

# Passover and recognizing the Jewish state

 The Canadian Jewish News – April 11, 2014

## Gerald Steinberg

The purpose of the Passover seder is to teach our children (and to remind ourselves) of our history and identity as a people and a nation. For at least 2,000 years, and probably long before, Jews have learned and relearned this history, from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to slavery in Egypt, the dramatic Exodus at the heart of the celebration, and the return to Israel – the Promised Land. In every generation, our ancestors asked the questions, recited the answers, and debated the consequences, ending with “Next year in Jerusalem”. For those of us privileged to live in the restored Jewish homeland, the thrill of fulfilling this ancient wish never gets stale.



But in recent years, Jewish history and identity have been under assault, as part of the wider war against restored national sovereignty in the State of Israel. In the Arab “narrative”, Zionism is a form of “colonialism”, and 4,000 years of Jewish attachment to the Land of Israel are erased from history books and television programs. The invasion of five Arab armies in 1948 has become a Jewish war of conquest and Palestinian tragedy (nakba), terrorism is transformed into “resistance,” and those who claim refugee status are given an invented “right of return,” which would put an end to Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish People.

Most importantly, these myths erase the history of Jerusalem – the centre of Jewish identity, worship and history since it was founded by King David more than 3,000 years ago. The Western Wall is transformed from the remains of Herod’s Temple to the site of a fictional midnight visit by Muhammad. The post-1967 rebuilding of the Jewish Quarter of the Old City that was desecrated and destroyed in the 1948 war and the Jordanian occupation that followed, and the restoration of Jewish ownership in neighbourhoods that were ethnically cleansed is attacked by Arab groups and in the United Nations as “Judaization.”

In 2000 at the Camp David summit, PLO leader Yasser Arafat told then-U.S. president Bill Clinton and then-Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak that the Jewish Temples were never in Jerusalem, and, therefore, there was no basis for discussing compromise proposals. Nothing has changed since then – the Palestinian leadership and the Arab League continue to reject any discussion of Jerusalem and Israel in terms of Jewish rights. These myths, and not the post-1967 settlements and occupation, are the main reasons for the ongoing conflict.

More disturbingly, this virus has spread beyond the Middle East to large parts of Western Europe and has gained a foothold at university campuses and some highly politicized church groups in North America. The myths of Zionist “colonialism,” Palestinian “resistance,” the “right of return” and the “Judaization of Jerusalem” are repeated as justifications for boycotts, divestment and sanctions and other forms of political warfare against Israel.

Every year, tens of millions of dollars are supplied to erase Jewish history, under the facade of support for peace and human rights, particularly by European governments. Dozens of radical anti-Israel non-governmental organizations (NGOs) lead these campaigns. Groups such as Zochrot, which gets money from ill-informed German government officials, hostile Belgium church groups and similar sources, campaign for the myth of a Palestinian “right of return” and condemn Zionist “colonialism.” In Jerusalem, Ir Amim and Terrestrial Jerusalem promote the “Judaization” narrative of imperialism, reinforcing the myths and false narratives.

As a result, the Israeli demand that, as part of a peace agreement, the Arabs recognize Israel’s Jewish roots and the legitimacy of the Jewish state is essential to ending the conflict. If the myths continue to dominate the Arab and Muslim relationship to Israel, no peace agreement will last, and the engines that propel the wars and terror attacks against Israelis will continue.

At Passover seders, Jews in Israel and the Diaspora continue to teach our children Jewish history. This history is the essence of our collective identity as a people and a nation, and it’s essential to our survival.