disagreement over the war.

Therefore, hear and respect everyone's opinion and perspective. Embrace and honor everyone's emotions and feelings. Differ with dignity and speak with kindness. As we consider differing ideas, our purpose at seder is not to seek resolution or unanimity. Our goal is to achieve union and comity for the sake of our families, circles of friends, and the Jewish people.

On Passover, our vision is to learn anew for our days the meanings and implications of Jewish origins. How are freedom, justice, equality, and dignity present or not in the world today? What are we each to do to live and advocate for these ideals, especially during the difficult days of Israel's consequential and defensive war?

On this Passover, in Israel and Gaza, individual and collective survival are at stake. How different it will be when we sit down at our Seder tables this year.

May what's different inspire us to be people of hope with resilient spirits and a resolve to renew our lives and our people. Robin and I wish you a sweet and meaningful Passover.

***Hag Pesah Sameah,***

Rabbi Ron Shulman

# *Haggadah Note*

After the midrash of the four children, the Haggadah text informs us, “In the beginning our ancestors served idols, but then God embraced us so that we might serve God.” This aspect of our liberation story is about the spiritual character and moral quality of being Jewish. It remembers our Biblical patriarch Abraham, the first to espouse and represent ethical monotheism.

Next, this section of the Haggadah quotes the Book of Genesis repeating God’s foreshadow of the Exodus from Egypt and promise to Abraham. “Know for certainty that your offspring will be strangers in a strange land... Know with equal certainty that I will judge the nation that enslaved them...” This promise is of a future redemption and living covenant through history.

At this point in the seder, we lift our wine cups and recite, *V’hi sh’amdah* וְהִי שֶׁעֲמָדָה - “It is this that has sustained our ancestors and us, for not just one enemy has arisen to destroy us; rather in every generation there are those who seek our destruction, but the Holy One, praised be God, saves us from their hands.”

Now our discussion begins. Since early medieval years when this statement, *V’hi sh’amdah* וְהִי שֶׁעֲמָדָה, was added to the seder ceremony, generations of Jews ask and debate.

What sustains our people through the ages? Is it a Divine promise of on-going redemption, as suggested in God’s words to Abraham? Is it our religious heritage and cultural values guiding and encouraging us? Is it an urgency to survive, and even thrive, in the face of each new threat? Is it a messianic hope of living to see better days? Is it the diversity of Jewish identity that enables us to adapt and endure? Is it the uniqueness of Jewish peoplehood that transcends other imposed categories of race, nationality, ethnicity, and individual identity? Is it the dynamic interplay between Israel and the Diaspora? Is it none of these or more than one of these?

How different it will be when we sit down at our seder tables this year.

Invite your seder guests to reflect on these questions and their own. Use their thoughts to frame your discussion of Israel, the war, and antisemitism. Hear and respect everyone's opinion and perspective. Embrace and honor everyone's emotions and feelings. Differ with dignity and speak with kindness. Our goal is to achieve union and comity for the sake of our families, circles of friends, and the Jewish people.

Here's why. After your discussion, if you continue to follow the Haggadah text, the next two words are, "Go and learn." This instruction precedes another Torah quote recounting in a few verses the master story of the Jewish people, the Exodus from Egypt.

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