

# As If We Were There

Thoughts for Passover 5746  
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The formulators of the Haggadah derived from a passage in Exodus an obligation which is incumbent upon every Jew each Passover:

In every generation, one is obligated to regard himself as though he himself had actually gone out of Egypt, for the Torah says: "You shall tell your child on that day, saying, 'For the sake of that which G-d did for me when I went out of Egypt.'"

The emphasis is on "me" and "I." Thus as we sit at the Seder, we must project ourselves back to an ancient era, to feel our forefathers' pain and to relive the glory of their release as our own.

Various aspects of the Seder assist us in our task. We gather our families, sometimes from all over the country, to eat the Passover meal, just as our forefathers gathered their families which had been dispersed in servitude throughout Egypt in order to partake of the Passover sacrifice as a unit. We eat the same matzoh that they were forced to eat because haste forbade a delay to allow their bread to rise. We eat bitter herbs to remind us of their bitter lives in Egypt. We dip vegetables in salt water symbolic of their tears. And we recite the story of the exodus in the Haggadah, an account fraught with drama and replete with the miraculous events that accompanied our people's redemption.

These and other practices make Passover a magical holiday for children, whose vivid imaginations and strong sense of empathy permit them to fulfill the Passover obligation with no reservation; they are there. But for those of us who have grown to adulthood and experienced a loss of imagination through years of Seders, something additional is required. Our sense of personal participation in the Passover story must

come from an element of identification within ourselves, an element achieved through a variety of means.

For many of us, the means in the past few decades has been our experience of the Holocaust and the birth of the Jewish State. By reliving the greatest tragedy and the greatest job of our modern history, we have been able to relive the Jewish people's historic tragedy and joy as well. Subsequent conflicts between Israel and her surrounding enemies have reminded us of the presence in each generation of those who would destroy us, and of our utter dependence upon G-d for our continued survival.

This year we have witnessed yet another historic event which parallels the Passover story. This year, Anatoly Shcharansky, former prisoner and victim of oppression, is a free Jew in Israel. In achieving his freedom, he has lived a private exodus; in tracing his passage, we can relive an ancient one.

At the Seder this year, let us imagine ourselves in Anatoly Shcharansky's former existence, the existence of a Jew in the Soviet Union. We are forbidden to express our Jewish identity in any way -- forbidden public worship, study of Hebrew, fulfillment of the laws of kashruth. If we attempt to observe our faith in private, we can trust no one -- save a few similarly committed individuals -- to keep our secret from the ubiquitous agents of the government. We live in fear of betrayal at any moment.

Perhaps we save the informers the trouble by applying for an exit visa to Israel. Then we can be assured of an escalation of oppression. We face a loss of job, followed by charges of "parasitism" or other trumped-up accusations, imprisonment, torture, exile to labor camps -- in short, destruction as human beings, much in the manner of Pharaoh's Egypt.

All this has been Mr. Shcharansky's ex-

perience, and from this he has been released. He has celebrated his first free Purim. He has walked in streets filled with friends and brothers, men in yarmulkes or fur hats, women discussing preparations for Passover, children on their way to schools in which they learn about their people's heritage. He knows that he may enter a synagogue, buy a pound of matzoh, perhaps someday celebrate a child's bar or bat mitzvah, without ever looking over his shoulder. He is free to be a Jew among Jews, just as our forefathers were freed to become a nation.

And like our people's exodus thousands of years ago, his exodus has made a mark upon the nations of the world. The President of the United States was instrumental in his release; his fate was discussed among the people and in government circles throughout continents. For them, as well as for us, he has become the personification of Jewish survival despite persecution.

This year, then, let each of us live Anatoly Shcharansky's story. Through his experience of oppression, let us taste the bitterness of our forefathers' servitude; through his new-found freedom, let us savor the joy of their redemption. By seeing ourselves "as if we were there," let us learn the ultimate lessons of Passover: that the Jews are one people no matter how scattered, and that G-d's promise of our redemption still holds true.

May that redemption come quickly in our time.

TEL AVIV (WNS) — An infiltrator was killed and another wounded and captured in a clash with an IDF patrol while trying to infiltrate into Israel across the Jordan river. The patrol opened fire on suspicious characters seen trying to cross into the Jordan Valley. Both men were wounded and one died later of his wounds. There were no casualties among the Israelis. The large quantity of arms and ammunition found in their possession indicated that the terrorists may have been trying to bring weapons to terrorist groups on the West Bank.

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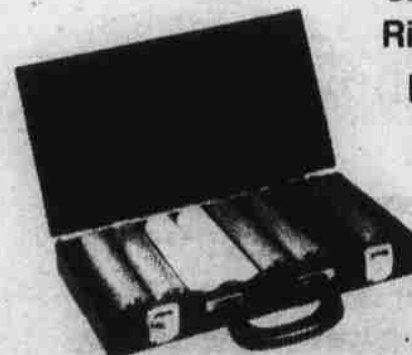
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