

## Yom Hashoah 2016

This year, as I was sitting at the Seder with my family and friends, which included great-grandchildren, I thought of the last Seder conducted in the Warsaw ghetto, just before as the revolt broke out against the Nazis.

I thought of Dr. Aaron Peretz, who witnessed the following scene near a hospital: German soldiers in automobiles would approach mothers with children, or children who were on their own. They began separating the children from their mothers and tossing them into the automobiles.

Dr. Peretz remembered: ... I saw mothers screaming. One mother whose three children had been taken away shouted at the Germans... give me my children. You may have one, he replied.

She went up to the automobile and all three children stretched out their hands. All of them wanted to go with her, but she did not know which child to select... and so she broke down weeping and left the car.

I thought of the Seder that night in Warsaw in 1943, and I could not imagine how those gathered around the Seder table could go on. All of them had witnessed members of their family taken by the Nazis. There were no children at the Seder to ask the traditional four questions. There was no wine to fill up for the cup of Elijah. But they still retold the story of the Exodus.

Later when the Nazis destroyed the ghetto, amongst the items they found were the Passover Haggadas of the last Seder.

Then I thought of our times and the double standard applied to the State of Israel, something the whole world saw two weeks ago when the UN Commission on the status of women condemned Israel for its treatment of Palestinian women. Among those who voted were Iran, Saudi Arabia, where women are regularly beaten for not being properly clothed or are not even permitted to drive cars, even in emergencies. Two countries that condemned Israel were Syria and Iraq where women are regularly arrested and tortured.

Yes, sadly, Jews have suffered from a double standard for 3,500 years even during good times, even when Queen Esther, who had great influence over her husband King Achashverosh, who finally allowed Jews the right to retaliate against the terrorists who inflicted murder and mayhem against them. So the king, at Esther's behest, issued a royal proclamation, giving the Jews the right to retaliate, but here's the catch – they could only do so for one day or if they lived in the capital city of Shushun, then they were allowed two days.

That double standard is still the policy today! Yes, Hamas is allowed to fire thousands of rockets for an extended period of 8 months, but for Israel it's different. As soon as she exercises her right of self-defense, the world insists that it can only be for a few days, otherwise, the UN Security Council, including some of our European Friends convenes and proposes a resolution condemning the defenders rather than the perpetrators.

Yet, despite all this, my friends, the Jews have survived and thrived. And why is that? Because they believe what the great Talmudist and philosopher, Rabbi Joseph B.

Soloveitchik once explained, as perhaps the Jews most important contribution to mankind. Their ability to take to heart the teaching of the Medrish that teaches that G-d destroyed many worlds, before he created this one. Why says Rabbi Soloveitchik, to teach Jews to emulate their creator and teach their children and grandchildren how to pick themselves up by the bootstraps, even when their previous worlds have been decimated and destroyed in places like Auschwitz and Treblinka. To declare with confidence that despite this suffering we, the Jewish people, are determined to rebuild and recreate, to teach our families, to laugh again and contribute to mankind. To be able to say of our new world, "Behold, it is very good indeed."

That is why when the Second World War was over, and six million Jews had been murdered, the 5,000 survivors aboard the ship Exodus on its way to the Promised Land, published a newspaper, which they called Baderech – On the Way. Yes, these people who had lost everything, their suitcases could only have been filled with tragic and bitter memories. Yet, they still had the courage to wipe away their tears, to turn despair into hope and to choose life again – to smile and find love. To remarry and have new families.

Their message to the world was that in spite of everything we have experienced, we are Baderech, on our way to a better world determined to deliver the message that long after you, our enemies, have been deposited in the dustbins of history, we the Jewish people shall sit around our Seder tables and sing as our ancestors have sung before us,

ואתא הקדוש ברוך הוא ושחט למלאך המות

“Then came the holy one, blessed be He and slew the angel of death.” Chad Gadyah, Chad Gadya. Am Y’Israel Chai.

לשנה הבאה בירושלים הבנויה