

Chol HaMo'ed Pesach

April 15, 2017

וְהָיָה כִּי-תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן יְהוָה לָכֶם--כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר; וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם, אֶת-הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת

Exodus 12:25 *When you come to the Land, which Adonai will give you, as declared, you shall carry out this service.*



Passover in Jerusalem, April 24, 1948 from
Zippy Porath's book *Letters from Jerusalem, 1947-1948*

The Passover story is one of history. It is also full of messages—in the narrative itself and in the way we share it. Two of the central messages are the affirmation of Jewish history and its significance to Jewish identity and the idea that maintaining our common past while understanding, and more so reliving, our historical experience lends commitment and even direction to a shared Jewish destiny.

As families and friends sit around the table, they recall the story of the once enslaved and somewhat directionless Jewish people. Jewish people around the world observing Passover celebrate liberation from that narrow place (Mitzrayim - Egypt) to an unknown destination.

Once across the Red Sea, having escaped the enemy, the Israelites faced endless possibilities while amongst potentially dangerous nations. And, in their formation into a common people on their way to their own land of promise, they learned the rules, order, and structure that helped ensure long-term success and continuity.

Both the content and delivery of the *Haggadah* can serve as a model for what and how we teach each generation about the story of our people and the shaping of the modern State of Israel. First, like any cultural tradition, it is essential that Jewish history and experience be affirmed. Every aspect of Jewish life has been deeply affected by the creation and development of Israel - spiritual, liturgical, political, cultural, literary, and linguistic. One cannot extricate Israel and our present Jewish identity. Conveying the impact of the people who brought the idea of a Jewish Homeland to reality brings to life the extraordinary efforts of individuals and groups.

There was never complete agreement among leaders. There were often multiple ideas of how to proceed, beautifully mirroring the many differing commentaries of talmudic rabbis codified in the passover *Haggadah*. Many crucial moments and important individuals form the content of the Israel's story—seekers and builders of the State of Israel. Theodor Herzl, Ahad Ha-am, A. D. Gordon, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Zev Jabotinsky, Chaim Weizmann, and David Ben-Gurion count among them.

Peak moments for the content of this history of Modern Israel might begin with biblical covenants, liturgical aspirations, the Zionist Congress meeting, the New Yishuv, and move through the decades of statehood to this modern day. Chronicle Israel's Nobel Prize winners: Shai Agnon, Aaron Ciechanover, Avram Hershko, Ada Yonath, Dan Schectman, Arieh Warshel, Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Rabin, and Shimon Perez, and mention other Nobel nominees, musicians, poets, and innovators who contributed to Israel and our world. This enriches the narrative and captures the attention of learners.

In considering the method for telling the story of Modern Israel, one can again take instruction from the Passover *Hagaddah*: tell the story with primary texts. Use sources that convey the message of Israel's founding: The Zionist Congress meeting notes, the Declaration of Independence, the texts and diaries of musicians and poets in pre-state Palestine through to this day. The story is compelling and honest through these primary sources.

The future of the Modern State of Israel is better understood when the history of Jewish state-seeking, state-making, and state-keeping is taught as the shared history and responsibility of all Jewish people. Understanding and connecting to Israel's history, people, policies, government, culture, and its place in the modern world at large will enable the next generation to have a hand in maintaining the ongoing narrative of the modern Land of Israel.

As we bring the *seder* to a close with the words "Next Year in Jerusalem," let it serve as more than a metaphor or an existential hope. We are presently "in Jerusalem" and perhaps it's time to change the final words to: "This year, let's continue to thrive in Israel!"

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How might life in the diaspora be different in the absence of the State of Israel?
- 2) What is it that we as Jews weigh about ourselves and our faith, perhaps shaped from the Passover Story, about going or staying? Consider our history: Stay in Europe after the 1903 pogroms or not? Stay in Germany in the 1930s or not? Stay in Iraq after the Farhud/Anti-Jewish riots in 1941 or not? Stay in France in 2015 as Jews or not? Stay in the West Bank or not? And when we go, what is the common thread for the Jewish people in all of these examples?

Additional References:

Paz, Aviram. *The Egyptian Exodus from Egypt – Then and Now*. (rare Haggadahs from the 1940's), Ma'arechet Publishing House, Kibbutz Dalia, 2015