

Passover Feature

IN HONOR OF PASSOVER, WHICH COMMEMORATES THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION OF THE ISRAELITES FROM EGYPTIAN BONDAGE, THE LAS VEGAS ISRAELITE WILL PUBLISH A SERIES OF FEATURES. THIS YEAR THE PASSOVER FESTIVAL IS INAUGURATED AT SUN-DOWN ON THE EVENING OF WEDNESDAY, APRIL 2, AND ENDS ON THURSDAY, APRIL 10.

We Need Passover

By ROBERT E. SEGAL

It seems reasonable to conclude that Jews have been observing Passover for just about 3300 years. In times as the Black Plague in Europe in the 14th Century and in the long night of Hitler's Holocaust, the strength flooding back into our beings from participation in this ancient festival of freedom has been most memorable.

But if we are to continue as a part of that often-assailed but never completely broken line of Jewry in this era of nuclear threat and international insecurity, we need Passover this year as much as ever. Let's look at some of the good reasons.

We need Passover because its symbolism rededicates us to a faith remarkable for its durability and its contributions to all civilizing influences a harsh, primitive, and stubborn world has ever known.

We need Passover because our high hopes for the establishment of an effective Parliament of Man in such instrumentalities as the League of Nations and the United Nations have been sorely tested by the dissolution of the League and by the cynical play of power in the UN. Could it then possibly grasp the meaning of the Seder? Could members of the Soviet Arab-African bloc begin to understand why hearts of rulers much more modern than that Pharaoh of Moses' time seem hard to us? Passover is synonymous with liberty for us; for the power brokers in the UN, liberty appears a casualty in the race for oil and in the tendency to curb the rights of small nations. Moreover, the UN's seeming impotence in the face of the crisis of these days in breeding a new isolationism among people heretofore most dedicated to the rearing of a world parliament consecrated to peace and justice.

We need Passover because the 2,000,000 to 2,500,000 Jews remaining in the USSR are in danger of losing Judaism and every claim to the right to practice their religious beliefs in Freedom. A modernized Haggadah, designed especially to express American Jewish solidarity with Russian brethren, pointedly asks:

1. Why is it that we and Jews all over the world to-

day can obtain Matzah while Jews in the Soviet Union have extreme difficulty in obtaining it?

2. Why is it that the lives of Soviet Jews are made bitter by discrimination while Jews all over the world can enjoy freedom?

3. Why can't Jews be free to live as Jews in Russia? Why can't they be free to study Jewish religion, history, and culture?

4. Why must Jews in the Soviet Union be afraid to have Seders while we and Jews all over the world celebrate the Seder without fear?

We need Passover to help cool-headed and reasonable men prevail in the councils of those who falsify the meaning of the black revolution in America and try to fan a small spark of balck anti-Semitism into a racial bonfire. When we repeat at the Seder table, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt," we are, in a sense, proclaiming that we know the meaning of slavery. When we utter the admonition: "Remember this day, in which ye came out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage," we perpetuate a day of remembrance not for ourselves alone, but for all who have been oppressed. When we refer to plagues of frogs, ahil, locusts, darkness, water pollution, and plagues among cattle, we have a responsibility to realize that we still have about us the plagues of discriminatory practices, of starvation, of poverty, and of humiliation on the basis of origin.

We need Passover because its complete story reminds us that Moses didn't make a beeline for the Promised Land. He was far too wise. No fancy, neon signs pointed the direct route to Canaan, just 200 miles along the coast. In his wisdom, he went straight east from Goshen. And the sages who have come along since Moses figure that Moses realized it would take years -- aye, at least a generation -- to develop the kind of spiritual discipline needed by those who had been slaves. Perhaps they would not be required to make bricks sans straw in the land over yonder; but they would be put to other tough tests.

They were. So are we. And Passover continues a blessing.

NEW YORK: -- Rabb Robert Layman, who was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in 1959, will serve for the 1969-70 year as Advisor to the American students taking a year of high school study in Israel as a part of the America-Israel Secondary School Program of the Department of Education and Culture of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

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