

# Passover Thoughts

By Arno Herzberg

More than forty years have passed and the frightful events of the Hitler era recede slowly into history. But the grip they have on all those who survived has never lessened and will never be forgotten. Every Passover when we talk about freedom, the picture of those events stands out in all its vivid intensity.

It seems so long ago that we sat at the Seder table in a small German town. We did not talk much. We were overwhelmed by the sequence of happenings, blow after blow; it seemed never to end. A wave of unprecedented hatred was engulfing us all. We hardly grasped its impending message of death and destruction.

There was not much to celebrate at that Seder table. The words of the Haggadah had assumed a strange sound. We could not say "Every generation should feel as if they went out of Egypt." For us it was the reversal of it all -- not from bondage to freedom, but from freedom to bondage. We were the Pariahs. We had lost our freedom.

More than forty years later, a new generation has taken hold and commands events in its own way. A new way of life brings the opportunities we all craved for. There is much to celebrate this Passover 5746 in the freedom of a blessed country. The words of the Haggadah have assumed their original meaning. A new generation has grown up in freedom. There is freedom from want. The fear that once grasped our throats is not known to them. Freedom has become more than a promise.

But for me, in the midst of all the celebrating,

there is still the nagging and almost tantalizing question: What have we done with this new freedom? Have we made proper use of it? Did we, as a group, here and in Israel, use freedom for the benefit of our people?

There was never so much disunity, never so much irresponsibility in our midst. All sorts of extremists claim the spot light. Do-gooders raise their voices. Minds are closed. Positions have hardened. A growing intolerance cuts off dialogue and the sense of belonging. The middle ground between the political right and left, between ultra-orthodox and reform has been eroded. There is polarization and fanaticism on all sides of the political and religious spectrum, here and in Israel. Headlines and photos showing Jew against Jew testify to an alarming situation.

Everyone regrets this state of affairs, but very little is done to rectify it.

For me - these are trying times. There is a lump in my throat and my blood pressure exceeds its limits. Has freedom clouded the minds of people and created an over-abundance of selfishness and a retreat from responsibility?

I often wonder.

## Waldheim: 'I Have A Clean Conscience'

NEW YORK (WNS) — Kurt Waldheim conceded for the first time in an interview published here that he was aware of atrocities committed against Yugoslav partisans,

though he remained insistent that he was not involved in the atrocities.

Waldheim, the 67 year old former United Nations Secretary General and Austrian Presidential candidate, also said in the interview with The New York Times that he was unaware of the deportation of Greek Jews from Salonika, and also from Vienna, even though he visited the Austrian capital during the war.

"I only heard that

there were measures against Jews, that they were taken away without knowing where to -- we didn't know. But I didn't know it was such a mass affair," he said of the deportation of Jews from Vienna, which started in 1939.

Waldheim, the conservative Peoples Party candidate in next month's Austrian elections, said he was aware of atrocities against Yugoslav partisans while he was an intelligence officer preparing daily battlefield reports in the Balkans. "I knew that," he said, "but I also knew that many German soldiers were trapped and executed in a similar way."

"It was a nasty, dirty confrontation, although I have to add immediately I was far away from these atrocities, and I just got the reports. I had to forward them, put them together, to forward to the high command. I have a clean conscience, that's why I'm very relaxed, very relaxed, although I tell you in an emotional way."

Despite Waldheim's assertions that he had no knowledge of the deportation of thousands of Jews from Salonika, the head of that Jewish com-

munity, Leon Bamajor, said in an interview in a television documentary that it was "a monstrous lie that Waldheim did not know of the fate of the Jews of Salonika." The special documentary on Greek Jews during the war was broadcast in Rome earlier this week.

On April 24, 1943, said Bamajor, a Holocaust survivor, 3,000 Jews had to cross the entire city to the ghetto from where they were then deported. "Even the stones of Salonika knew of the drama of the Jews," he added. "It is possible that Waldheim did not see the yellow stars on our chests, the Jewish cemetery destroyed by the Germans, the shops displaying Jewish property signs, and the Nazis storming into our homes? Even a simple soldier could have observed these things, even a simple German and Waldheim was much more. He was a secretary to the General of the Nazi troops stationed five kilometers from Salonika," Bamajor continued. "This lie conceals other things." If definitive proof is gathered, Waldheim should be put on trial for war crimes, Bamajor said.

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