

Chief Rabbi's Pesach Message 5768

This year as we prepare to celebrate Israel's sixtieth anniversary, think of the power of Pesach to shape Jewish history.

Pesach was and always will be our way of remembering the miracles of the past: the journey from slavery to freedom, from Egypt to the Promised Land. But when Israel again went into exile, memory of the past became hope for the future. What had happened once would happen again. In the words of the prophet Micah (7: 15), 'As in the days when you came out of Egypt, I will show you miracles'.

So hope was born. Nowhere was this expressed so simply and powerfully as in the words with which the Seder opens: "This year here, next year in the land of Israel. This year slaves, next year freely That hope sustained the Jewish people through some of the darkest nights of human history, ages in which Jews knew all too well what it was to eat the bread of affliction and taste the bitter herbs of suffering.

When, a thousand years from now, people look back on Jewish history, people will wonder, with genuine astonishment, how three years after the Shoah, the Jewish people was reborn as a sovereign nation in its own land. They will see it as a miracle not less than the original exodus. Pesach is not only about the past but about the present and future.

Memory plus faith equals hope. Israel is the nation whose national anthem, Hatikvah, means hope. The state of Israel, testimony of the power of faith to triumph over tragedy, is a living symbol of hope.

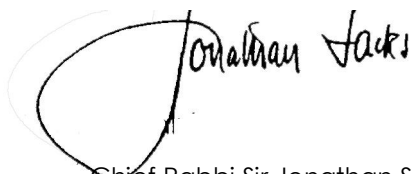
The State of Israel still needs hope. It has found its many offers of peace rebuffed. It is still surrounded by enemies, still at risk of terror. It still has to fight for what every other nation takes for granted, the right to be. It is at such times that we realize, all over again, that the fate of nations is as much determined by spiritual as by military strength, perhaps more so. Faith sustained Israel in the past. It will do so now.

So important do I believe this to be, that together with the most wonderful support of some outstanding people, I have made a double CD which is being sent to all communities under my aegis for distribution. It tells the story of Israel from biblical times to today, together with contemporary music from or about the land, because song expresses emotion better than the written or spoken word.

If I were to summarize the message, it would be in the words of Hallel: ' This is the Lord's doing. It is wondrous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it'.

This Pesach, and this Yom Ha-Atzmaut, let us think about the chapter in the story of Pesach added by the modern state of Israel. It tells of how a people, ravaged by anti-Semitism, were inspired to undertake another exodus, another journey from slavery to freedom; and whether they knew it or not, G-d was with them, helping them do wonders. May He be with the land and its people, and with us, in these worrying yet wondrous times.

Be-birkat chag kasher ve-sameach,



Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks
Pesach 5768