

Torah for Turbulent Times

“Opening Our Doors, Then & Now - Portals for Passover & the Prophet Elijah”



Passover begins tomorrow night and we already have the answer to that first question. “*Mah nishtana ha'laila hazeh?*” Not just, “*Why* is this night different from all other nights?” But, “*How* very different this night really is this year!” One major difference is quite obvious. We spoke about it in our Zoom chat rooms this past Shabbat. How different and disappointing it feels to not be physically gathered together with our family, friends and community. Beyond the scintillating smells, scrambling for the afikomen and munching on matzah, many of us look forward to opening our doors to others. Indeed, we’ve been opening our doors and homes for centuries, and beyond a sign of welcoming guests, this simple gesture also reveals our resilience and highlights our hope.

Whatever meal we get on the table this year, however many glasses of wine or grape juice it takes to get through, and whichever version of the story we tell, we’re invited by our ancient sage, Rabban Gamliel to at least accomplish this. We point to the three symbols on our table: Pesach, Matzah & Maror and we read what each of them symbolises. Matzah and Maror, that’s an easy one. The dough didn’t have time to rise and life was bitter. As for the Pesach, it’s symbol is the roasted shank bone (or beet as the vegetarian option). In our story of freedom, it represents the sacrifice of the lamb essential to the Angel of Death “passing over” the Israelite homes. This year our story truly comes to life, as we pray for the health of each and every household in our wide world. And, there’s more to the story.

A quick look at Exodus 12 reveals an important detail. G-d tells Moses and Aaron to instruct the whole community to not only take the lamb, but to mark the two doorposts (*m’zuzot*) and the lintel of their houses with its life-blood. This important gesture guaranteed life for those dwelling within their homes. Why oh why did they have to go

through this? This question has puzzled our commentators throughout the years. For some, it was the all important and final step of liberation for each and every individual, signifying a newly liberated identity. For others, it was a courageous, public, and countercultural display of faith. And yet, for others it underscored the importance of the family structure in Jewish life. As this explanation goes, the doorposts and the lintel represent the home. Within its walls, a quarantine of sorts, we can find protection and preserve life. The doorposts, and by extension, the home, symbolise our supreme values of *hayyim* and *mishpacha*, life and family.

Along with G-d's help, liberation required personal action, which revealed the resilience of a newly redeemed people. For this Passover's seders, technology has helped us to redefine our doorposts, our portals of entry into each other's lives. Family and friends are zooming to our tables (my favorite new haggadah is entitled, "*Kulanu M'Zoomim*"). Our new "doorposts" are the frames of the screens we sit in front of. They are our corridors, connecting us from wherever we sit (and recline) for this year's holiday!

And, however much of the post-meal haggadah we do or don't do, it wouldn't be the same without opening the door at the end of the seder. Now, like other times, but maybe even more so this year, we will sing our hearts out and anticipate Elijah's arrival. With the door open, I pray that we are strong and healthy enough to welcome another day. I hope that day by day we will approach messianic times, redefined this year to simply be a better, healthier return to normal. Beyond welcoming guests and revealing resilience, in opening *all* our doors this year, we highlight - HOPE. According to R. Nachman of Breslov, "All new beginnings require that you unlock a new door." *Ba'shanah ha'ba'ah b'rushalayim*, yes, next year in Jerusalem. And....

Next year in person!

Happy Passover,

Rabbi Mark