Passover 5775 - April 2015

Come and let us celebrate the Passover...The Festival of Freedom

Rabbi Arnold Saltzman

As I write this the election results in this year’s Israeli election show a race too close to call. The candidates Netanyahu and Herzog, both are claiming victory. In the next days the votes of those serving in Israel Defense Forces (IDF) will be counted and these can shift the results as there are 250,000 additional votes to be counted. Whatever the outcome, it will take several weeks to know who can piece together a voting coalition if it is possible.

One of the most unusual results of this election include the fact that four small Israeli- Arab parties joined together and formed one party. Israeli Arabs make up one fifth of the population, and usually they stay away believing that there is little to gain in voting. This time they won 13 seats out of 120 in the Knesset, Israel’s Parliament. They have also indicated that they would use their votes if given a chance to block Netanyahu from returning as Prime Minister, and to do this they would support Herzog, the Labor candidate.

This turned into an exciting election, where Israeli’s began to express their concerns about social issues such as housing and the growing inequality in income in Israel, while the Likud emphasized defense, and external threats such as Iran and Hamas. Surprisingly, Netanyahu without apology said he was opposed to a Palestinian State in order to get more ‘settler’ votes. He has not presented an alternative except the status- quo, and that is problematic. Whatever the answer for the future it is not the status-quo.

This is the background for our Passover festival this year. Difficulties in Israel, anti-Semitism in Europe and in the United States on some college campuses, Anti-Semitism is the subject of many articles, and much concern. The story of Passover seems timely, while today Egypt does not seem to be a problem, except that it is dealing with its own challenges. The Pharaoh, a dictator who thought he was God, came up against ‘God in history’, and Pharaoh lost.

What is it that we experience in the Passover? For me the most important moments are the years of memories and traditions, the family table, or the community Seder, the years of watching children grow, participating with their first Ma Nishtano, and inviting guests to the festive table. The memories of parents or grandparents create a special connection knowing that they too observed these mitzvoth, sitting at the same table, or using the same goblet.

Many people who have chosen to become Jews have been guests at our seder, a real gesture of inclusion and recognition. Many Christians have been guests at the seder which they identify with their deep religious tradition associated with the Last Supper in Jerusalem. The food, and delicacies are truly something to savor, yet it is the Passover Plate, the symbols which teach us through the taste, the bitterness of slavery, the tears of suffering, the beauty of the season and the sweetness of freedom.

Whenever we drink wine in the ceremonial manner, we say the blessings, at least four times, and this wine, as always, represents the cup of joy and salvation we experience on these nights of the Passover Seder.

The music transports us to the authentic traditions of many communities. The wonderful Aramaic language throughout the seder, as well as the hymns and songs of the seder give these evenings an unforgettable connection to past, present and future generations.

We experience these nights, in Every Generation it is imperative that we teach ourselves and our friends and families the events of the Passover. Freedom is most precious, and we can be enslaved by others, and by our own ego. So the idea of this Redemption is to let go of some of that which enslaves us, having a real Yom Tov Festival, we can do something remarkable.

We can experience this human history, of sacrifice, bitterness, redemption and revelation as we continue this table, this order, known as Seder, which has the finest warmth and glow of gathering those we love in the most sacred and enjoyable moments of sharing.

This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land which enslaved them. Let all who are hungry come and eat and celebrate the passover with us.

Wishing you a Chag Sam’e’ach, a beautiful festive holiday for you and your loved ones.

Rabbi Arnold Saltzman & Carol Nissenson