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A Shabbat Message from Sami Vingron, Our Rabbinic Intern

Friday April 19, 2024
Parsha Metzora - Shabbat HaGadol

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Passover When the World Feels Scary

Recently, I was reminded of a quotation from David Ben-Gurion: “In Israel, in order to be a realist you must believe in miracles.” The quote seems fitting. After all, our ancestors had longed for the establishment of the State of Israel for almost 2000 years. The existence of the State of Israel after such a long time and its success despite a very hostile environment is indeed miraculous. But the quote is also fitting in another way. The miracle of the modern-day State of Israel resembles the miracle of the exodus from Egypt in the Bible. Both tell the story of wandering Jews finding a home in Israel. Sadly, our home is not a safe home at the moment. We are experiencing this insecurity intensely. Yet, I think that there is a deep connection between Ben-Gurion`s statement and the festival of Passover on which we commemorate the exodus.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the great 19th Century German scholar, taught that miracles are historical events that occur in order to teach us invaluable lessons. Passover is the holiday of redemption in which we remember how God led the Israelites out of Egypt. As we tell the Passover narrative, we celebrate several miracles that God performed for our ancestors and for us: overthrowing the Egyptians, splitting the sea, guiding the people through the desert, feeding the people in the desert and more. It is not surprising that telling the story of Passover is supposed to take several

hours. How else could we do justice to all the wonderful deeds that God had done for our ancestors and for us? Applying Hirsch`s insight that miracles are always also educational, we should ask ourselves: what can we learn this year from the miracles that we commemorate?

Especially on this upcoming Passover I think of God's might. God, who brought our ancestors out of Egypt, is powerful. Our tradition also teaches us that God cares deeply, hears the outcry of the people and does not forsake them. There was no Israelite too small or too insignificant to remain undetected by the watchful supervision of God. Passover reminds us that God redeems and liberates the individual as well as the people, and that God demands justice and is outraged at the evil that is being committed by the enemies of Israel. As we celebrate the holiday of Passover we learn –every year anew– never to lose our faith in God.

We are in deep need of God. As this Passover marks more than half a year in which over 130 hostages are still held in the violent hands of Hamas, the word liberation or redemption has become tragically real for us. The current situation makes us aware that we are dependent on God's protection as much as ever. Telling the story of Passover should help us not to lose our trust in God and our hope for the redemption of the Jewish people and of all humankind. It should encourage us to believe that miracles are possible. After all, how else could we be realists as we think about the situation in Israel?

This year Passover will feel different for many of us. I would like to suggest one change in the order. There is a widespread custom to reserve one free seat for the coming of Elijah. This is a beautiful symbol of hope. I suggest reserving this seat as well for one of the hostages. Soon, with the help of God, the hostages will finally be back with their loved ones and Elijah will celebrate with us.

Shabbat Shalom,

Sami Vingron, Rabbinic Intern