REFLECTIONS ON APRIL 2024 ISRAEL MISSION
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Temple Sholom
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My friend and teacher Rabbi David Wolpe reminded me (and his thousands of readers and students) that throughout Jewish history, the Passover Seder has operated on two levels of time. Rabbi Wolpe explained, "The Haggadah recounts the past, the story of both the Exodus and the Talmudic Rabbis who expound on it. The words make all of the ideas come alive for the participants: slavery, freedom, study, storytelling, song, and symbol. Passover is quintessentially a celebration of the events of the Jewish past."

He continued, "At the same time, Passover is about the present. In medieval times, Jews felt their predicament as parallel to their ancestors, and the despotism and persecution with which they lived lent power to the tales of the Haggadah. The Seder was not a meal about what was, but what is.

As we sit down to the Seder this year, we have the same experience. In our own day, the Seder is about the historic liberation from Egypt that is threaded through and referenced as part of the “Master Story” of Judaism throughout of calendar, our prayers and rituals. Every time we recite the words, “yitziat mitzrayim” as we did earlier in the vayahavtah as well will soon in the kiddush we are reminded of our past, where we came from, what we have been through and the gratitude we must consider for where we are, even if our redemption is incomplete.

But it is also about the present, about hostages in Gaza, about an Israel that has evacuated 10% of its residents from the North and South because it’s not safe to live under the rain of rockets, not safe to live so close to the borders. It’s about an Israel that feels vulnerable and unsafe.

While I was in Israel last week on a Jewish Federation mission many were sharing photos of past 1948 Haggadot written by kibbutzim that reframed the Seder in a safe and

secure Israel. One version from the early years after the establishment of the state of Israel rewrote the four questions as follows:

How is this night different from all other nights?
On all other nights our towns were besieged and we were surrounded by enemies inciting us.
On this night, we sit secure in our home and our towns are flourishing.

How is this night different from all other nights?
On all other things we would celebrate our Festival of Freedom when we were controlled by a foreign ruler
Now we are free people in our free land
the State of Israel.

On Passover the past becomes present but also in this moment the present reminds us of the vulnerability of the past, the years BEFORE the establishment of the state of Israel, before the kibbutz felt confident, safe and secure

enough to rewrite and reframe those haunting four questions.

We are told in the Haggadah that in each generation one must see oneself as if we went forth from Mitzrayim. The reverse is also the case. In each generation we must see how we are still enslaved, still held hostage and brutalized by cruel pharaohs, still held suspect in the eyes of those that see in our creed and culture not a people desperate for freedom but a less than human group to be demonized and derided.

The Seder is again the story of what was, but also the story of what is.

I want to share with you some observations from my mission to Israel last week. There is much more detail on my still incomplete blog that we share in the temple happenings email but there are a few things I think are important to highlight.

1. Who was on the mission?

a. Indigenous leader
b. Provincial elected officials
c. Civic leaders
d. Jewish Community volunteers
e. Professionals
f. Major donors
    i. The frame for the trip was education both ways. We had things we wanted them to see, a missile attack by Iran was not on the list but abundantly relevant to the lived experience of Israelis today
    ii. We had things we also wanted to learn from them, to see through their eyes. One example was the non-exclusive fact that Jews are indigenous to the land of Israel. How would this be seen by an indigenous leader, by public officials in BC who go to such great and necessary lengths to use indigenous inclusive values and language in their work?

iii. The case was made and the conclusion clear, you cannot separate Jews from this land. Political zionism is a movement but Jewish connection to the land is an anchor, a historical fact that has not diminished over time, colonialism or exile anymore than time, colonialism and exile has weakened the claims of the first nations.

iv. We should have allies with the First Nations of Canada and the fact that we do not is a failing of our own efforts to explain and tell our story as much as it is to our abdication of the field to the activist left that have usurped our own indigenous narrative in an Orwellian double speak.

2. The North is at war but not at war so it's not at war but it is
    a. 4km
    b. Displacement
    c. Resources

3. Israel feels depressed and vulnerable like it didn't in December
    a. Hatikvah but hopelessness
    b. Can't get the hostages back
    c. Can't bomb Hamas into submission
    d. No obvious or attainable solution
    e. Time and numbers not on our side

I left Israel Saturday evening around 530p - they closed the air space at 730p. I landed in Munich around 10p that evening and watched the missiles fly toward Israel from the safety of my German airport hotel room.

It was surreal to sit as a Jew in Germany, feeling safer there than in Israel.

As I watched the rockets arrive closer toward Israeli airspace we began to hear reports of intercepts from US, British, Israeli and even Jordanian jet fighters and anti missile systems. Even Saudi Arabia participated in tracking the missiles and aiding in Israel's defense. For at

least that moment we were not alone in the world. For at least that moment the world sees the great threat that Iran poses not just to Israel but the region and the world. Surreal indeed: a Jew safe in a German airport hotel, thanking the USA, and the UK when 80 years ago the world was largely silent, we couldn't get the Allies to bomb the rail lines to Auschwitz. Now those same air forces flew in defense of the Jewish State, alongside an Israeli Air Force that might be the best in the world.

Surreal, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, 50 years ago on Yom Kippur invaded Israel, that night they helped protect our people and the Jewish State. If the world can change so much in 50-80 years maybe there is hope with leadership and wisdom it can change for good?!

We end our seder with Next Year in Jerusalem. For a holiday that looks backward and to the present its an oddly forward thinking proclamation. It's the answer to history, for all the years we could not be in Jerusalem, next year we will be, and it's a statement of fact for the present, we

are here now and we will be here in Jerusalem next year and for every year to come.