



Sermon Tidbits

MARCH 26, 2018

Shabbat of Passover

Red Wine's Deeper Meaning

Creator of the Fruit of the Vine (Passover Haggadah)

בורא פרי הגפן (הגדה של פסח)

Terrorism has been a tragic feature of life in Israel since the country was established, and even before. According to the Israeli government's [data](#), as of 2017 approximately 3,100 people have been killed in terrorist attacks in Israel's modern history. The majority were victims of politically motivated violence perpetrated by Palestinians. Just the other week two young soldiers were killed in a [terrorist car ramming](#) along with serious injuries sustained by two other IDF soldiers. Following on the heels of this attack, a [young Jewish man](#) on his way home from work in the Old City of Jerusalem was stabbed and killed. Tragically, as we have witnessed in recent days, the state of Israel continues to contend with an opposition that is willing to harm, to maim, and to murder. The recent uptick in terror attacks against Israel is alarming and heartbreaking especially for us in the Jewish community who deeply care about the lives of our brethren in Israel.

Each year we read from the Haggadah about the painful servitude of the Jewish people in Egypt. Our sages have taught us that when telling this story we are to go beyond a mere *telling* of the story—we are to *relive* the story. We are to taste bitterness when eating the bitter herbs. And when tasting the bitter herbs it is recommended that we pause for a moment and picture in our mind's eye what it was like for the Jew to be oppressed and tortured by the Egyptian Pharaoh.

Jewish law suggests that in order to fulfill the requirement of the four cups of wine one should optimally drink *red* wine. One possible interpretation is that it reminds us of the blood of Jewish children whom, a midrash teaches Pharaoh slaughtered so that he could bathe in their blood to cure his leprosy. The color red of the wine at the seder table is to be understood not only as a celebration of the exodus from Egypt, but also a reminder of the shed blood of our beloved children—and our commitment as a people that they will never be forgotten. Three thousand years after this event we remember this tragedy. This ritual of using *red* wine teaches us a striking lesson, namely, when precious lives are brutally taken from our people, especially the tragedy of the murder of our tender and precious children—we have a obligation never to forget. We must courageously stand up for justice and work to ensure that no one else endures this kind of tragedy and trauma again.

Israeli Ambassador to the U.N. Danny Danon recently [demanded](#) that the Palestinian Authority put an immediate end to its despicable “pay to slay” policy in the wake of the recent attack on the Israeli soldiers. “As as long as the Palestinian Authority continues to pay hundreds of millions of dollars to terrorists to who kill Israelis, we will continue to see such heinous attacks,” said Danon.

We as American Jews are distraught over the senseless loss of innocent lives and watching the deep scars that are inflicted on so many that experience the loss of family members, a loved one, or a friend. That is way, now is the time to [thank](#) our members of Congress for supporting the Taylor Force Act as part of the omnibus bill that President Trump recently signed into law. The Taylor Force Act cuts funding for assistance that directly benefits the Palestinian Authority (PA) due to its ongoing practice of providing payments to convicted terrorists and the families of those who died while committing acts of terrorism against Israelis and Americans.

When lifting our cup of wine at the Seder we pray for the day to speedily arrive when we can celebrate with a full heart; a day when there will be an end to bloodshed and peace will come to our holy city of Jerusalem and to all mankind. ■

Breaking the Matzah and Oneness

Breaking the Matzah in Two (Passover Haggadah)

יחזק (הגדה של פסח)

Passover is a time that accentuates the importance of oneness and unity. On seder night, when we as a people gather together, we remember our historic roots and re-experience both the dark days in Egypt and our miraculous redemption from bondage. The Jewish people across the globe feel a sense of closeness and connectivity to one another as we share in common rituals, songs, and in a unique conversation. One of the first rituals we engage in at the Seder is the breaking of the matzah into two halves. A beautiful explanation is offered by the Sages for this ritual. Namely that the act of breaking the matzah at our Seder table reenacts the way the Israelite slaves conducted themselves during their enslavement in Egypt. The Israelite slave who was fortunate to have had a bit more means would break off a piece of their bread and share it with a fellow slave who may have had less (*The Night That Unites Haggadah* p. 64) The ritual of *yachatz*, one of the first steps of the Seder night, highlights the remarkable bond of brotherhood and sisterhood that was never lost within the Jewish people even when they faced the most dire and threatening of circumstances.

This theme of unity continues to be a powerful force today. When Israel is made to feel isolated at the United Nations and other international forums, and when the Jewish state is threatened by its neighbors, as it is today, Israel can count on the unified support of one steadfast friend—the United States—that provides the confidence and added strength to remain vibrant and safe even in the face of danger. With no other country in the region, and few in the entire world, the [United States](#) shares a high level of strategic dialogues among senior political and military planning and exercises, intelligence sharing and technological development. The expanding network of American and Israeli military and intelligence coordination has provided a powerful deterrent to those in the Middle East who seek to harm either country. The historic alliance between the United States and Israel is the most stabilizing feature in an otherwise unstable region of the world. Just a few weeks ago a major [joint warfare](#) exercise “Juniper Cobra,” was held in Israel. As part of this exercise, the Israeli military hosted U.S. Marines for an urban combat drill in which they shared know-how and signaling the allies’ shared interests. The U.S. troops joined Israeli Special Forces regiments to practice battle formation, helicopter deployment and medical evacuations in a mock up village in the desert.

In Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s [speech](#) before AIPAC a few weeks ago, he spoke of: *the good*—Israel’s current strengths; *the bad*—Iran’s growing threat; and *the beautiful*—Israel’s alliance with the United States. Netanyahu spoke of how the words of Biblical prophets inspired American leaders such as Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King Jr. He said that the values that inspired the American quest for freedom are the same of those animating Israeli society. Netanyahu did not just speak in abstract terms. Earlier in his talk, when he spoke of “the good” in terms of Israel’s capacity to defend itself with hardware like Lockheed’s F-16 advanced fighter or the Iron Dome missile interceptor system, he thanked the U.S., saying that successive American presidents, both Republican and Democratic alike, have helped bring this about.

As we celebrate our Passover Seders we are inspired to envision a world where true peace can be reality. Although we are living at a time of great uncertainty around the globe, and especially in the Middle East, it is important to remember that regardless of the many threats and various obstacles that Israel faces in obtaining the security and peace that it desires, when we stand as one, in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Israel, we can achieve great things—perhaps even the serenity and peace we all long to realize. ■

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