

### Other Red Seas to Cross

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and parted the Red Sea for them to begin their journey to the Promised Land, it marked the beginning of the first mass aliya.

To be sure, some Jews left Egypt reluctantly claiming that they were going to an unknown land and leaving behind them positions in which they had become comfortable. Many of the Jews who had been slaves, were thankful for their chance to achieve freedom but subsequently became disgruntled with the long, arduous and dangerous trek through the desert.

This is a striking parallel to the condition of Jews today. Many feel comfortable in their positions of relative security in the golah and disdain to make aliya. For many Jews, golah has become a soft berth despite the occasional rumblings of anti-Semitism. For many Jews, the best form of aliya is to send their money to Israel, rather than themselves. They ignore the fact that golah is a form of slavery, of alienation from Jewish values and the blurring of Jewish heritage.

This condition was graphically described by Achad Ha'am in his famous essay, "Slavery in Freedom," which he wrote in 1891. In that essay he castigated French Jewish intellectuals for their assimilationist ideology and for ignoring or minimizing the danger of anti-Semitism. The condition of French Jewry, he wrote -- and he could have said the same about Jews anywhere in the golah -- "may be justly defined as spiritual slavery under the veil of outward freedom."

This condition was also described by Leo Pinsker in his famous work, "Auto-Emancipation" which he wrote in 1882. In it he described Jews in the golah as "shuttle-cocks" between the indigenous peoples. He declared: "For the living, the Jew is a dead man; for the natives, an alien and a vagrant; for property holders, a begger; for the poor and exploited, a millionaire; for patriots, a man without a country, for all classes, a hateful rival."

The issue of aliya this year, particularly

during the Passover holiday when Jews read the Haggadah and reaffirm "Next Year in Jerusalem" is especially meaningful considering that the 100th anniversary of the BILU movement will be celebrated next year.

BILU the acronym for Bet Yaakov lechu venelechah ("O house of Jacob, come ye and let us go." -- Isaiah 2:5) was the first modern Zionist aliya effort. It was founded in 1882 in Kharkov by Jewish students and intellectuals

reacting against the waves of pogroms in Czarist Russia and the refusal by many Jewish representatives to understand that Jews could not lead a normal life as a people in the golah. The Biluim viewed Jews existence in the golah as an anomaly.

Of some 300 Biluim who undertook to make aliya to Palestine about 16 made it and laid the foundation for future waves of olim who eventually realized the goal of building a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Some of the Biluim who began the journey from Russia decided to drop out -- as many Soviet Jews are doing today. Others were stricken by disease in Palestine. Still others became disgruntled with the primitive conditions of the then barren country and left for other places in the golah.

Many Jews in many parts of the world will, as they taste the bitter herbs on their seder plates, reflect on the bitter life they are forced to endure in the golah and the poverty and deprivation that surrounds them. Many Jews in many parts of the world -- especially the Soviet Union, Arab lands, South America and even in some countries in Europe -- will reflect on the growing danger of anti-Semitism, neo-Nazism and rightwing extremism.

Some may decide to make it "This Year In Jerusalem." But the majority will continue to recite by rote "Next Year in Jerusalem" as they have in the past. But for all Jews in the golah, Passover may be the occasion for them to think about the need to cross their local Red Seas to Israel where the promise is being fulfilled.

NEW YORK (WNS) -- The American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) has shipped over 390,000 pounds (195 tons) of Passover supplies to small Jewish communities throughout the world, including a shipment to Falasha Jews in Ethiopia, according to JDC president Henry Taub.

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