



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday March 27, 2026 ~ Shabbat HaGadol/Parshat Tzav

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

If We Don't Tell the Story

There is a simple but striking idea at the heart of the Seder. Our *Haggadot*, following the rulings of the Mishnah and other great Rabbis teach us that if a person does not mention Pesach, Matzah, and Maror during the Seder, they have not fulfilled their obligation.

Think about that for a moment. You could sit at the table, recite the four questions, read most of the *Haggadah*, discuss *Yitzi'at Mitzrayim*, the coming out of the land of Egypt, sing the songs, and yet, if you failed to articulate those core elements, Jewish law and tradition says *you did not tell the story*. Which forces us to ask a fundamental question: What kind of “story” is this, that if you leave out key elements, it’s not just incomplete, but invalid as well?

The answer is: the Seder is not about telling *a* story. It is about telling *the* story. A story that is structured, intentional, and disciplined. A story that insists you address core ideas:

you must name the suffering
you must describe the redemption
you must explain the symbols
you must connect it to yourself.

Our Rabbis command us to observe Passover in this manner because the Torah understands something essential about human nature. If the story is not told clearly, people don't just lack information, they construct competing stories. The Seder is a way of preventing fragmentation.

It does not say: “Everyone share what Passover means to you” though such a discussion is certainly praiseworthy. It says: Here is the text. Here are the questions. Here are the anchors of meaning. Without that clarity and direction, the foundational story of who we are would fracture.

We are living in a time when this exact principle is playing out before our eyes. We are watching, in real time, what happens when a nation is not told a clear story. And I want to say this to the community plainly and directly.

When leadership fails to clearly explain a military conflict, its purpose, its goals, and its risks, that is not a small communication gap. That is a failure of responsibility. In the current moment, President Trump has not clearly or consistently communicated to Congress or to the American people, leaving the nation divided, confused, and increasingly bitter regarding our current campaign against Iran.

What exactly are the objectives?

What does success look like?

What are the risks?

What sacrifices may be required?

These are not political talking points. They are the essential elements of “the story” a nation needs in order to remain unified and grounded in a time of peril and crisis. No matter what the merits are (and there certainly are many), the failure to speak clearly to the American people was more than a mistake. It created a void that has too often been filled by irresponsible, reckless, and at times, antisemitic voices.

As a result of the lack of clear and reasonable explanations from President Trump and his advisors, something very predictable happened. The public did not calmly wait for clarity. People constructed a story of fear, dismissal and blame. And this has, sadly, had led to the current situation in which we find ourselves: a nation divided by competing narratives about reality instead of a steely-eyed conversation about American leadership in a world in which Iran openly pursues nuclear weapons, develops ballistic missiles, and supports forces like Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis that do not hide their intentions toward Israel and the West. The threat is real. But recognizing a real threat does not remove the obligation of leadership to tell the story, and define the national interest clearly.

The time has come for this administration to explain what must be done, why it must be done, and what it will cost in terms of economic consequences, instability, and the price that ordinary citizens may pay. The fact that this was ignored is the reason that the price of gas is receiving more attention than Iran’s 47-year against the West, its role in the murder of hundreds of American citizens and military forces, its lies about its nuclear program, and the real threats it poses to American interests throughout the world.

The Torah does not allow that to happen at the Seder. Passover simply does not allow ambiguity about our suffering, our enemies, our responsibility, and our redemption. Instead, it insists that we tell our story clearly, completely, and in a way that both forms and strengthens our Jewish identity. Because the alternative is not neutrality, but fragmentation.

And that is why the Seder is not just words. We drink the wine or grape juice. We eat the *matzah*. We taste the *maror* (bitter herbs). We ask questions, because a story that defines a people cannot just be recited. It must be lived.

On Pesach, we are not just remembering the past. We are practicing something essential for every generation.

We embrace the responsibility to tell the story clearly enough that it can hold us together. Because whether in a family, a community, or a nation, if the story is not told clearly, it will not remain one story.

And when that happens, unity fractures, understanding dissolves, and we lose not just clarity, but identity itself.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner