

Do not “Pass Over” the true meaning of Passover

Many traditional Jews remove chametz (food forbidden on Passover) from their homes but forget the meaning of this ritual. Removing un-kosher clutter from our homes to prepare for Passover is a metaphor for removing the clutter of negativity, greed, and cynicism from our minds to prepare for spiritual liberation.

The Passover Haggadah (story) describes Pharaoh’s enslavement of the Jews, who he treated as objects to use and exploit without mercy. As a result, he unleashed a series of plagues upon himself and his nation. The unmentioned actors in this drama are the vast majority of Egyptians who remained silent and benefitted from institutionalized racism and slavery, bringing great suffering upon themselves. Throughout history, humans have emulated Egypt and doomed their nations by moral collapse as time “matzahs” on.

In the antebellum south, genteel southern Christians profited from the selling, trading and owning of human beings before the south was destroyed; Roman crowds cheered as human beings were thrown to the lions and forced to fight each other to the death, which presaged the end of their civilization, and today the Colosseum lies in ruins; and most Americans were silent or collaborated as the indigenous people of America were subjected to physical and cultural genocide, and now we face environmental collapse by ignoring their maxim that the earth does not belong to us, we belong to the earth. Perhaps the appointment of the first Native American, Deb Halaand, to lead the Department of the Interior, augurs a turning point in our nation’s history and hope for the future. Sadly, many Jews learn nothing from the past and rebel against Moses, as in Biblical days, by denigrating Jews who follow the Mosaic ideal of compassion and love with their most vile epithet, “liberal”.

The Torah says that God “hardened” the heart of Pharaoh and kept the Jewish people enslaved despite ten horrific plagues. Our benevolent ancestors could not imagine anyone as cruel as Pharaoh, so they blamed his cruelty on God. But we need not go back thousands of years or resort to supernatural agents to see the tremendous capacity for heartless stupidity among leaders and sheep-like acquiescence by their loyal subjects who follow these despotic leaders into the abyss with their sin of silence.

Today, humans face ten modern plagues of ignorance, arrogance, intolerance, climate change, overpopulation, gun violence, religious fanaticism, poverty, injustice and war, as a result of our Pharaonic behavior, and we also suffer from the worst plague of all according to Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, the plague of indifference, which makes all the other plagues possible and lethal.

The horrors in Ukraine are the result of the world community’s craven addiction to oil which causes us to abandon our ideals, debauch democracy and dance “sheikh to sheikh” with *oiligarchs* who have us over a barrel and offer an *oilwellian* future by our continued enslavement to fossil fuels and the slick politicians who support modern day Pharaohs who threaten Israel and America. Let us free ourselves from the death grip of these murderous regimes by launching a Manhattan Project to develop alternative energy with new and improved technology that will make oil and gas obsolete and will bankrupt these vicious regimes and bring great wealth to those who devise this new technology.

May all Jews become “little Messiahs”, collectively taking on the role of Elijah, the forerunner of the Messianic Age whose presence is invited into all Jewish homes on Passover. On that day, Jews may spearhead a global spiritual transformation to perceive earth and all its creatures as one, reflected in the Shema and unite all people on Earth to protect Creation, symbolized by the parsley, and to free all people from tyranny.

Let us not “pass over” the true meaning of Pesach, i.e. “freedom” and ask ourselves a 5th question this Passover, “Will the world be inspired by the Passover saga of liberation under Moses by standing with the Jewish hero Volodymyr Zelensky, who is courageously leading his people and the free world in a struggle for liberation against Putin?” This Passover let us respond to the stirring words that Moses, said to Pharaoh “Let my people go” and by the courage of Zelensky who said, “Slava Ukrainiye, heroim slava” (Glory to Ukraine and glory to the heroes), and let us unite to bring freedom to all people on Earth.

Happy Passover and Shalom to you and yours,
Rabbi Barry Silver