

How long O LORD, how long?

This is our God, we have waited for Him...

On this first night of Passover, the festive meal is preceded by the seder. (order of service) This is when we remember our humble beginnings by tasting, touching, reading and talking about where we came from and why! The salty water reminds us of the tears of our slavery. The shank bone, speaks of the Passover lamb whose blood was shed and placed over our door posts so that the Angel of Death would pass over our huts. The haroset, a mixture of almonds, dates, raisins, cinnamon and honey, is sticky like the mortar we used to cement the bricks. We remember our Egyptian taskmasters. The matzah, unleavened bread, pierced through and striped reminds us, that as slaves, we were beaten, whipped and speared. The flatness of it, due to lack of yeast speaks of the absence of pride that puffs one up. Isaiah 53 also perfectly describes the abuse inflicted upon the suffering Messiah for His people. And so, with our family - 3 of our 4 sons and grandchildren sitting around our table, (our 4th son is in Helsinki doing the same with his family) we join our hearts with the Jewish people and nation to give thanks for being overshadowed by the Almighty. Together with 93% of all Israelis we begin our Passover journey into new life, new hope and strength. But, our first call is to remember and give honour to whom honour is due by reliving that last night under Egyptian slavery, before we became a massive throng of 650,000 men not counting women or children... exactly like refugees on the run for their lives. There was no retreat and no way forward, but GOD using His elements in nature, fought for our escape. The symbolic elements. rehearse our emergence from bondage into nationhood. We recount the miracles associated with the Exodus, when God ***'went to make for Himself a people, a nation.'***

The central theme of the Haggadah, Hebrew for "the retelling of the story", resonates powerfully with the present turbulent times in which we live with barbarians at our gates and the betrayal of Israel by much of the world who routinely "give us the cold shoulder." It speaks of our treatment down through history. Jews in exile for 2,000 years, of anti-Semitism, persecution, expulsion and attempted genocide initially experienced as preserved in the Bible's Passover/ Exodus story. It is with a feeling of awe that we repeat the Biblical verses that our ancestors recited for thousands of years, and at the same time keeping our current situation in mind. ***"The promise made to our forefathers holds true for us today. They have risen against us to destroy us; in every generation. But the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hands."***

It was because the Hebrews prospered, multiplied and "became very strong and numerous." This prosperity is what made the Egyptians fear us and make us "enemies" of the state. Discrimination brought on the taskmasters to oppress us into slavery. Persecution grew to include the death of all new born male babies. This sequence of events has endured throughout our 2,000 year long exile among the nations, ever since the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. History is cyclical, first, we are tolerated, then discrimination sets in followed by physical persecution and exile or murder. The most horrible of all was the Nazi era when the entire world was thrown into war and suffering and six million Jews were murdered. We lost a father and grandfather. Suffering and salvation belong to the Jew first; chosen and given the pattern of redemption out of death. We will not forget but remember... especially as the full moon rises high on this night, when we fled Egypt.

But, tonight we Israelis take time to rehearse, remember and rejoice! It is our privilege to be the generation who are living witnesses of miracles no less profound than that first Passover night. We give thanks that in the midst of turbulence and continued terror in this barbaric region, we continue to welcome home new waves of immigrants who immediately start to root down and grow in spite of the challenges. We are undoubtedly the most blessed and privileged generation since the Exodus. ***"For when the LORD builds up Zion, He will appear in His glory for this is written for the last generation."*** Psalm 102:13 (from the Hebrew Bible)

A trickle of pioneers began to return in the 1880's from Lithuania and Czarist Russia. Let us never forget that the resurrection of Hebrew into a spoken language is an integral part of the miraculous solidifying process, which continues on everyday. Miracles unfolded, in 1947, in the midst of political agendas during

the Cold War. Both the USA and the USSR voted in favour of a homeland for the Jews that November. What a miracle!

Even more extraordinary in 1948, was the ability and determination of the fledgling Jewish state with only 600,000 citizens and a remnant of thin, war torn Holocaust survivors. Where did the grit and determination to militarily overcome a unified effort by a far more powerful combination of five Arab states to destroy it? At the time, Israel's airforce owned one Piper cub plane, and the army in Jerusalem owned one mortar launcher which was dismantled and carried from place to place in a milk can and fired making the Arabs think they had many guns. Mock ups of naval war ships built of plywood were fastened to fishing boats in the Haifa and Tel Aviv harbors. It was a spoof. We tell this heroic story in our classic film, *Apples of Gold*, You may order it, in our "classic series" offer.

But the greatest miracle of our time, since modern Israel was created, is the *ingathering of the exiles*, as prophesied by every major Biblical prophet. Jews from all over the world have returned to their Biblical homeland. They range from survivors of the Holocaust to Jews hounded and driven out of Arab lands with just the clothes on their backs; to new immigrants from the developed world of North America and Europe. Other Jews returned home from primitive societies; Ethiopia, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Mizoram, India. Totalitarian Islamic regimes have given up their Jews.

What stands out is also the modern celebrated exodus from the former Soviet Union, which we remember at the Passover table right along with the Exodus from Egypt. These Jews were once regarded as lost and assimilated. They discovered their Jewish identity and amazingly stood up in the suffocating world and were counted! They became a major contributing factor with the support of world Jewry to bring about the ultimate collapse of the "Evil Empire." Nothing short of "miraculous" can describe these extraordinary events. We Rawlings were there and created a powerful film that helped forward the release of Soviet Jews. Also a classic, it is called, *Gates of Brass*. You may order it, as well. Jay received a 'life time achievement award' for creating this documentary and many others, from the *World Zionist Congress* and the *Christian Allies Caucus* this January 2016. What a privilege to have been a very small part in filming this ongoing story, or should I say history!

With the Almighty's guidance, the Israeli family, professional and lay people alike have had incredible success in molding these new immigrants: most of them, refugees from oppression, into a rejuvenated power house for Israel. The success grew out of the soil of their ancient homeland, giving them a place where they could be Jews, free to flourish and excel. They embraced their once forbidden Jewish culture, tradition and faith with enthusiasm.

After attaining nationhood the "People of the Book," powerless for 2,000 years, almost overnight succeed in creating the most powerful regional army which, despite its size would be classified as one of the strongest military powers in the world. Israel continues to demonstrate an incredible capability of deterring aggression and defending the Jewish people day in and day out. This week a Jerusalem bus was fire-bombed by Hamas. Twenty one people were injured, two seriously. The only death was the 19 year old Palestinian terrorist from Bethlehem a Hamas operative. Himself a victim of deceit and lies. How sad. Also two Hamas tunnels penetrating into Israel from Gaza were uncovered and destroyed this week. **"He who keeps Israel, neither slumbers no sleeps."**

With great thankfulness, we rehearse our history and sing our songs. We understand that inspite of the continous pressure from terror threats including Iran and Hezbulloh in Lebanon with their 100,000 Iranian missiles pointed at us, we will remember! Yes, we were slaves, but today we are a free people who **"God chose to make a name for Himself."** Today we celebrate our history lived out in hope mixed with grit and determination bringing us to this day in our on going miraculous history. Those among us who believe in the divine presence will express joy and thanksgiving for our rebirth. Please join us in prayer and thanksgiving that the LORD GOD continues watching over His people. Hag Samach!

Meridel Rawlings in Jerusalem.. Excerpts from *Candidly Speaking*, Isi Leibler. Jerusalem Post.

