



Celebrating in solitude

*While Jews around the world celebrate their freedom,
many will encounter a very different kind of holiday this year*

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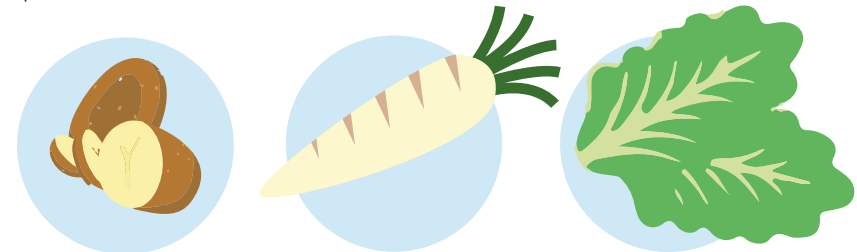
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How fragile we are

We're all going a little stir crazy by now. Whether one is rich or poor, old or young, Jewish or Muslim, secular or observant, we've suddenly all found ourselves in the same crazy topsy-turvy boat of self-isolation – or bidud as we say in Hebrew.

But, for some, loneliness is felt more acutely than others. We can say from our own personal experience of expecting our first child in June, that this feels like an especially precarious time to bring a child into this world.

How long will we be in isolation? Will we even be able to kiss our own baby without wearing a mask? What does it mean to raise a child in this new era of social distancing?

However, Passover is a time of hope. So we remain hopeful. Like our ancestors, we must choose to

venture into the unknown, searching and yearning for freedom and hope for the best.

As such, this magazine offers stories of that very search for freedom in a time where nothing feels certain. From Ethiopians who finally have set foot in their new home in Israel (only to be warded off into – you guessed it – bidud) to refugees from the Middle East and North Africa who are desperately seeking self-determination after years in limbo, stories of escaping shackles of oppression are all around us.

The threat of coronavirus has taught us that it really doesn't take much to unravel everything we in the Western world have been striving to build. As a Sting song released more than 30 years ago taught us, Covid-19 has reminded us how fragile we are. The revelation is not only humbling, but it compels us to focus on what really matters.

So while discussions of how we recover emotionally, economically and physically when this disease is contained are inevitable, as we welcome this very different kind of Passover, we choose to focus on cherishing those both near and far who are dear to us. Our Seders may not be as raucous as usual, but they will be just as joyful because we have the most important thing that matters: hope.

Chag Sameach,



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Why is this night different from all others?

With the coronavirus outbreak, this year's Passover will certainly be one to remember

By BARRY LEFF

This year the answer has little to do with dipping twice or leaning left. Jews all over the world will do something many of us have never done: sit down to a Seder without our extended family or friends - just our nuclear families. And in some families, there will be tension from the pressure of living on top of each other for the past few weeks without a break. People who've never hosted a Seder before will find themselves hosting one. This will certainly be a Passover to remember.

One thing is certain: despite the quarantines, despite the many bans on travel, despite the difficulties shopping, we as a people will celebrate Passover, and we will celebrate it on time, the 15th of Nissan. There are no postponements until Pesach Sheni a month later, or to some other more convenient date.

We Jews love rules, and for Passover we pile rules on top of our rules. Everything becomes far more stringent. Mess up and spill something not kosher into your soup, and during most of the year - as long as the stuff that's not kosher is less than 1/60 the volume of the kosher stuff - it's considered nullified and it's OK to eat. During Passover if a breadcrumb you missed fell into your big kettle of soup, you can't eat it. Chametz (leavening or any leavened product) is forbidden in any amount.

And yet, in extraordinary times, our people have always found ways to adapt to changing circumstances so that we can continue to celebrate. The default *halacha* (Jewish law) is that the wine we drink at Passover should be red. The red is supposed to remind us of the blood our ancestors smeared on their doorposts so that God would pass over their homes.

During the Middle Ages, blood libels spread throughout Europe. Jews were accused of killing Christian children to use their blood at Seders, so the rabbis said to use white wine instead. They would drink the white wine and be reminded that while they weren't slaves in Egypt, their situation was nonetheless precarious.

EVEN IN the darkest days of the Holocaust, Jews celebrated Passover. Rena Quint wrote in her memoir how, in 1940 in a ghetto in Poland, some Jews made wine from raisins. The bakers in the town kashered the ovens and baked matzah, even though they were living under Nazi occupation. In 1943, a group of Jews hiding in a secret bunker in the Warsaw Ghetto celebrated a Seder while the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt was beginning.

As Pinchas Gutter described it: "That day, we all went down to the bunker, about 150 people in all.... My father must have brought wine, somebody else had matzos, and that evening in the bunker, they made a Seder. Everyone was crying and praying. These were religious Jews who knew by heart the Haggadah, the Jewish text that sets forth the order of the Passover Seder, and it still amazes me that, at such a dire time, they never forgot their culture and their morals. They also always made sure to shelter and look after their children."

Most years when we tell the Passover story, we're living lives that are like the lives of our ancestors at the

end of the Haggadah: living freely, worshiping God, remembering the difficult times of the past.

This year, it's as if we're in the middle of the Passover story as we're telling it. We're like our ancestors who were holed up in their homes while Moses and Aaron were negotiating with Pharaoh, and plagues were in the air. Even though they were spared, our ancestors were terrified by the plagues all around them and felt helpless. Death was in the air as they hunkered down in their houses while Egyptian first-borns were dying around them - they could hear the anguished cries of their neighbors who lost loved ones.

That's where we are this year. We're hunkered down in our homes as a plague rages around us. For many of us, going to the grocery store feels like a scary proposition. Just as our ancestors had no idea when the plagues around them would end, we don't know when the plague around us will end, we don't know the "end game."

And yet, the Seder brings a message of hope. We drink four cups of wine at the Seder because there are four mentions of redemption when God promised to bring the Hebrews out of Egypt in Exodus chapter 6: "I shall take you out... I shall rescue you... I shall redeem you... I shall bring you." The four cups symbolize four redemptions: from Egypt, from Babylonia, from Greece, and the future redemption.

Most years when we tell the Passover story, we're living lives that are like the lives of our ancestors at the end of the Haggadah: living freely, worshiping God, remembering the difficult times of the past. This year, it's as if we're in the middle of the Passover story as we're telling it.

The future redemption isn't only the long-awaited coming of the Messiah. The future redemption is any redemption that's yet in the future of the people having the Seder. During the Middle Ages, when the Jews in Europe were spared from pogroms, that was a redemption. When World War II ended, and Jews were liberated from the camps, that was another redemption.

When we are freed from the restrictions we are living with, it will be a redemption. When those who've lost their jobs because of the coronavirus get back to work, it will be a redemption. When those who've fallen sick from the coronavirus get their health back, it will be a redemption.

One of Passover's names is *chag ha'aviv*, the spring holiday. We're reminded that just as nature is coming alive again, the world is turning green and the dark season has passed, our lives, too, will experience renewal. The difficult time will pass.



▲ A man wears a mask as he shops at a food store while observing a partial lockdown to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease in Jerusalem last month. [Reuters]

L'shana haba'ah b'Yerushalayim (habnuyah), next year in Jerusalem (rebuilt)! Next year together with our family and friends. Next year in good health. ♦

The writer is a rabbi and businessman who divides his time between Israel and the US.



▼ Barry Leff. [Courtesy]

Celebrating freedom through Israeli wine

How the story of Israeli wine epitomizes Judaism's historic transformation

By GOL KALEV

The question posed annually at the Passover Seder – “Why is this night different from all other nights” – takes on a special meaning this year. No doubt, this year’s Seder will be different, but the unique circumstances can also be an opportunity to relate to aspects of Passover in a different manner than in previous years.

This could be applied to the commandment to drink four cups of wine. Should it be any wine? Or should this year’s four cups be filled with Israeli wine?

“Again shalt thou plant vineyards upon the mountains of Samaria,” assured the Prophet Jeremiah right before the destruction of the First Temple. Indeed, the Jews returned, replanted vineyards throughout Israel, and are now producing award-winning wines in more than 300 wineries.

The story of Israeli wine epitomizes the historic transformation Judaism is going through.

“There is a mental shift in perception of Israeli wines from being something simple for kiddush [sanctifying Shabbat], to being something sophisticated and high-quality, a status symbol,” said Roni Saslove – one of the best-known figures in the Israeli wine industry, who conducts wine workshops for international and domestic audiences.

When asked which wine she would recommend for this year’s Passover, Saslove offered one that is suitable for our times: Light out of Darkness (*Or MeOfel*), from Ya’acov Oryah Winery.

“It is a white wine made from red grapes, with beautiful aromas and a long finish,” she said. “I find it gentle, refreshing and exciting. There is that moment of quiet that wine gives you. This is what this wine delivers, especially in this time of uncertainty and fear.”

Light out of darkness can also be a metaphor for the epic story of Israeli wines. The Bible is filled with references to wine. Most notably, only a year after the events we recount in the Passover Seder, Joshua and Caleb used grapes to try to prove to the nation of Israel that this land was indeed “an exceedingly good land.”

But with the Temple’s destruction, exile and subsequent Muslim rule, under which wine production was prohibited for religious reasons, the grapes of the Holy Land, along with the wine industry, went into long hibernation.

The era of Jewish freedom ended with the Second Temple’s destruction in 70 CE, but Judaism did not evaporate. Instead, it transformed to accommodate the realities of the exile. The core of that second phase of Judaism was the canonization of the Oral Torah. And right there, in that maze of Talmudic richness, Israeli wines were stored, waiting for salvation.

In Tractate Sanhedrin, a famous saying was coined: “When wine goes in, a secret comes out” (*Nihmas yain, yatsa sod*). But the context of this phrase is not just the tendency to divulge secrets after a few sips of wine.

Rabbi Hiyya, who coined this phrase, explained,



▲ View of vineyard and fields in the largely agricultural district of the Adullam region. [David Bena/Wikimedia Commons]

“Wine was given in 70 letters, and secret was given in 70 letters.” This could be interpreted to say that wine is where the secret to Jewish freedom has been stored!

That secret, kept safe for centuries, was unveiled by Theodor Herzl. Long before he devoted his life to Zionism, Herzl received a gift – a bottle of wine from a newly established Israeli winery. Toward the end of the 19th century, after nearly 1,800 years of idleness, Israeli vineyards were beginning to be replanted, and the great secret hidden in their grapes was about to be discovered.

Sure enough, when Israeli wine entered Herzl’s body, a secret came out. He wrote: “The man who first spoke to me of the Palestine colonies also offered me



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'Raise a glass to freedom': Some wines to enjoy over the Seder



▲ Tabor Adama Barbera, 55 NIS



▲ Tulip Espero, 96 NIS



▲ Domaine Netofa Red, 60 NIS



▲ Har Bracha, 160 NIS



▲ Domaine Herzberg, 80 NIS

[Courtesy]



▲ Vineyards of Kabir winery in Elon Moreh on Derech Avot. [Ian McGonigle]

a taste of local cognac [a spirit distilled from wine]. Perhaps the concept of the Jewish state was planted in this bottle.”

Herzl knew what to do with that secret, and he planted the seeds for a miraculous new era of Jewish freedom. Hence, it should only be natural that the freedom we celebrate on Passover should be coronated with Israeli wines. With so many superb wines to choose from, a few wine experts offer their recommendations.

“FOR THE four cups I’ve now started to drink rosé,” explained Gary Landsman, who brings Israeli wine experience to American audiences. “I like the Tabor Adama Barbera Rosé. I find it easy to drink on its own, and rosés are usually lower in alcohol, which works great for the four cups.”

Selling Israeli wine abroad has been met by various challenges, including the high price of Israeli wines relative to those from other regions. But perhaps the

primary hurdle has been the perception that Saslove alluded to; the lack of awareness that Israeli wineries are now producing top-quality, award-winning wines.

The false association of sophisticated Israeli wine with cheaper kiddush wines gets amplified by their locations in wine stores. Italian wines are shelved under “Italy” and Chilean wines under “Chile,” but Israeli wines?

“In more than 90% of the cases, Israeli wines are still in the kosher section,” Landsman maintained. “There are some stores that promote Mediterranean wines, but by and large if you want an Israeli wine, you are likely to have to find it in the kosher section.” This, of course, curtails the purchase of Israeli wine by the general non-Jewish population.

Most Israeli wines are indeed kosher, but the classification of wines produced in Israel with a religious tag also signals a wider failure to recognize the transformation that Judaism is going through. From

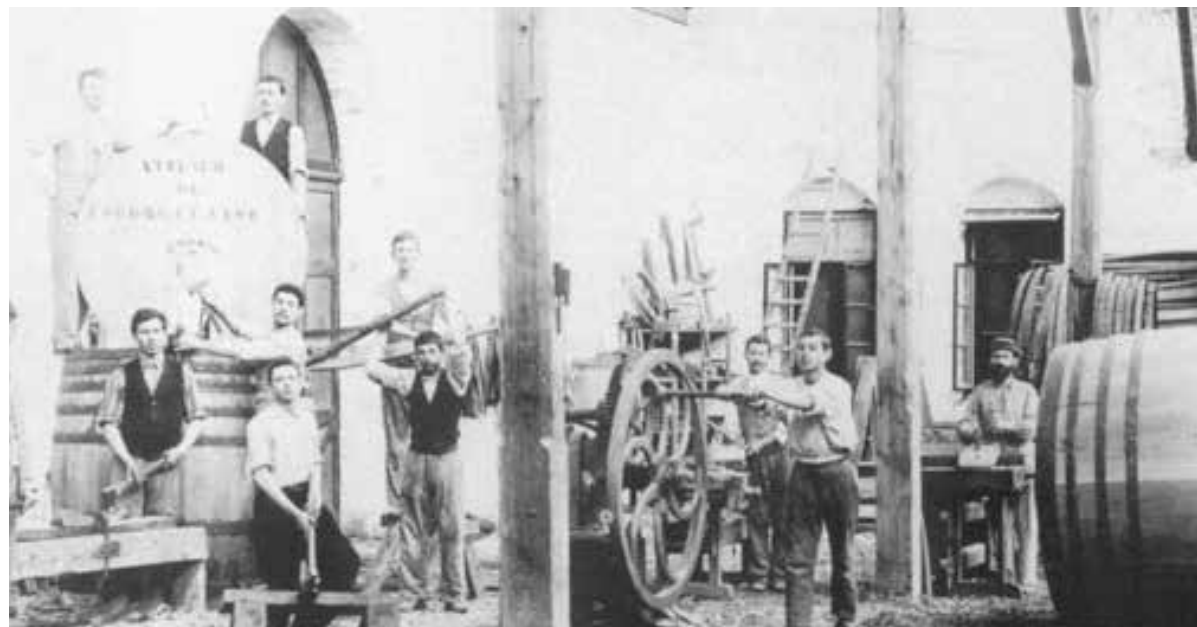
Yiddish to Hebrew, from a charity-case to hi-tech, from Yentel to Wonder Woman, from being dependent on the mercy of the world, to being a beacon of humanity.

Various efforts have been made to change this perception about Israeli wine, including through the Israel Museum’s annual Wine Festival, the Jerusalem Wine Salon (of which the writer is founder), and the Jerusalem Wine Club, which helps acquaint wine consumers with smaller Israeli boutique wineries, primarily through its “Wine of the Month” program.

Eli Poch, the wine club’s founder, recommends the Domaine Netofa Red.

“It’s a medium-body blend of Grenache and Syrah, easy drinking with flavors of red cherries and strawberries and a bit of white pepper,” he said.

Similarly, The Wine Temple, located in an 1874 Templar wine cellar in Jerusalem, was established to raise awareness of Israeli wines, showcasing 60 boutique Israeli wineries, many of whose products are



▲ Winemaking barrel shop in 1890s Zichron Yaakov. [Wikimedia Commons]

Selling Israeli wine abroad has been met by various challenges, including the high price of Israeli wines relative to those from other regions. But perhaps the primary hurdle is the lack of awareness that Israeli wineries are now producing top-quality award-winning wines



not available to purchase outside of the winery.

Wine Temple founder Eli Winberg, said that drinking Israeli wine is a good way to connect to Israel.

“From ultra-Orthodox to non-Jews, everyone can connect to Israel through Israeli wines because they come from all over the country. [As you travel through] the 450 kilometers of the State of Israel, you can learn about the land by tasting its wines.”

Indeed, one organization facilitates an even deeper connection to the Land of Israel through wines – by planting vineyards.

ADAM SCOTT BELLOS, founder of Wine on the Vine explained, “Wine tells the story of the Israeli people. It is part of both our ancient identity and our modern one.”

Wine on the Vine invites people to donate a vineyard, in a similar way that Diaspora Jews historically donated trees. This helps strengthen the centrality of Israel in Jewish identity, and does so through a fun

and relatable concept: wine.

Bellos underscored that wine is integral to the Jewish religion and tradition.

“[The biblical interpreter] Rashi had a vineyard. Judah washed his clothes in wine instead of water. That is the reason that in the Chagall windows in Hadassah Medical Center, the window of Judah is red. Other than the menorah, there is nothing better than wine that explains our cultural, religious and national identity.”

Bellos recommended the Domaine Herzberg Malbec.

“The winemaker was a biochemist who has a unique approach to wine,” he noted. He also recommends Tulip Espero, noting its great value.

Israeli wines, however, are not just a conduit for Diaspora Jews to connect to their Judaism through Israel. Israeli wines are also a fleet of ambassadors of Israel, and they can indeed still travel.

Prof. Ian McGonigle, a Harvard-trained anthropologist now teaching at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, specializes in contemporary Middle Eastern societies. His academic work took him in a surprise direction – making a documentary film about wineries in Judea and Samaria.

“The wine route from Shechem [Nablus] to Hebron is also the path of the patriarchs, Derech Ha’Avot, and each winery on the route has its own story to

tell, many of which powerfully relate to the biblical stories,” he explained. “This makes for an opportunity to better understand the communities of Judea and Samaria through the lens of winemaking, and specifically to showcase the importance of wine as a way to reconnect to the land.”

McGonigle recommended two wines from opposite ends of the route of the patriarchs. From the northern end, Har Bracha Highlander Special Reserve 2014 Cabernet Franc, and from its southern end, La Forêt Blanche, Yaar Levanon 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon.

“The Yaar Levanon is made with grapes from the Sde Calev Vineyard.” This is where Caleb (at times spelled Calev or Kalev) and Joshua are believed to have fetched those grapes that first demonstrated to the Jews how exceedingly good this land is.

This exceedingly good land now produces exceedingly good wines, made with a secret ingredient, just as Herzl envisioned in Altneuland: “That soil was unproductive for others, but for us it was a good soil. Because we fertilized it with our love.” ♦

The writer is chairman of the AIFL think tank and author of upcoming book ‘Judaism 3.0.’ Visit JewishTransformation.com. Send comments to comments@JewishTransformation.com. For more of Gol Kalev’s articles, visit EuropeandJerusalem.com

Create your own exodus in the Negev desert

*A tiyyul to Israel's South, even if it must necessarily
be a virtual one, can help recall our ancestors' Exodus from Egypt*



▲ Overlooking Nahal Zin from David and Paula Ben-Gurion's graves at Sde Boker. [David Brummer]

By JOEL HABER

Passover is known as Z'man Cheiruteinu (the Time of Our Freedom) and there may be no better place in Israel to feel free than in the northern Negev. So, while we obviously have no way of knowing what will be possible to do on the holiday this year, we can still think of ways to use the region as a means of feeling and embracing our freedom.

If we were able to actually travel around the country on Passover, heading to the desert would help remind us of the time our ancestors spent in the desert following the Exodus, and getting away from the masses that typically crowd the center of the country would similarly be a boon. Alternatively, if pandemic-related circumstances prevent us from physically visiting places, let's remember how for thousands of years of exile, Jews all over the world dreamt of and longed to live freely in our ancestral homeland. Isn't that the way Jews throughout history experienced Passover? Coronavirus won't last forever, so "travel" to the Negev virtually now, and think forward to physically visiting these spots in person in the near future.

The northern Negev region is close enough to the center of the country that it can easily be reached for a day trip. Every site in this article is reachable within approximately two hours by car from both Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. And yet, despite its proximity, the

region is a fairly blank spot in many Israelis' awareness.

There are so many sites in the area that are connected to Zionism and the establishment of the modern State of Israel – arguably the greatest story of Jewish freedom to ever take place. Any selection of sites from this list should make you proudly feel the freedom you live every day in modern Israel.

The ancient, yet modern city of Beersheba has traditionally been seen as the main access point to the Negev region, and also its unofficial capital. Two sites in this city work as the perfect introduction to our exploration of modern Israel.

At Hatzetim Air Force Base, just southwest of Beersheba, sits the official Israeli Air Force Museum. A visit includes a look at historic planes from throughout the state's history. Latrun, the home of the tank museum and Armored Corps Memorial, is much more familiar, due to its location. But in many ways, the IAF Museum at Hatzetim is even more impressive.

With more than 150 planes arranged – generally in historical sequence – it is possible to examine them in order. By noticing the changes, one can trace the history of the state itself. There are three main phases: the early period around the establishment of the state, with foreign planes of mixed origins (whatever the fledgling air force could get its hands on); the 1950s through 1967, when France was our main aircraft supplier; and the post-Six Day War period when America became

our main military trading partner.

Beyond that, there are many fascinating and historic planes on display. Visit the 707 jet plane used during the famous raid at Entebbe in 1976. Explore one of the three existing prototypes of the Lavi fighter jet – a homegrown project that was eventually cancelled due largely to financial considerations. Check out the array of UAVs (drones) and understand the growth of Israel's tech prowess in this field as well.

SPEAKING OF modern technology, one of the newer attractions in Beersheba connects the modern story of the region with the historic: The Gateway to the Negev. Run by the Or Movement, which focuses on development of the Negev and Galilee regions, the Gateway offers a multimedia experience summarizing some of the amazing advances helping sustain life in this desert region today.

Heading south from Beersheba, you have a great opportunity to explore the tremendous successes Israel has had in making the desert bloom. A good place to start is heading to the Mitzpe Revivim site on the kibbutz of the same name. In truth, without the Zionists who settled on this kibbutz, the Negev might not have ended up in Israeli hands.

When the United Nations UNSCOP group was exploring ideas for partition in 1947, the commission members traveled through the land. When they came to Kibbutz Revivim, they were amazed to see the agricultural successes there – in particular,



▲ Israeli-built Kfir fighter jet at the Air Force Museum in Hazerim [Joel Haber]

beautiful gladioli growing in the desert. Refusing to believe their eyes, they pulled the flowers up, thinking they were just stuck into the sands ahead of the commission's visit. But when they saw the roots beneath these flowers, they decided that if the Jews living there could have such success in developing the Negev, they deserved to have it. So, when the map of the United Nations Partition Plan was released, the entire Negev was to be included in the Jewish state.

Just driving through the kibbutz, seeing how lush and green it is despite its desert location, you can't help but marvel at the miracle of modern Israel. Equally, it can help you connect to another of Passover's nicknames: *Chag HaAviv* (the Spring Holiday).

A SHORT drive of fewer than 15 minutes will take you from Revivim to Ashalim, a great place to discover the amazing things Israel is doing right now in the Negev. Already from the time you leave Beersheba, you'll likely have seen a tall tower gleaming in the far distance, with a glowing ball of light at the top. This is the Ashalim Solar-Thermal Power Station, part of a three-section clean-energy site that provides 2.5% of Israel's electricity needs.

It sits adjacent to the Ramat Negev Agricultural R&D Center. There are various agricultural research and development facilities scattered throughout the country, with each working on specific solutions to the challenges farmers in each different region are facing. In this region, one of the major areas of research is growing produce in brackish water, of which there is a tremendous amount lying in the aquifer beneath the Negev desert. It was this very same saline water that the members of Revivim used to grow their flowers. Tours of either or both sites at Ashalim are conducted by the R&D center.

A bit further to the southeast sits Kibbutz Sde Boker. The name most closely associated with this kibbutz is the man who most famously dreamt of Israel making the desert bloom – David Ben Gurion. While many are familiar with his Tel Aviv house, where Ben Gurion lived from 1931 through 1953, fewer know his desert home at Sde Boker. The first Israeli prime minister and his wife, Paula, spent their twilight years in this modest location, now preserved as it stood when they lived there.

A visit to the site provides a glimpse at the human side of this towering figure in our country's history. The highlight for many is a look at Ben Gurion's per-

sonal library. Others appreciate the various exhibits that sit in surrounding buildings, which can help you trace the trajectory from his ideas for the Negev and the State of Israel straight through to their fulfillment today.

Just 10 minutes' drive away sits the perfect spot to pay tribute to the founder of our country. Nestled behind Midreshet Ben Gurion is the official gravesite of David and Paula Ben Gurion. A peaceful and meditative spot, the site features magnificent views over Nahal Zin (the largest such canyon in the Negev). It is easy from this spot to imagine the potential the Ben Gurion saw in the Negev, and also the attraction the region held for him personally as a home.

Tapping into some of that natural beauty itself might be the perfect caper to a day in the region. One ideal option is just adjacent to Ben Gurion's tomb, at Ein Avdat National Park. From the entrance to the site, a short walk takes you past pools of fresh water and various trees and flowers, reaching the highlight of the site: the Ein Avdat Waterfall. From there you can return the same way you came back to the start at the lower parking lot. Alternatively, if you are traveling to the region in two cars, and plan ahead by leaving one car at the end of your path, there is also the option to turn this nature stroll into a bit more of a hike, with a path that continues past the waterfall, and climbs up (with the assistance of metal rungs embedded in the cliff) to the upper parking lot, about 10 minutes' drive further south along Road 40.

Especially in these uncertain times, check with all sites before visiting, to confirm that opening hours are as usual. But a selection of a few of these spots (now or in the near future) should help you live the Passover spirit and connect it to the end point of our redemption – the modern State of Israel. ♦

Just driving through the kibbutz, seeing how lush and green it is despite its desert location, you can't help but marvel at the miracle of modern Israel.

▲ Ein Avdat national park. [David Brummer]



A long way to freedom

University of Haifa's Clinic for Law and Social Change embarked on an ambitious mission to assess the mental health of refugees stranded in Greece. The volunteers who listened to their stories are now forever changed

By NOA AMOUYAL

While the Western world grapples with a new harrowing reality, thanks to COVID-19, refugees from the Middle East and North Africa have for more than five years been experiencing horrors we can hardly imagine.

"After what I saw, I'm not afraid of the coronavirus. I'm afraid of them getting it. We have a home, they sleep in tents. They have nothing. They are isolated," second-year law student Genwa Esleih said upon her return from Athens, Greece, earlier this month.

Esleih was part of a three-student delegation that ventured to Greece to speak with and listen to refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. Their fact-finding mission was part of a bold project spearheaded by University of Haifa's Clinic for Law and Social Change, whereby students have one-on-one interaction with refugees to assess their needs and notify them of their legal rights.

Thousands of refugees have arrived on Greece's shores in precarious makeshift boats since 2015. The result? The biggest humanitarian crisis to hit Europe this century.

Esleih understands that even the most well-intentioned volunteer can't work miracles and instill widespread change, but every little bit helps.

"One person can't change the world," she acknowledged. "Listening to their stories was the hardest thing I did in my life. Many of them slept in the streets for months and spoke about it like it's nothing."

Since the refugees' journey to freedom is so overwhelming, the clinic decided to focus this year on one aspect where the students can make a difference - using international law to implement refugees' rights to access mental health care.

"Refugees need mental health services, but they're not even aware of it," Esleih explained. "They say they need a home and a salary - they need those, too - but first they need to know how to cope with the trauma they experienced before they can enter normative society."

The university's work in Greece began when one of its researchers and humanitarian law experts, Dr. Itamar Mann, forged a connection with the German Refugee Law Clinics Abroad (RLCA) some three years ago. Mann shared the RLCA's desire to use the law to enhance social justice for marginalized people. The latest group to visit Greece is the clinic's fourth delegation of students, who were looking for sensible ways their legal aid can make a difference.

The first three missions were in Chios, home to a large refugee camp. The most recent mission took place in Athens, where students focused on aiding refugees who have already entered Europe.

Students spent two weeks engaging in long, jam-packed days in which they asked refugees probing questions about their current situation. The students - all of whom have been Israeli Arabs thus far - have the distinct advantage of being able to communicate with most of the refugees in their native tongue. Considering that the Greek islands are flooded with volunteers from the West who



▲ Students at University of Haifa gather in Athens, Greece as part of a delegation to help refugees from Syria and North Africa. [Courtesy]

don't speak Arabic, sending students who do adds a much-needed degree of cultural sensitivity to a chaotic situation.

The students also met with other aid organizations to gain an understanding of the services available to refugees and the barriers preventing them from receiving mental health care.

"OUR STUDENTS' visits to Greece gave them valuable, hands-on experience," Adv. Samar Qudha, head of the university's human rights clinic, explained. "They learn to gather critical information from marginalized people and educate them about their rights. They also learn how to translate humanitarian distress into legal claims. But they understand, too,



▲ A migrant holds a placard during a demonstration against living conditions at the Moria camp on the island of Lesbos, Greece in October last year. [Reuters]

For the students, speaking with the refugees was a reality check that left a lingering impression they won't soon forget.

that they're not miracle workers and must maintain a professional distance from their subjects."

The University of Haifa's work in Greece is just one example of Israelis helping refugees who are attempting their own personal exodus from oppression. From IsraAid administering medical assistance, to Safed's Ziv Medical Center treating Syrians from across the border, the country is doing its part to help those who yearn for a better and more secure life.

While Israel largely embarks on these humanitarian missions with the Jewish notion of *tikkun olam* - "repairing the world" - being the motivating factor, the university's Arab students come from a different place. Ultimately, though, the final destination is the same: helping those who are less fortunate.

For the students, speaking with the refugees was a reality check that left a lingering impression they won't soon forget.

"I anticipated seeing hard cases, but not like this," law student Rahaf Rahal said. "I saw people who lived months without a home. They lived this experience.

Hearing it directly from them was incredibly moving."

Rahal recalled meeting a 20-year-old woman with a six-month-old infant. Before her baby was born, the young woman had already suffered five miscarriages.

"She got married in the camps. She must have been about 15. During her time she witnessed rape and rampant drug abuse," Rahal, who is also 20, added.

"We're the same age! When I compare our lives, it's shocking what she has experienced. It gives you perspective."

The students worked with dozens of refugees and helped them fill out an in-depth questionnaire about their experience as refugees, which revealed how they've been impacted on an emotional and psychological level.

It is the clinic's hope, the students explained, to present their findings to larger organizations in Greece and beyond that can help implement a plan to make mental health services available for refugees.

Although not all of the students plan on pursuing

humanitarian law upon graduation, they do hope to return - either with the university or on their own - and continue their work.

If anything, they hope their presence will enable them to give a voice to a story that the media have largely ignored in recent years.

"There's a darkness in the media," Rahal lamented, adding that she hoped the students' findings can give a voice to the voiceless.

Perhaps the largest lesson these students have learned is that despite the dire circumstances these refugees have found themselves in, like the Jews who wandered the desert for 40 years, they are still hopeful that freedom is within reach.

"I was surprised by how the refugees opened their hearts and talked to us about their situation and about how they really feel about it," student Lyne Haj Yahya marveled. "They were honest and had nothing to hide. Although their situation is hard, they were always trying to show us that they are in a good mood and that they are optimistic." ◆

An exodus in progress

For the 115 Ethiopians who made aliyah last month, their arrival is the fulfillment of a dream but nevertheless bittersweet, as many family members left behind are still in limbo not knowing when they, too, will be able to enter the Promised Land

By DAVID BREAKSTONE

With the outbreak of the coronavirus, so many of the things we're used to doing have been put on hold. But for an organization whose very mission is to facilitate aliyah and protect and connect the Jewish people around the world, shutting down until this pandemic subsides is simply not an option. Particularly with Passover fast approaching.

For years, The Jewish Agency has been ensuring that the Jewish communities awaiting Aliyah in Gondar and Addis Ababa have had the provisions they need to celebrate the Passover holiday properly. Up until now, that meant - among other things - supervising the baking of the essential unleavened bread locally. With coronavirus restrictions in place, however, that was going to be impossible this year, so "Plan B" went into effect and hundreds of boxes of the stuff were shipped out in time for the Seder.

But this year, circumstances were such that The Jewish Agency was also called upon to provide out-of-the-ordinary pre-Passover emergency assistance, both to prevent the introduction of Covid-19 into the local community and to offer succor, in particular, to the older, at-risk demographic. That request was met, among other ways, with 57,600 bars of soap and 78,000 meals.

As gratifying as it is to be able to meet these needs of the Jewish community in Ethiopia, even more to the Jewish Agency's liking is the opportunity it has had over the past several weeks to facilitate the aliyah of 115 of its members. After so many years of longing, those who have just arrived will finally be celebrating Passover with their prayer for "next year in Jerusalem" answered.

Here are a few of their stories:

After waiting in Gondar for nearly 12 years for permission to make aliyah, Asmare Kasahun Desta finally arrived in Israel on March 24, together with his wife and six children. It was an extraordinarily emotional moment for him, but one also tempered by the circumstances. As is the case with all new immigrants coming during the coronavirus pandemic, his family and the 64 other members of the Ethiopian Jewish community who arrived with them were immediately quarantined in a dedicated absorption facility, meaning it would be another two weeks before he'd at last get to see his ailing 82-year old mother whom he hadn't seen since she was allowed to make aliyah more than a decade ago.

Mituku, one of Asmare's five siblings who has been in Israel since 2008, told me this week that "My brother is so very, very happy to be here and so thankful," and is now anxiously awaiting the reunion. "We still have three sisters and another brother in Ethiopia," he explained, "and our mother cries every day over our family being separated like this. She's very sick and wants only to live long enough to see us all together again. She prays for that every day."

It's a prayer that touches me profoundly. I care deeply about bringing home all those still longing for Zion, but it is the Kasahun family that personalizes for me the predicament of the entire community. Just over a year ago, I was in Ethiopia on behalf of the



▲ A young couple who were among the 72 immigrants from Ethiopia whom Israel welcomed last month in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. [Courtesy]

Jewish Agency and by chance visited Asmare in his home, a single-room, dirt-floor, mud-made hovel with no running water or electricity, typical to that of all his neighbors. At the time, he showed me pictures of his parents and siblings who were already in Israel and beseeched me to do everything and anything I could to unite them all - an assignment still pending.

Another of the new olim is Degarge Demlie, 35, who, after 11 years of waiting, arrived here last month with his wife, Workie, and their two young children. A mechanic by training, Degarge was also a prominent member of the community's governing council in Gondar, serving as its secretary, and involved for years in promoting its members' interests.

Long separated from his parents and five siblings who were brought home years ago, he is thrilled to be reunited with them. But his happy ending, too, is marred by a phenomenon far too common to be ignored. Now it is Workie who is separated from her mother and five siblings, as they are still in Ethiopia awaiting notification of their turn to come.

Amsalu Ayenew is one more of the new immigrants. While Degarge was involved in the organizational life of the community, he was deeply engaged in its spiritual side. Only 22, Amsalu's entire life has been one of waiting, but also one imbued with a mission. Prior to his aliyah, he served as both a cantor for the Gondar synagogue and a Jewish studies teacher. He grew up under the tutelage of Rabbi Menachem



Until their call is heeded, there is every reason to celebrate the influx of the 115 who have just arrived, the 602 who preceded them in 2019, and the 153 expected within the next couple of weeks. The chronicle of their years of waiting is heartbreaking; the story of their homecoming inspirational.



◀ Asmare Kasahun Desta in front of his home in Gondar last January, holding pictures of his parents and siblings who were already in Israel and with whom he has now been reunited after 12 years of waiting. [Courtesy]

Waldman, who has dedicated more than 30 years to the well-being of the community, forever traveling back and forth between Ethiopia and his home in Haifa, often twice a month.

Amsalu is one of his protégés, a group of some 40 promising young leaders, men and women, whom he has cultivated among the younger generation in both Gondar and the capital, Addis Ababa, providing them with high-level Judaica courses, Hebrew language instruction, and preparation for life in Israel – taught both by himself and an ongoing succession of volunteer teachers he organizes.

Now, Amsalu, after leading his congregation a thousand times and more in the singing of Hatikvah, with which every service in Gondar concludes, his “hope never lost” has been rewarded with his being brought to Israel together with his mother and five brothers and sisters, joyfully reunited with his grandparents and nine aunts and uncles who were permitted to make aliyah a decade ago. He is, of course, elated to be here, but similarly, not without a twinge of regret. His father died two years ago in Gondar, his lifelong dream of settling in the Land of Israel unfulfilled.

For many involved, the as yet to be resolved conundrum of relatives being separated is particularly vexing. It is against this background that a distinguished council of kessim (spiritual leaders of the Ethiopian Jewish community) and eminent Orthodox rabbis published yet another declaration in mid-March attesting to the Jewish lineage of the community. Referencing the fundamental responsibility that all Jews bear for one another, the document calls for expediting their aliyah – especially in light of the coronavirus that poses particular dangers for this vulnerable population.

Until their call is heeded, there is every reason to celebrate the influx of the 115 who have just arrived, the 602 who preceded them in 2019, and the 153 expected within the next couple of weeks. The chronicle of their years of waiting is heartbreaking; the story of their homecoming inspirational.

May the strong hand and outstretched arm of the State of Israel now speedily embrace those who will again be concluding their Seder with a heartfelt intonation of “Next year in Jerusalem.” As the rest of us will most probably be celebrating the holiday with too many empty chairs around the table in any case, might I suggest that you symbolically invite one of them to join you. In commemorating one exodus during this Festival of Freedom, let us not forget that there is another yet in progress. ◆

The writer serves as deputy chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive. The opinions expressed herein are his own.

A peek behind the curtain

With the spread of coronavirus inducing worldwide panic, the public is starved for information more than ever; 'Post' editors share how they're coping both professionally and personally during this surreal moment in history

Reaching 60 and breaking the shackles of oppression

By STEVE LINDE

As editor-in-chief of The Jerusalem Report, I was told by management that my job as a journalist was a vital one, and I should keep coming into work as long as I could, because we have at least 60,000 subscribers and many more readers on the JPost.com website who rely on reading the magazine every two weeks.

So, after purchasing hand sanitizer, gloves and getting a mask made by a friend's mother, I drove into work every day. Then, on March 25, the government ordered a lockdown, and warned that people over the age of 60 should stay home as much as possible. Well, I checked the date, and realized that I had almost a month's grace, because on April 23, 2020, I turn 60.

My wish for my birthday is that it's all over by then, not for me but for the whole country and the whole world. But as my late mother, Roseve, once wished me on my 21st birthday, "May all your dreams come true, and if they don't, may you learn

to cope with that too."

As a journalist, I have always believed in putting a positive spin on a story. Yes, I know this virus is potentially lethal, and it has tragically killed wonderful people. But it is also a common enemy that has brought humanity together and taught us to really appreciate the things in life – and people – we might have taken for granted. If there's one thing I've learned from this disease it's that the more you show compassion and reach out to others, even if it's just a phone call, the better you feel about yourself.

A fake letter published in the name of Microsoft founder Bill Gates contained a wise line. The virus "is reminding us, by oppressing us for a short time, of those in this world whose whole life is spent in oppression," it said.

As the Jewish people prepares to celebrate its freedom from slavery in Egypt – the festival of Passover – in the time of coronavirus, this is the time to remind ourselves that, as the late Israeli singer Meir Ariel sang, "we survived Pharaoh, and we'll survive this too."

The writer is editor-in-chief of The Jerusalem Report



▲ Jerusalem Report Editor-in-Chief Steve Linde dons the necessary protective gear during the current pandemic in his Jerusalem office. [Courtesy]



► David Brinn, Jerusalem Post Managing Editor. [Courtesy]

Family and Passover in the time of corona

By DAVID BRINN

One of the reasons my wife and I decided to have four children was the hope that, come holiday times, the house would be chock-full of family – not only our kids, but in time their spouses and eventually grandchildren.

Making aliyah on our own, we were taking out an insurance policy that we wouldn't be lacking in company, but would have an occupied house and a full dinner table.

And it came to pass. All of it – even the spouses and a granddaughter.

We've always tried to be together for Passover Seder, and have generally succeeded, barring a child's army service absences or obligations at the in-laws. Additionally, we've hosted longtime friends and families, singles, Chinese journalists and African refugees. The Seder table has been lively and joyous.

All that is changing due to the coronavirus lockdown. We're all separated; some, like a daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter, only by two kilometers. A son in Tel Aviv prefers not to put his "elderly" parents in danger by coming home.

Another son is being inducted into the army early April, and between basic training and corona regulations, it's unlikely we'll see him home for the Seder.

That leaves one daughter and a dog home with us on Seder night. Keeping the evening joyous and lively will be the big challenge of Passover 2020. Sure, we'll bring the laptop out and try to do a Zoom or Skype joint Seder from our various points in the country. But it's not going to be the same.

That's why we'll give Elijah some company and pour some more cups for all those who can't be with us. And that's why, at the end of the Seder, we'll vary the closing declaration and shout out "Next year in our house together!"

The writer is managing editor of The Jerusalem Post and likes his wife's haroset more than anything

Celebrating with absent friends and relatives

By LIAT COLLINS

We all know the answer to the question “Why is this night different from all other nights?” and yet every year we ask it. That’s what tradition is about. This year, however, the response will be like none before: corona – a deadly pandemic that is changing everything about the way we live, pray, work and celebrate.

Gathering with family and friends, out; social isolation, in. It goes against everything we have been taught and against our very instinct and nature, but if it can save lives, we do it. And you can be sure that we will wash our hands before the meal.

Even if my household is reduced to a mother-and-son family Seder, we intend to go by the book: the Haggadah. We can argue about the math of the plagues, the tunes of the songs, the meaning of the words. We can discuss the significance of the Four Sons, even with only one son at the table.

I can pass on family lore – the time that this or that happened, stories that grow larger every year. You’ll never believe how hot the horseradish has become in my memory, or how long it took to realize my uncle was tricking my mum into serving ever more portions. And every year someone will say: “Eggs in salt water never taste the same any other time of the year.” I guess this year I’ll be that “someone,” and my son can give me the standard response: “But we never eat it any other time of the year!”

When it comes to opening the door to Elijah, I will recall the stories of my grandmother, who died when I was too young to remember her. Family legend has it that she hated that part of the evening. She was conditioned by her childhood memories to be afraid that Cosacks might come in and commit a pogrom. This year, there will be those scared of opening the door and letting in an invisible virus instead of the prophet. Indeed, every generation has faced threats and ultimately been saved.

The family stories that are passed down through the years bring us together even when we’re apart. These shared memories allow beloved relatives – even those long departed – to join in the celebration. In that sense, this year will be no different. Those who can’t physically be with us will be together with us in spirit.

The story of this year’s Seder will be recalled for years to come. We will tell it to our children, and they will tell it to theirs. Next year, in a Jerusalem rebuilt, we will look back in wonder and remember the Exodus, the 10 Plagues – and the coronavirus epidemic. It is no fun now, but it will make an epic family legend.

The writer is editor of The International Jerusalem Post. liat@jpost.com



▲ Liat Collins displays the first edition of the predecessor of The International Jerusalem Post, from September 1959. [Yonatan Sindel/Flash 90]



▲ The writer hopes to return to the serene Greek Islands in the near future, but in the meantime, she travels there in her mind. (Courtesy)

Thinking of you

By ERICA SCHACHNE

Suddenly we find ourselves thrust into a dystopian near-hellscape even Stephen King couldn’t have dreamed up. Our world looks the same, the almond trees are blossoming and the birds are singing, but it’s eerily quiet and the next minute could turn everything upside-down again.

In Israel we’re used to being a country apart and having different rules apply to us. But nothing could have given us the bandwidth for this. If you told me less than a month ago I’d be putting out two supplements on a weekly basis given these new pressures, I’d have... I don’t know. Certainly not believed it.

But yes. It is true. Every morning, for a split second I wake up and forget. Then I spring into action: Time to fortify myself with healthy food I was lucky enough to purchase at a supermarket yesterday. Time to decide if I’ll walk the kilometers into work - yes, I’m still going to the office, blessed routine and fresh air! - or take my chances on the bus and light rail, exchanging stares with the other aliens brave enough to risk it. And when I sit behind my desk, time to

forget my own fears of everything imploding, and remember the people at home.

I ask myself: What do they want to read? Do they want comfort, reassurance, practical suggestions, humor, searing introspection, to forget? All of the above, I think. And then I put my head down and try to pull those threads together, stopping every so often to yell out in frustration, stress eat or laugh at some impossibly creative meme.

I’m grateful to have a purpose, to writers for taking inspiration and producing like never before. When I feel the printed Magazine in my hands, I’m thankful it’s somehow come together for another week, and picture you at your kitchen table, hopefully feeling seen.

And Passover? I’ve been living in the moment, something that doesn’t usually come naturally for me. I’ll manage. I’m doing it on my own this year and I’ll make it happen, somehow. In years to come, I’ll recline at a decidedly more standard Seder and be ever-so-grateful - for the return to normalcy, but also for the resilience this insane period has ingrained in all of us.

The writer is the editor of the Magazine and In Jerusalem. maglet@jpost.com

Telling the untold story

Freelance journalist Annika Hernroth-Rothstein has spent the past five years chronicling distressed Jewish communities and their search for freedom

By NOA AMOUYAL

For a woman stuck in an African country with no departure date in sight, Annika Hernroth-Rothstein is in very good spirits.

“May I have a coffee with milk, please?” I overhear her ask a server in an upbeat voice as we speak by phone from her hotel.

“So what are you currently working on over there?” I ask her.

“Oh, you know, the usual,” she says with a laugh.

What she blithely refers to as the “usual” is actually her venturing off to remote countries – often risking her own life – to chronicle what distressed Jewish communities around the world experience on a daily basis. At times, she also takes a look at the wider picture of the community’s society at large, often writing about whatever political and economic turmoil is around her.

We agree that I won’t specify which African country she’s in at the moment for her protection, as her home country Sweden has closed its borders due to coronavirus and she’s not sure when she’ll be able to return.

But Hernroth-Rothstein is used to precarious situations. From being held up at gunpoint in Venezuela to being interrogated by Iranian officials attempting to ascertain if she’s an Israeli spy, being holed up in a comfortable hotel for an indefinite period of time is but an inconvenient hassle in the grand scheme of things.

“Both Iran and Venezuela are good examples where I did what I love to do the most, those experiences felt the most valuable and meaningful,” she says of her some five years traveling the globe where she penetrated the most secretive and elusive Jewish communities around the world.

Her book, *Exile: Portraits of the Jewish Diaspora*, is a raw account of the sacrifices each community has had to make in order to live as Jews.

“I don’t think I’m practically helping these people in oppressed states who are lonely and destitute. But I’m making them be seen and matter,” she says.

While many Jews in Europe and the US lament having to celebrate a Passover in solitude, for many Jews in these disadvantaged communities, all they have is each other and a yearning that someday they will be free.

For Jewish communities in Caracas and Tehran, for example, Hernroth-Rothstein has given them a voice because oppressive regimes have denied them one.

Hernroth-Rothstein has managed to steal precious moments and glimmers of unvarnished honesty from these communities. Women in Tehran huddled behind the *mechitza* (the partition between men and women in a synagogue), asking with a lump in their throats what Jerusalem is like; a Shabbat dinner in Caracas where guests bellow out their hatred for Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro Moros – offer the reader a glimmer into what life is like behind the curtain.

So when they gather around the Passover table

and say, “Next year in Jerusalem,” it’s a cry coming out from the depths of their soul.

But this isn’t the first time Hernroth-Rothstein has been deeply familiar with feeling so far away from family and home on Passover. Two years ago, as she visited Caracas for the second time, local authorities – livid at her coverage of the injustices in the country on her previous trip – deported her.

“I landed in Caracas hours before Passover eve,” she remembers. “I was immediately detained, questioned for hours and then sent back. It was heartbreaking.”

Instead of enjoying a warm meal while safely ensconced within the fortified walls of the Jewish community in Caracas, Hernroth-Rothstein was put in handcuffs and escorted onto a plane by the Venezuelan military.

Her crime? Telling the truth about the starvation, depravity and injustice of the Maduro regime.

Her plane landed in Paris, where she checked into a hotel. Alone, shaken and humiliated, Hernroth-Rothstein spent her Passover inspecting the

literal and figurative bruises the military thugs left on her body as they roughly hauled her on and off the plane.

“I lost my spirit because it was so demeaning. They also manhandled me quite a bit. It’s a strange thing, and the police in Paris have to take you off the plane. There, they grabbed me and walked me off the plane in front of everybody. You’re being marked as a terrorist. It’s so degrading,” she said of the harrowing experience.

However, Passover is a time of hope, and it didn’t take long for her to plot how she would sneak into the country and continue her mission of telling a story of freedom, revolution and yearning for a better future.

“There is no stronger yearning than a yearning for freedom,” she says. “Venezuela is a great example of that. They don’t have water. They don’t have toilet paper. The women don’t have tampons. They don’t have food. Still, they take to the streets and fight.”

“The price for freedom there is so high,” she continues. “It makes you think, ‘maybe stay in Egypt.’” But



► Annika Henroth-Rothstein stands in Mordechai and Esther's tomb in Hamadan, Iran. [Annika Henroth-Rothstein]

'Ultimately, [Freedom] means not being in chains. Those chains can mean bowing down to somebody, a government, military or person...I don't bend my back to anybody. I'm not subservient. Me not having to bow down to any power apart from God, that's what freedom is to me.'

– Annika Henroth-Rothstein



▼ Annika Henroth-Rothstein sits next to a sign critical of President Nicolas Maduro in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas. [Annika Henroth-Rothstein]



like our ancestors in Egypt who were fine with the devil they knew and were reluctant to break from the Pharaoh because freedom is hard, they ultimately knew they had to put it all on the line.

"I love retelling that story," she marvels. "It shows that there is humanity behind freedom and that it certainly isn't free. It hurts. But we fight for it because the yearning burns within us. It's as natural as breathing."

For someone who writes so often about freedom, she hesitates when asked what it means to her.

"Ultimately, it means not being in chains," she says after a thoughtful pause. "Those chains can mean bowing down to somebody, a government, military or person," although in her native Sweden, where antisemitism is on the rise, Henroth-Rothstein stills feels free because she knows that, as a Jew, she can rely on Israel in any time of need. "I don't bend my back to anybody. I'm not subservient. Me not having to bow down to any power apart from God, that's what freedom is to me."

But despite her intrepid and optimistic nature one can see that her indefinite stay in Africa where she will need to spend another Passover away from loved ones, hits close to home.

"My kids ask when I'm coming back and I don't know what to tell them. Luckily, they're old enough to understand the situation," she says of her two teenage boys. "I don't know if I'll have a Seder this Passover – the Chabad house is probably closing down which is unheard of."

But when she looks back at the stories she's told, the tales she's heard and digested, her plight seems to pale in comparison.

"We live cushy lives now. We're so used to community, but we'll bounce right back. This will not be something that will shape us as Jews," she says of the current coronavirus pandemic. "This is a drop in an ocean of misery."

It is an ocean she's spent the better part of the decade wading through and one where she sheds a light on their moments of fear, joy and, yes, hope. ♦

How to contend with the coronavirus crisis: **A Jewish view**

There is much to be learned and even an element of reassurance to be derived from how our ancestors contended with far graver epidemics

By MICHAEL FREUND

As we hunker down in our homes, sequestered from society and gripped by uncertainty about what the future may hold, it is tempting to succumb to the notion that the COVID-19 pandemic is unlike anything mankind has ever known, an idea that only further exacerbates the situation.

But such thinking is not only feckless and unhelpful, it is also patently untrue. And while the coronavirus has indeed taken a devastating toll in human life and agony, it is important to view things in the proper historical perspective, if only because doing so may help to alleviate, even somewhat, the anxiety that many people feel.

No less crucial is the fact that by casting a glance backwards, we can see that there is much to be learned and even an element of reassurance to be derived from how our ancestors contended with far graver epidemics.

But first let us assess the cold, harsh facts.

It is undeniable that the annals of mankind are filled with countless examples of contagion and pestilence.

Among the most infamous is the Black Death of the 14th century, which halved the population of Europe.

In the Great Plague of London in 1665-6, nearly a quarter of the city's population perished, while the Third Plague Pandemic, which struck beginning in 1855, led to more than 1 million deaths in China and over 10 million in India.

Sadly, there are numerous other instances as well.

But we should not lose sight of how fortunate we are to live in an age where medicine, science and public health are more advanced than ever, providing us with policy tools and solutions that previous generations could not have imagined.

Indeed, as deadly as the coronavirus has thus far proven to be, both in absolute numbers and in percentage terms it does not even remotely approach the outbreaks mentioned above.

That may seem like small comfort, but when compared to living in medieval Europe while the bubonic plague swept the continent, our overall situation is significantly more encouraging.

Consider the following. Among the “cures” that were tried to stem the Black Death, medieval medical practitioners would engage in blood-letting, where they intentionally cut a vein to drain “hot blood” from the body, or instruct those stricken with the disease to sit in the sewer in the hopes that doing so would drive away one’s symptoms.

We have thankfully come a long way since then.

In terms of the Jewish approach to contagion, it is instructive to see how prescient our tradition was with regard to ways with which to grapple with infectious disease.

In Bava Kamma 60a, the Talmud says, based on a verse in Isaiah, “Our Sages taught: If there is plague in the city, gather your feet,” meaning that you must



▲ A plague doctor and his typical apparel during the 17th Century Outbreak. [Wikimedia Commons]



▲ Michael Freund. [Courtesy]

limit the time you spend outside your home, “as it is stated in the verse: ‘And none of you shall go out of the opening of his house until the morning.’” This is further elucidated to mean complete, round-the-clock seclusion until the danger has passed.

As if to underline the importance of self-quarantine, the Talmud goes on to note that the sage Rava would close the windows of his home during an epidemic.

Similarly, in Tractate Ketubot 77b, while discussing an infectious skin disease known as ra’atan, the Talmud states that, “Rabbi Zeira would not sit in a spot where the wind blew from the direction of someone afflicted with ra’atan,” which clearly indicates the need to be careful around those who have contracted the disease.

It further states that, “Rabbi Elazar would not enter the tent of one afflicted with ra’atan,” suggesting

In terms of the Jewish approach to contagion, it is instructive to see how prescient our tradition was with regard to ways with which to grapple with infectious disease.

the need for social distancing, “and Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi would not eat eggs from an alley in which someone afflicted with ra’atan lived,” possibly out of fear that the illness could survive on surfaces for a period of time.

More recently, in 1831, when a cholera epidemic struck Poland, Rabbi Eliyahu Guttmacher of the community of Pleszew wrote to his teacher, the famed Rabbi Akiva Eiger, who was the spiritual leader of Poznan’s Jews, asking him what to do.

Rabbi Eiger, who is best known for his glosses and commentaries on the Talmud and the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law), answered with a series of directives that included imposing strict limits on the size of public gatherings such as prayer services, urging people to stay clean and maintain proper hygiene, and asking the police to enforce the necessary restrictions on the public.

To say that many of the recommendations adopted by Israel’s Health Ministry in recent weeks echo those espoused by Jewish tradition would be an understatement.

But no less crucial, particularly now as we find ourselves confined to our homes for prolonged periods of time, is to ensure that we maintain our mental fortitude and refuse to give in to despair.

“Do not worry, and stay away from all forms of sadness,” Rabbi Eiger advised, and his words are equally relevant to our current situation.

A simple yet profound tip as to how to do just that, and make the most of our social isolation, beyond just catching up on Netflix and sharing funny Internet memes, is one that dates back more than 2,500 years, when the prophet Isaiah (26:20) wrote, “Go, my people, enter into your rooms and close your doors about you; hide for a moment, until the wrath passes.”

In one of his explanations of the verse, the great medieval commentator Rashi, quoting Rabbi Tanhuma, explains, “Think about your deeds, in the chambers of your heart.”

So rather than just staring at the four walls all day and bemoaning the world’s fate, we should all strive to keep things in perspective and utilize to the fullest the time that we now have whether for personal introspection and improvement or for reaching out and helping others.

That, in a nutshell, is how Jews have always responded to crisis and, in this respect, corona must be no different. ♦

The writer is founder and Chairman of Shavei Israel (www.shavei.org), which assists lost tribes and hidden Jewish communities to return to the Jewish people.

▼ Citizens of Tournai bury black plague victims. [Wikimedia Commons]



I am a Jerusalemite

By ALAN ROSENBAUM

When Shai Doron, president of the Jerusalem Foundation, is asked about the lessons he learned from Teddy Kollek, legendary mayor of Jerusalem, when he served as chief of staff during Kollek's final term, he replies, without missing a beat, "I learned from Teddy Kollek that there is nothing more important in the world than Jerusalem. It is the center of the world."

Doron, who has headed the prestigious Jerusalem Foundation since August 2018, is today attempting to apply Kollek's aphorism in addressing the city's pressing needs during the corona crisis and planning for the city's long-term future once the crisis ends.

The foundation, which was created in 1966 by Kollek, promotes development within the city and raises funds for social, cultural and beautification projects. Since its founding, it has invested more than \$1.5 billion in promoting economic growth, education, dialogue, arts, culture and heritage preservation within the city. It is a private and independent organization that works in coordination with Jerusalem's mayor and the municipality.

"We promote our agenda and master plan, but everything is done in coordination with the mayor and the city. We cannot succeed working alone," says Doron.

The health crisis that has enveloped the world has caused the Jerusalem Foundation to change its focus for the immediate future. Working with the professional team at the foundation in coordination with the Jerusalem Municipality, the foundation is currently helping to provide basic needs for sectors of the population that the municipality has difficulty reaching. These programs are largely targeted at the most vulnerable sectors of the population in all parts of the city. The foundation is providing a great deal of assistance to the elderly, assisting homebound Holocaust survivors via its Café Europa program, which provides food and emotional support to survivors, and also providing funding to the Misgav Lakashish association, which helps the elderly in the ultra-Orthodox section of the city.

It has also extended support to the Battered Women's Shelter, which will enable the shelter to provide enriched content for children that will help them cope with the added stress of the current situation.

"The children are under a great deal of pressure," explains Doron. "They do not go out in the morning or the afternoon to their regular programs."

Other projects targeted at Jerusalem youth include the Ma'ayan School in Ein Kerem for children with severe physical challenges. The Jerusalem Foundation has purchased touch computers, enabling the school to stay in contact with the children and their families, and is helping the Hut Hameshulash organization for Youth at Risk – a special program for youth at risk in the city center who have no safe home base and support. The foundation is also assisting mentally handicapped adults and their families, through the Shekel organization, which provides a phone hotline for support and guidance in Hebrew and Arabic.

The coronavirus has affected all sectors of the population, and the Jerusalem Foundation has



▲ Jerusalem Foundation President Shai Doron laments that due to the coronavirus epidemic, many residents of the city are vulnerable and in need of assistance. [Photos: The Jerusalem Foundation]

extended assistance to areas of east Jerusalem as well. The foundation is providing assistance to the Attaa Center, which works to enable the rights of area residents.

Doron explains that many Arab residents do not know how to fill out the proper forms necessary in order to receive unemployment benefits. With the assistance of the foundation, the center will be able to provide services to hundreds of people who need help in filling out national health insurance and employment service claim forms as well as dealing with health issues.

In addition, the foundation is helping small business owners in Abu Tor and Silwan, many of whom are on the verge of starvation because they have lost their jobs.

Doron explains that many of these businesses operate without receipts and are not eligible for

welfare benefits from the city. "With the assistance of Israeli donors, we are distributing food baskets in the neighborhood."

The scope of this crisis, explains Doron, has changed not only the focus of donations, but also the nature of the organization's fund-raising activities.

"In the past," notes Doron, "the Jerusalem Foundation worked with people who gave significant amounts of money. Now, in the next period of time, we need to work with a larger group of donors who may give smaller amounts. Every dollar, euro and shekel is important."

Despite the precarious economic situation, Doron is grateful for the support that the Jerusalem Foundation has received both from Israel and abroad. The project for assisting the poor of Abu Tor and Silwan was organized by Israeli businessmen, and funding for the Café Europa project was provided by



generous Christian donors from Holland.

"It is heartwarming to see how Jerusalem – even in this difficult situation – enables us to mobilize resources for the sake of the city," says Doron.

He takes great pains to point out that the foundation is focusing on providing for the weakest and most vulnerable sectors of the population, in all sections of the city.

THE CORONAVIRUS crisis will eventually come to an end. When that day comes, says Doron, "We have to set aside time for the day after – to speak about Jerusalem for the long term."

In preparation for that time, Doron and his team at the foundation are working on a strategic "Jerusalem 2030 and Beyond" plan that involves three primary components – communal strength, creative culture, and leadership.

Doron explains that the individual communities and cultures that make up the city's mosaic need to be strengthened and nurtured. "We will do it with community work, social work and education, placing an emphasis on weaker communities, with a strong emphasis on living side by side, narrowing gaps, and giving opportunities to all."

'It is heartwarming to see how Jerusalem – even in this difficult situation – enables us to mobilize resources for the sake of the city'

Shai Doron,
President, The Jerusalem Foundation

all groups. The creative culture that is part of the city, he suggests, can be used for economic development of the city as well.

To increase the city's landscape of cultural creativity, the foundation is planning a long-term project that will turn the area of the Sultan's Pool into an open park that will be open to both the eastern and western sectors of the city, year-round.

Finally, the foundation wants to develop a cadre of young civic leaders from all sectors of Jerusalem who will live in the city and be committed to Jerusalem and its development. The foundation is initiating a project for students who have received their doctorate degrees in Jerusalem, and will place them in positions of leadership of civic and social projects, thus eventually building up a group of responsible civic leaders that can provide guidance for decades to come.

Before assuming the presidency of the foundation, Doron, a fourth-generation Jerusalem resident, avid swimmer, and a rabid fan of the Hapoel Jerusalem Basketball Club, served as director-general of Jerusalem's Tisch Family Biblical Zoo, which hosts more than half a million visitors each year. During his tenure, he led the construction of the Gottesman Family Israel Aquarium, the first aquarium in Israel, adjacent to the zoo.

▼ Doron walks alongside the late Teddy Kollek, Jerusalem's most iconic mayor.



As an example of communal culture, he cites the work done by the city's neighborhood community centers, the majority of which were established by the Jerusalem Foundation. "There is an amazing network of mutual community support. Volunteers distribute food baskets, and they have a pulse on what is happening in the neighborhoods."

Another concrete example that Doron points to is the foundation's "Springboard Plan," in which neighborhood community councils provide educational and community services. He cites the neighborhoods of Kiryat Menahem and Gilo, where work has been done in this area.

To further express the idea of communal strength, the foundation plans on raising money to build two community sports centers in east Jerusalem, with one in Beit Hanina and one in Sur Bahir.

"Over the years we have built sports centers in many communities like Gilo, Neveh Ya'acov and East Talpiot, but there are none in east Jerusalem," says Doron.

Jerusalem has a rich and varied culture, and the foundation, says Doron, wants it to be available for

Ultimately, says Doron, "We wanted visitors from all over the world, but the most important thing on the agenda was to be involved with the local community and create local community involvement with the zoo. To that end, the zoo provided animal-assisted therapy for children with special needs, and a "Zoo Mobile" reached out to communities within the city.

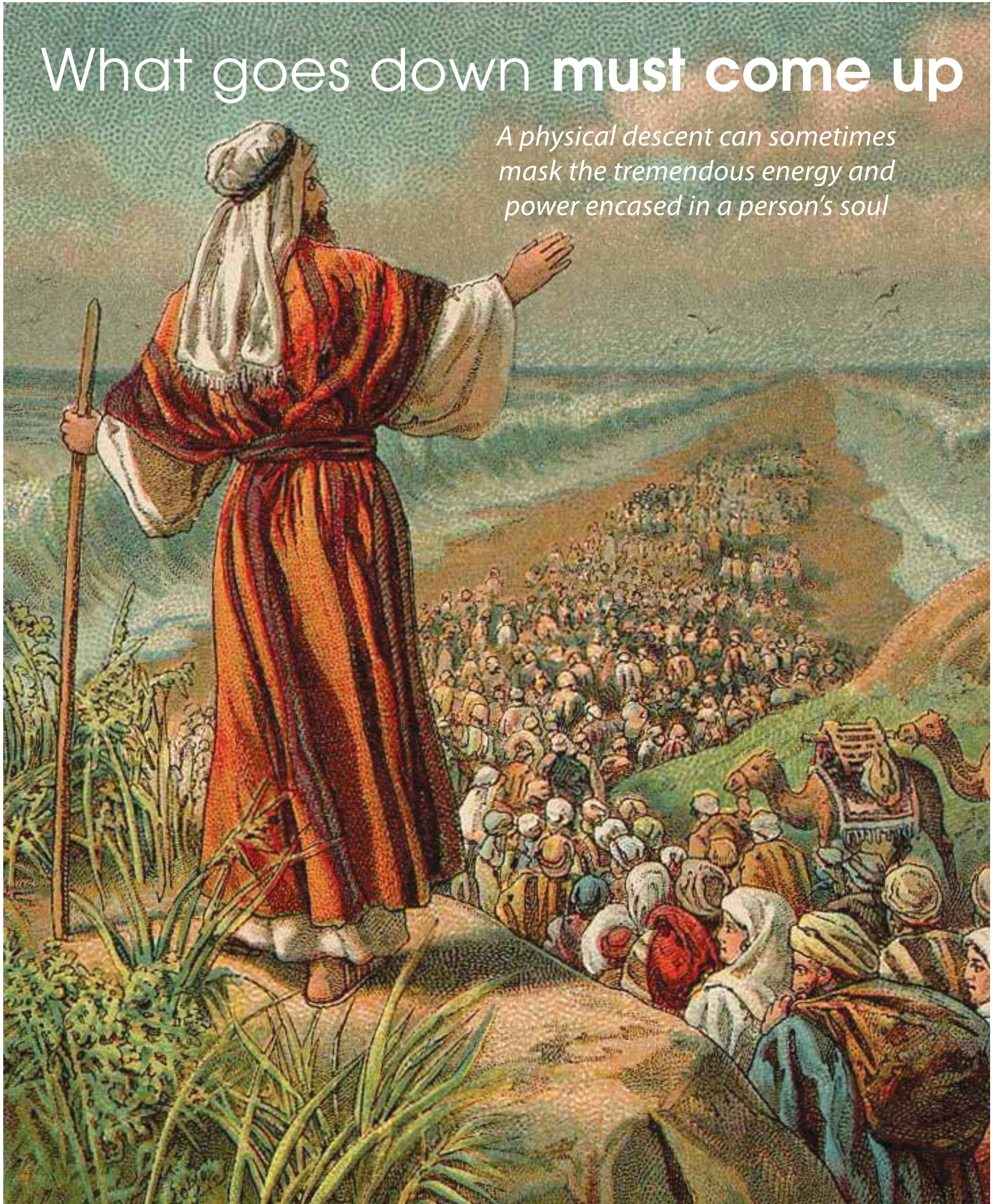
Citing the second lesson that he learned from Teddy Kollek, Doron refers to Kollek's insistence that the city's diversity is its greatest asset. "Though some said that this very diversity was a drawback, we divided the word into two – using the phrase, a 'diverse city.'

In Doron's view, Jerusalem can be a model of how different communities can live together in an inspiring way. His challenge as president of the Jerusalem Foundation will be to help maintain the city's social fabric, in these challenging corona times and in the years ahead.

"I am a Jerusalemite," says Doron. "There may be better fund-raisers, and those that speak English better than I, but I am a Jerusalemite, and I really care, and know the city." ◆

What goes down **must come up**

A physical descent can sometimes mask the tremendous energy and power encased in a person's soul



By YOCHAVED RINDENOW

In Torah we have a concept called “Yerida l’tzorech aliya,” which I translate here as “what goes down must come up.” According to the spiritual design of the universe, every descent is only for the purpose of an ascent. There are many physical expressions of this concept. As with a basketball player heading for a slam dunk, first he bends his knees super low and that enables him the momentum to leap back up even higher.

Your infinitely powerful and all-knowing soul compressing down into your dense physical body, with all its limitations, is considered the prime example of this. What your soul can accomplish with this descent into a body is astronomically higher than where it could get to otherwise. Your expansive soul has come into the specific form and makeup of you, your character and life circumstances, in order to experience your particular array of challenges, so that you would rise up and birth your greatest self through them.

Everything you encounter in your life is catered exactly to what your soul has come here to know and create itself through. To go deep down into those dark and shadowy places of the mind, body and heart, sometimes for prolonged and arduous periods; and then to shine your enlightened self into them, transforming the “curses to blessings.”

In Hebrew, Egypt is known as Mitzrayim, which has at its root the word “Metzar,” a narrow strait.

Like the compression of a spring, when we get pushed into tight places, the tension builds and triggers us to take action. And when all that tension is released, it propels us forward to greater heights. People come up with the most brilliant innovations when under pressure to produce. Discomfort catalyzes change. When the soul, your consciousness, encounters constriction of any sort, struggle, adversity, pain, it becomes alerted to what is pushing for expansion, to what part of you is ready to be birthed from that narrow strait.

The literal and metaphysical descent into Egypt was sinking to the darkest levels of human experience. But not so that we would perish and end our story there. You must face your own darkness in order to find greatness. You must face your fears to know yourself truly. Abraham was promised that not only would his children be slaves in a land that was not their own, but that we would also be redeemed and made into a great nation in our own land.

Exodus from the dire constriction of Egypt shaped us as a nation and gave us an identity by which to always know ourselves and God. Our God is the One who took us out of Egypt; that is how He identifies Himself when we received the Torah at Mt. Sinai and sealed in our first commandment. And we are a people that has the ability to walk out of Egypt. To go from a slave people to a free and abundantly wealthy nation who received the Torah. To transform great darkness to abundant light.

What is it that enables us to transform darkness in such drastic ways and how can we apply that to the serious challenges we are facing today? The wisdom gained from our experience exiting Egypt seems to be as follows:



▲ Yochi Rindenow sits in her Jerusalem apartment. [Nechama Jacobson]

1. Cry out to God when you need help: This means first and foremost internalizing that God is listening and cares and wants to take you out of your suffering and bring you to ‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’ Going through the constriction is the route to activate your potential and take you there. Identify what exactly you are feeling, let God know in words, and ask God to free you from that strait, even if it will take a million miracles for it to happen. Miracles are easy for God.

2. Be open to perceiving the miracles when they come: Expand your vision. When Moses arrived, there was a recognition that he could be the one to lead us out of slavery. There was also doubt about him being any help at all because of the level of despair we were in. Slavery was all we had known for centuries. Therefore, even when faced with disheartening facts, choose to be aware of a higher-level consciousness that allows for possibilities beyond your scope of experience. The miracles that occurred when we were freed from Egypt were like nothing the world had ever

known before. Know that could happen now as well.

3. Use your fears to open to greater levels of trust: The Jewish slave women kept musical instruments, for they trusted that one day they would use them to celebrate being liberated. Nachshon ben Aminadav jumped into the sea before it split, trusting that it would. Trust is greater than faith. It’s taking action that relies upon the belief being true. So beyond mentally knowing that miracles are possible, come to a place where you expect them to happen for you.

4. Stick together as a community: When we stood at the mountain to receive the Torah we were like “one person with one heart.” We are each a part of a unified whole, and when we function as one, with each person being their individual best and appreciating and supporting each other, then we are capable of soaring to the greatest elevations. ♦

The writer is a Jerusalem-based licensed psychotherapist and energy healer, who incorporates Torah based concepts into her therapy and workshops. For information: yochevedkalev.com

Your expansive soul has come into the specific form and makeup of you, your character and life circumstances, in order to experience your particular array of challenges, so that you would rise up and birth your greatest self through them.

▼ A lone man walks along a deserted beach - the author argues that coronavirus is an opportunity to acknowledge God's majesty. [David Brummer]



Accepting the crown of divine majesty in the time of coronavirus

This year - perhaps more than any other in recent memory - if we leave a Passover Seder on the same spiritual level we entered it, we've missed the point

By RAV YOSEF ZVI RIMON

We are living in uncertain times, as a global pandemic rages and we begin anew to understand the preciousness and precariousness of life.

I thought deeply about what I wanted my message to be this Passover. There seems to be only one topic on everyone's minds at the moment - and as we in Israel are in a constantly ramping-up population-wide lockdown, perhaps we need to address the relationship between COVID-19 and Passover. In the modern world, we have a nexus of technology and science - one of the most potent combinations we have ever encountered. However, despite our great advancements and sophistication, we can be in no doubt who the ba'al habayit (master of the house) really is.

This understanding is also central to our comprehension of the plagues in Egypt, which were the catalyst for the Exodus. The message could not be clearer.

While it will obviously be very difficult this year for families to be forced to hold their Seder separately - or in much smaller numbers than they are accustomed, there are matters we can still talk about - not least that the Almighty rules the earth.

Egypt went through something much worse than coronavirus - they had diseases that were even more highly transmissible. In reality, we have to hope that the coronavirus will not affect most Jews. However, if we cast our minds back to how instrumental God was in our leaving Egypt and what effect the plagues had on the Egyptians and the absence of any effect on the Children of Israel, we can take heart. There were 10 plagues in Egypt and some commentators suggest there were hundreds more by the Red Sea.

The Vilna Gaon taught that none of the plagues affected us, the Israelites. The Egyptians received them all. Moreover, Ha'Rav Blumenzweig noted that thousands died, but the Children of Israel had no casualties from the plagues. There is protection. God loves us so much and he wants to protect us.

Experiencing the current pandemic puts the miracles that we recall at Passover into perspective. This is heightened further still when we think about Egypt's position in the ancient world.

Egypt was an empire, one of the largest the world has ever known, with an ostensibly all-powerful Pharaoh at its political and religious heart. What could a downtrodden and enslaved people do against such might? And yet, despite this enormous influence and dominance, God showed that He and only He, is truly in control.

This fact gets to the heart of why we tell the story of the Exodus at the Passover Seder. Of course we want to thank and praise God, and show that we have that precious but potent mixture of belief and faith. However, I think that there is another central theme at play here. It is also about going through a process - something that our current experience may put into focus.

Someone who only thinks of the Exodus as securing national freedom has missed the point. It is also



▲ Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon. [Courtesy]

very much about one's personal freedom. In Egypt, there was neither national nor personal freedom, and the two are inextricably linked. If a person leaves the Passover Seder the same way as they entered it, then they've missed the point. It is supposed to be transformative and take us to a different place.

One of the Seder's key messages is not explicitly written in the text, but it has become very much part of tradition. It will be painful this year when Seder night is supposed to be a time when we open up our homes and hearts to guests. We want to exclaim that anyone who wants to come should be able to. Although, perhaps in the absence of the potential to physically embody that precept, it can still be foremost in our minds. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik asked what the difference between a slave and free person is. "A slave," he wrote, "thinks only of himself. A free person has the ability to think of others."

Our goal is to be sensitive to society as a whole; to be free is to be helpful and considerate of others. In this context, the coronavirus has caused everyone, and especially the people of Israel, to show sensitivity to the elderly and weaker population. All of us are self-isolating in our homes not just because we are afraid of being infected, but mainly because being outside endangers others. There is incredible consideration and regard for the elderly and weaker population and this is one of the signs of our being free.

During the Seder there are points that remind us that freedom is paramount. We are also encouraged to investigate what it means to be free and where in the Haggadah that message speaks to us, such as Ha Lahma Anya ("This is the bread of our affliction") and Mah Nishtana ("What is different about this night?") At the most basic level, the Mishna explains that questions should be asked. And why does any person ask a question? To get answers, of course.

In this time of quarantine and self-isolation, we recall that the Talmud pointedly states that even if one is alone, he or she should ask themselves questions. Our sages wanted to teach us that one of freedom's central themes is not being afraid to ask. This requires the faith to both ask the question and then be receptive to an answer that one may not expect...or want. It should be juxtaposed to slavery, in that slaves do not ask questions.

By asking questions it shows that an individual

is open to advancement, whereas, a slave is by definition, locked, emotionally at least, in place. It is essential - especially in these unusual times when we are constrained in our ability to move beyond our own property - that we maintain the potential

to change and to be free. Each of us has the power to change, despite the fact that this can be a painful and difficult process. A useful question to ask ourselves is, "How can we elevate ourselves this year to a higher level?"

This Passover we are given an unusual opportunity: We are commanded to remember the Exodus as though we had participated in it, which can sometimes be a hard point to grasp. We are also taught that it is important for Jews to understand that we were once slaves. We need to know what evil regimes have done to us and that there is a fine line between order and chaos - and we could be so targeted again. If in 2020, with the state of the world as it currently is, if we cannot be sensitive to people who may be trapped, then we may never understand the true meaning of slavery and the Jewish experience.

There is a final truth that Passover also highlights; the power of one person to change the world.

As the epidemic began with one person and spread to the entire world, so the good we do has an effect on the entire world. It shows that individuals have tremendous influence. It can be used for good or it can be used for bad, but every person, made in the image of God and endowed with a specific task, has that ability. We rarely get to see the direct results of our actions, but a general rule that we might follow is that attempting to use our gifts for good is of much greater benefit to all humanity. ◆

The author is the Rabbinic Head of the Jerusalem College of Technology and the head of its Batei Midrash.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik asked what the difference between a slave and a free person is. 'A slave,' he wrote, 'thinks only of himself. A free person has the ability to think of others.'



▲ An element from the Ad Halom memorial for fallen Egyptian soldiers at the entrance to Ashdod. [David Brummer]



Exile and redemption

The Children of Israel's Exodus from Egypt was just the beginning of a long journey toward nationhood and redemption

By MOSHE DANN

Pesach is a paradigm of Jewish history. As the Haggadah relates, the story begins in exile, “Once we were slaves in the land of Egypt,” and ends seven days later with the triumphant march through the sea, the destruction of the Egyptian army, and a song of redemption.

“Next year in Jerusalem.”

But the story is not about events -- hardship, suffering, leaving Egypt, fear of being overtaken and wiped out, fear of returning to slavery, and a trek into the desert, the unknown. The story is about a process that contains both exile and redemption at every moment. In Egyptian exile, Hebrew slaves yearn for freedom, but have no idea what that means; they are not yet Jews.

Guided by Moses, Aaron, Miriam and 70 elders, they are still affiliated to tribes, clans and families. They move out of Egypt with material possessions, herds of animals, and one spiritual item, matzah. They don't know where they are going, or why. They only know they must leave one home, in Egypt, in order to make another. Knowing they are helpless, they need to develop faith, in themselves, in their leader, Moses, and the promise of Torah that they will receive.

Between exile and redemption, they were not yet a Jewish People, they did not know their mission, their particular purpose, nor their ultimate destination. Although physically free, they were still in existential exile. Standing on the northern side of the Red Sea, the beginning of their redemption is mingled with doubt: have I done the right thing? They understand more clearly where they have come from, but are unsure of where they are going. And they will always be caught in a tension between what they know and don't know, between doubt and faith, exile and redemption.

Exile and redemption are not events, but processes which mold our consciousness, creating awareness not only of who we are, but why we exist as a people, and our sense of purpose. At moments of exile, alienation, lack of connectedness, we need to hold on to a vision of redemption, belonging, and companionship; and at moments of redemption, we need to remember exile, especially being strangers, outcast, and alien.

Pesach brings us together as a “family” of Jews, invited guests and friends, to experience an event together, to share food and company, to tell the story of “once we were slaves,” and to create a moment of redemption, a sense of intimacy and reconciliation, a brotherhood, the warmth of belonging, not only to those gathered around the table, but to the Jewish People, the holiness of this night, and why it is so different.

Yin/Yang: in every exile there is a bit of redemption and in every redemption there is a bit of exile.

Having made it to the Land of Israel, prevailed against the Philistines, and built the Temple in Jerusalem, we lost it to the Assyrians and Babylonians. We returned and rebuilt, and lost it to the Greeks and Romans. Without a homeland for two millennia, the Jews returned, aliyah, a piece of redemption, a promise, the beginning and end of a journey: Jewish sovereignty in Eretz Yisrael.

“This year in Jerusalem.”

▲ Footprints in the sand leading to the water's edge, remind us of Nahshon ben Aminadav's faith in God when being first to walk into the Red Sea. [Ulises Rodriguez/Reuters]

The need for another timeless tale

The 1998 animated film the Prince of Egypt tells the story of the Children of Israel's leap of faith as they escaped bondage; sadly, we haven't had such an honest and optimistic telling of our story since

By NOA AMOUYAL

‘M any nights we prayed, with no proof anyone could hear,’ so begins the lyrics to *When You Believe* a rousing ballad from the animated film *the Prince of Egypt*.

The song crystallizes what it's like to crawl out of the depths of despair and find hope and freedom from slavery on the other side.

The words may have been written to represent Israelites and their Exodus from Egypt, but the message behind them is a universal one that can resonate with anyone who has lost hope.

It's perhaps the last time I've seen a movie that told our story – a vividly Jewish story – in a way that is optimistic, nuanced and, yes, hopeful.

Schindler's List told the story of Jews as victims. The wildly popular *Fauda* tells the story of Jews as warriors.

But with the *Prince of Egypt*, we're seen as a people – a representation of humanity tested to their very limits and who took a leap of faith in order to finally be free.

It's that telling of our story that's needed now more than ever.

When the most popular representation of us as Jews in the news and popular culture consists of Bernie Sanders (“the socialists”), Michael Bloomberg (“the robber baron”) and Jerry Seinfeld / Larry David (“the complainers”) then we have a problem. And those are the ones with redeemable values! Once we delve into the likes of Harvey Weinstein and Jeffrey Epstein (“the sexual predators”) the outside world doesn't get a very pretty picture of us.

And obviously, it's a simplistic picture. We're diverse. We're robust. We disagree.

So why can't we see that in pop culture?

When Dreamworks released *The Prince of Egypt* back in 1998, I remember sitting in a theater in the United States as a pre-teen with my Christian friends in shock that I was watching not only a story of my people, but a people who are joyful – praising their God in song (and in Hebrew!) and showing that while we disagree, at our core we are good, we are strong and we're not helpless.

It certainly helped that the cast had some serious star power. Val Kilmer, Ralph Fiennes, Michelle Pfeiffer and Jeff Goldblum were just some of the big names involved. It was co-produced by Steven Spielberg. And when it's flagship song “When You Believe” needed to be recorded for radio, producers brought out the big guns: Mariah Carey and Whitney Houston.

We're told representation matters – a young African-American girl sits on her couch and sees actors who look like her playing politicians or doctors or lawyers, then she slowly comes to the realization that those careers are options for her down the line.

So, no, I never aspired to like Tziporah, the wife of a shepherd turned prophet. But seeing cartoon

characters with olive skin like mine, speaking my language and telling a story Jews have been telling each other around a seder table for centuries in a major Hollywood production left a deep impression on me.

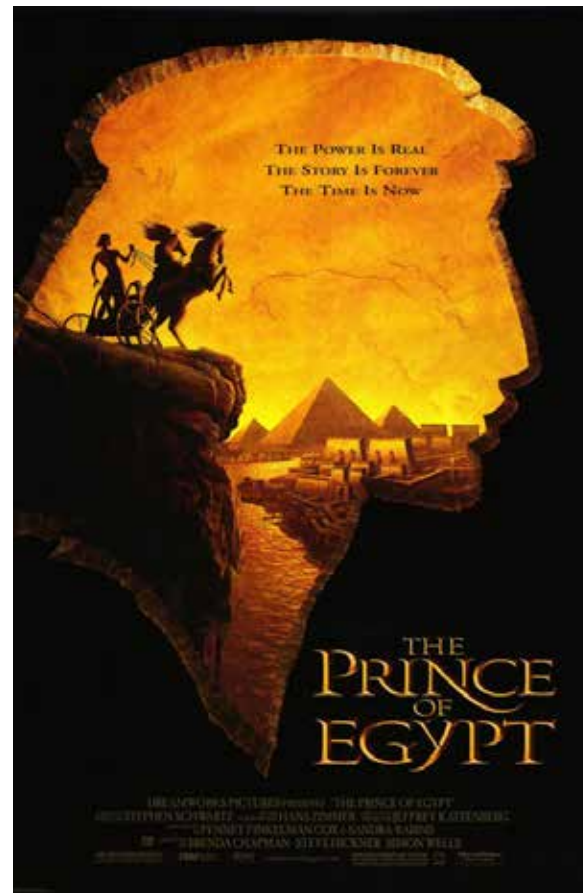
Why haven't we had something so pure, well-intentioned and tailored to the masses since? I'm not sure, although I would venture to guess that in today's climate, a major production about the Jews' Exodus from Egypt would inevitably bring about many references to the Israeli / Palestinian conflict. And, really, does anybody want to go down that rabbit hole when they just want to make a family-friendly movie?

And yet, it's something we need at this very time. When everything seems uncertain with the coronavirus pandemic and antisemites blaming the Jews for its spread, I know I'd savor something wholesome during this divisive time.

As *The Washington Post* noted when the film was released, “If nothing else, it's a wonderful essay on the meaning of freedom and the courage it takes to wrestle it from despots. In that sense, it feels more political and cultural than religious.”

In a time where we're so isolated both literally and figuratively, this is exactly the kind of pop culture the Jewish people need to bring us closer to each other, and also to be like other nations and people as well. ◆

► A poster of the animated film, *The Prince of Egypt* [Dreamworks SKG]



▲ A still from the film showing Moses leading his people out of Egypt. [Dreamworks SKG]

Parasha & Herzl: Passover as Jewish particularity

The challenge of the Exodus from Egypt was not merely a physical separation; it was the first step in a long journey of peoplehood, culminating in the fulfilment of Herzl's vision

By GOL KALEV

An astonishing 93% of Israeli Jews are estimated to observe the Passover Seder. This generation of Jews has a unique advantage that previous generations did not – the ability to understand the DNA of an exodus. The 20th century's mass exodus of the Jews to Israel from Europe and from other countries in the Middle East, makes Passover more relatable.

Passover, however, does not mark only the Exodus from slavery to freedom, it also marks the beginning of the first phase of Judaism – Biblical Judaism (Judaism 1.0). Within a year of leaving Egypt, the Tabernacle was inaugurated, later to become the Temple. Whether a Jew actually came to worship or not, the Temple served as Judaism's point of orientation. Biblical Judaism – anchored in the Temple, the worship of sacrifices in it, the centrality of Jerusalem and the physical presence in Judea – was Judaism's organizing principle.

When the Romans destroyed the Temple and exiled the Jews, Judaism lost its organizing principle. This would normally lead to extinction as a distinct group – as was the fate of other nations of that time that lost their anchor. But instead of evaporation, the Jewish nation went through a historical transformation. It acquired a new organizing principle: Rabbinical Judaism (Judaism 2.0). This was anchored in the canonization of the Oral Torah, Halacha (Jewish law), rituals, learning and the yearning to return home.

In the last decade of the 19th century, a man heeded the call to turn this yearning into reality. Theodor Herzl planted the seeds for the third era of Judaism, in whose early stages we are living. Once again, the organizing principle that held the Jewish nation together for 2,000 years – the religious aspect of Judaism (Rabbinical Judaism) – is eroding. The 20th century saw mass secularization and the outer walls that kept Jews insular have continuously crumbled. Yet, at the same time, the Jewish state has been re-established, and a new organizing principle of Judaism emerged: Zionism.

HERZL CREATED a new anchor for Judaism, having concluded that the primary malaise of 2,000 years of exile was not the persecution, but rather the lack of unified Jewish political leadership.

"This is why we have inwardly gone to rack and ruin," he said.

As he was setting the conditions for a contemporary exodus, Herzl was fully aware of the complexity



▲ Representation of Joshua and Caleb carrying a grapevine, used as the cover for Herzl's *Altneuland*.
[Maurycy Lillien/Wikimedia Commons]

of immigration – the mental, emotional and transformational aspects.

"My moving from Vienna to Paris and back was historically necessary," he wrote, "so that I might learn what emigration is."

And with that, Herzl was set to lead the Children of Israel into the Promised Land.

Herzl had a daring suggestion expressed in his utopian novel *AltNeuLand*, which described life in the Jewish state once established. The Passover Seder would have a new addition: "First we shall finish our Seder after the manner of our forefathers, and then we shall let the new era tell you how it was born. Once more there was Egypt, and again a happy Exodus."

The Seder is a powerful tool to convey a core principle of Judaism: Do not go back to Egypt – either physically or mentally. Herzl knew that once the Jewish State was established, there would be those who would long for the "fleshpot of Europe" – those "dancers around the golden calf," as he called



them. Hence, the Seder can be a useful tool not only to defend from the threat to Judaism 1.0 – returning to Egypt – but also from the threat to Judaism 3.0: returning to Europe!

Moses was an Egyptophile, just as Herzl was a Europhile. The Exodus from Egypt was not against Egypt per se. Egypt is certainly not Amalek. King Solomon even married the Egyptian king's daughter and relationships with Egypt were good. The Exodus was about Jewish particularity. Nothing could be more nullifying to Moses's Judaism than the re-Egyptianizing of the Jews.

SIMILARLY TODAY, Israel and Europe are close allies and there is a solid bond of deep personal friendships. But nothing could negate Herzl's Zionism more than the re-Europeanization of the Jews.

"The proximity to Europe is bad," Herzl wrote, "because in the first 25 years of our existence we need, for our development, some rest from Europe, its wars and social complications."

Regrettably, Europe never gave the Jews any rest; not when they were free at home, nor when they were enslaved in Europe. The last 300 years of the first phase of Judaism, were marked by Greek and



▲ Exodus from Egypt. [Edward Poynter/Wikimedia Commons]

Roman attempts to Europeanize – or Hellenize – the Jews. The Jews’ refusal led to destruction and to the second phase of Judaism: the exile.

Today, in the third phase of Judaism, once again there are attempts to Europeanize the Jews (right along with their neighbors, just like last time). This includes forcing European frameworks and terms to artificially define the Israeli-Palestinian relationship. This is expressed for example in aggressive European attempts to sabotage Palestinian employment and mentorship in Jewish-owned businesses in the West Bank. But it also has deeper and more dangerous aspects. For some, Zionism – the national expression of Judaism – is antithetical to the European ethos of post-nationalism and universalism.

Like the American Revolution before it, the Zionist revolution was a conceptual exodus from Europe and negation of prevailing European dogmas. There are those in Europe, therefore, who naturally seek to erode Zionism.

And here lies an existential threat to Judaism. Some Jews today, just like during Greek and Roman times, might argue that we should succumb to

In the Seder, we are forewarned that ‘in every generation, they rise up to destroy us.’ This is often assumed to be physical, but as implied in the reassurance that immediately follows the warning, this could also relate to conceptual destruction.

such European ethos, end the Zionist project, accept European frameworks and mentally go back to Europe!

In the Seder, we are forewarned that “in every generation they rise up to destroy us. This is often assumed to be physical, but as implied in the reassurance that immediately follows the warning, this could also relate to conceptual destruction.

Just like there was an internal threat of negating the Moses-led Exodus during the decades that followed, there is also an internal threat today of negating the Herzl-led exodus (“Post-Zionism”). Both exoduses were not just about immigration, but about a Jewish transformation, and both were a manifesta-

tion of Jewish particularity.

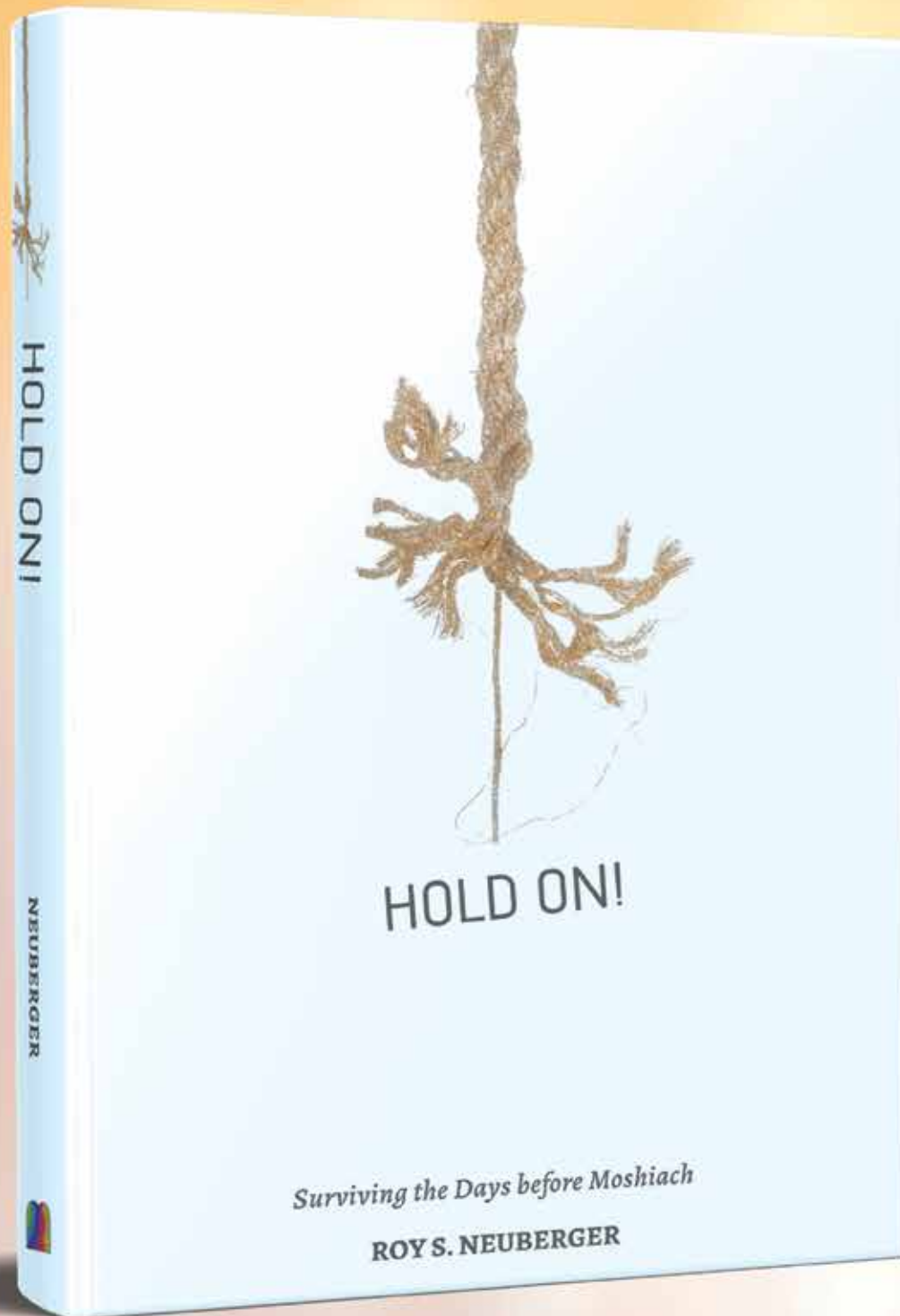
And so, the 93% of Israeli Jews who observe the Seder might want to consider adapting Herzl’s Seder suggestion in one form or another: To also celebrate our contemporary happy exodus as well as the new Jewish era that was born and is still in its infancy. ♦

The writer is chairman of the AIFL Think Tank and author of upcoming book *Judaism 3.0*. Visit: JewishTransformation.com. For comments: comments@JewishTransformation.com. For more of the writer’s Parasha & Herzl articles visit: ParashaandHerzl.com, for more of his analysis articles on Europe: EuropeandJerusalem.com.

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We must hold on tightly until the end.”

—The Chofetz Chaim



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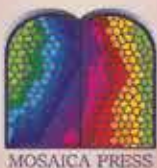
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