

Passover, Freedom and the Coronavirus

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Here in Israel, we will be celebrating Passover because our flights back to the United States were canceled due to the Coronavirus. We are about to begin celebrating the first night of Passover. Passover is an easily defined holiday for Jews. "It is the holiday of Freedom."

The Founders of our great American Republic saw themselves as the Israelites coming from bondage to freedom. The Pilgrims saw themselves that way, and so did the Quakers and many others.

One of the earliest suggestions for the seal of the new United States was Moses parting the Red Sea.

Franklin Roosevelt famously articulated the Four Freedoms on Monday, January 6, 1941. The Four Freedoms that Roosevelt defined were: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. The speech was delivered only 11 months before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

We can think of the freedoms we long for today: freedom of choice; freedom from confinement; freedom from fear; freedom from disease; and freedom from government restrictions, whether necessary or not.

Perhaps in America we do not think enough about our freedom. We often hear the trite expression that "freedom is not free". It is of course beyond question that freedom has taken the sacrifice of many millions of Americans over a period of more than 200 years. That is freedom in the macro sense. Today, we think about the micro component of freedom. Our freedom of movement is severely restricted. We feel confined, threatened, and fearful.

The Passover Seder represents the beginning of the New Year. It was a time when the Jews left Egypt as a formerly enslaved people not yet used to the privileges and responsibility of freedom. Initially, they questioned everything and sometimes they did not even understand the significance of the miracles which brought them as wanderers into the desert seeking the promised land, the land of milk and honey.

Jews in Israel are acutely aware of their responsibility to the rest of the world. Israel does set an example of a robust, free democracy surrounded by a sea of hatred and malcontent.

Americans who are not celebrating Passover but are getting ready to celebrate Easter and its message of rebirth can also join as brothers and sisters with the Jewish community in appreciating our freedom and in focusing on how we can make our country and our lives better after the immediate threat of the current pandemic is lifted.

How are we going to be better? How are we going to change? What resolutions will we make that we keep, and what resolutions will we make that we cannot keep?

I have taken to making a list of things I would like to see changed in my personal approach, in the way that my business is run and in my community. That is taking on enough. I would like to see plenty of changes on the national and international levels, but if I can just change two or three things in a significant way that improves the quality of my life and the lives of the people around me, that would be very **BIG**.

Each day, we read more and more bad news about death and suffering in our immediate community, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the United States, and the world at large. Perhaps as a civilization and society, we can think about being kinder to our world and more attentive to the spread of disease among the many billions of people whose health we are now the stewards of. When we get back to full steam in the great United States of America, what will we do to prepare for future threats? Perhaps this is the time to put the lid on the nuclear genie and get serious about shutting down nuclear proliferation. Countries like Iran and Syria must be sanctioned until they give up their nuclear ambitions. The great world powers need to cooperate on this goal and it needs to be an apolitical destination as well.

The question of environmental damage and global warming are issues that we should think about when we have time to tackle other great problems.

I once heard a Rabbi give a cute sermon in which he said G-d always taps us on the shoulder first. If we do not listen, we may get a nudge; and finally, we will get hit over the head with a 2x4. Maybe it is time that we sit up and actually see what is going on in the world around us?

To everyone and their families, friends, loved ones, those without support, those alone and those with families of varying sizes, may you all have a blessed, peaceful, happy and healthy Passover and Easter.

From Bat Galim, Haifa - Israel, the Holy Land.

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