

Four New Passover Questions

By Rabbi William Berkowitz

Most people assume that religion is all about answers. But Passover reminds us that in our tradition, Jewishness is all about questions. In fact, if we didn't have the Star of David as our national symbol, we probably could use the question mark.

Other faiths utter declarations and dogmatic statements. In Jewish texts, we read questions and counter-questions. Who can forget the old saw, "Ask a Jew a question -- and he'll answer you with a question." That's the Jewish way: Jews question Jews, themselves and even God.

The Jewish holiday par excellence that's bursting with questions is Passover. Just think of the Seder: It's an event that never stops evoking questions and has Four Questions at its centerpiece, asked by the youngest to their parents.

But no Jew is too old to ask questions, and this Passover should be no different. Maybe the only thing different this year, at your Seder, should be four new questions:

Next Passover, will there still be hunger? Last year, the American Jewish Heritage Committee undertook a national effort to mobilize rabbis at Passover time to raise Jewish awareness about world hunger. The effort worked.

This year, we are joined by several "stop-hunger" groups who agree with the notion that Passover is a time to be reminded that there are too many people in the world who go to bed every night -- not just Passover night -- starving. They need feeding, and need it fast. So when you recite the phrase, 'Let all who are hungry come and eat,' remember that there will be thousands who don't hear you and will starve that night.

Next Passover, will there still be divisiveness? Since when you have two Jews you have three opinions, it's only natural that when Jews get together there should be differences and disagreements. The Talmud is a record of Jewish disagreements. Disagreement is deeply etched in the Jewish psyche.

But differences need not mean divisions

anymore than unity should mean uniformity. The Four Sons of the Seder remind us that at the Jewish table there exist different kinds of Jews, with different views and ways. But what's important is that they sit together at the table despite the disagreements. Those Jews who would refuse to sit with other Jews at the communal table because of their ways and their views are not just wrong -- they are downright anti-talmudic.

Our theological stances make us diverse. They need not make us divisive, nor should they stop us from cooperating together in those areas where we can, and certainly should not stop us from sitting down, studying together and keeping the age-old Jewish arguments flowing.

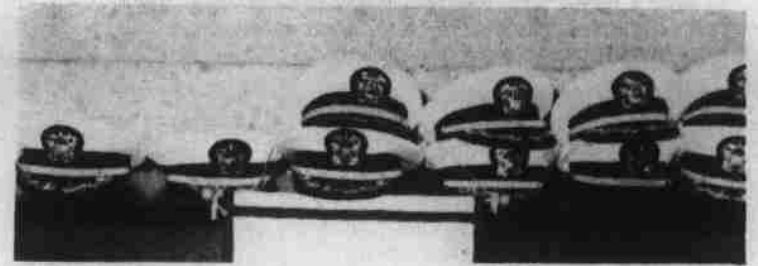
Next Passover, will there still be hatred? Increasingly in recent months we have seen the specter of murderous racism in Howard Beach, N.Y., of Klan bigotry in Forsyth County, Ga., and of deathly hatred in Brooklyn, where Hasidic Jews have been killed in random murders. In 1987, the dream of brotherly love has not been realized yet. And the Demjanjuk trial in Jerusalem which revives the horrid tales of Nazi bestiality brings to mind that hatred unchecked anywhere, in any dose, leads to no good.

The Passover song of "Had Gadya," (the one Kid), tells it straight: Hatred and bigotry accelerate and end in a climax of death and destruction.

Next Passover, will Jews still be enslaved? Passover celebrates the Exodus from Egyptian bondage, but Jews still are enslaved in our world. Soviet Jewry must now contend with the clever public relations tactics of the Kremlin, whose "openness" might mask its real agenda of lulling the Western world into a complacency, in which Soviet Jews would still not be allowed to emigrate.

But not only are Soviet Jews in bondage; American Jews must now contend with those vicious canards of "dual loyalty" whispered by those who would use the misguided and wrong actions of Jonathan Pollard to impugn the American Jewish community. At the same time,

Hats Off To Jewish National Fund



Aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy's senior officers took their hats off to the Jewish National Fund of America, as the organization feted them at a dinner at the Dan Carmel Hotel in Haifa. During JNF's recent Third National Assembly in Israel, organizers learned that the carrier was berthed in Haifa port and decided to mark the presence of 5,000 American military men in the region because of the Lebanese hostage situation. JNF decided to establish a grove of 100 trees in the American Independence Park outside Jerusalem, in honor of the Sixth Fleet for its peace patrol in the Mediterranean. At the dinner, Dr. Joseph P. Sternstein, JNF president, presented Rear Admiral Grant Sharp with a plaque for the grove and stated that the presence of the aircraft carrier in Israeli waters symbolized U.S.-Israeli cooperation and aroused the pride of American Jews. Assembly delegates were later thrilled by a private tour aboard the 80,000-ton carrier.

U.S. Jews must fend off the remarks of Israelis who argue that our response to the Pollard affair demonstrates Diaspora weakness. When will American Jews be free from such assertions, whether they be from anti-Jewish American citizens or outmoded Israeli critics?

These, then, are the questions that we would be asking at this year's Seder table. Next Passover: Will there still be hunger? Will there still be divisiveness? Will there still be hatred? Will Jews still be enslaved? This answer is: you.

(Rabbi William Berkowitz is national president of the American Jewish Heritage Committee.)



The Staff and Administration of Desert Springs Hospital wish you and your family a happy, healthy and peaceful Passover.

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Happy Passover

Best Wishes to our Jewish Neighbors



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