

# Staying Holy

## Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

We recently celebrated Pesach, which is referred to as Zeman Cheiruseinu, the days upon which we commemorate our freedom. We were exalted and relaxed as we sat at the Seder engaging in the mitzvos of the evening, primarily that of discussing our exodus from slavery and bondage and our creation as a free independent nation. We sang the tunes we memorized back in our childhood with the same joy and geshmak with which we have been singing them ever since: Mah Nishtanah, Avodim Hayinu, Vehi She'amdah, Dayeinu, Mekimi Mei'ofor Dol, Chasal Siddur Pesach, and so many more.

Wherever we were the night of the Seder, we were on top of the world, just as the Jews who came before us were every year, back until the first Seder in the desert.

But then the Seder was over, Yom Tov ended, and before we knew what happened, we were thrust back into an inhospitable, disturbing world.

Besides the usual pressures and challenges, a new one has cropped up: anti-Jewish demonstrations in major American cities. Vile masses of students and agitators gather at the most respected universities and call for genocide of Jews.

For those who don't understand, that means mass murder of Jews. Us.

They chant, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," which means that Israel and its inhabitants will be destroyed and replaced with the so-called Palestinians, Rachmana litzlon.

Many of us live in our little bubbles of self-contained communities and don't venture to the big cities, certainly not to where the universities are, so we are walled off from what is going on and lulled into a false sense of complacency. We don't appreciate that the Ivy League universities, which are currently hotbeds of Jew-hatred and calls for doing away with us, are the temples of the country's culture, education, intelligence and future. What happens at the top universities impacts the country. The current demonstrations are driving the media, as they elicit reams of fictitious coverage of stories about Israel's anti-humanitarian war, killing innocents at will, only because that is what Jews do.

The anti-Jewish crusade is spreading across Western capitals around the world, with feeble pushback here and abroad. Constitutional privileges, such as freedom of speech and others, are thrown about to obscure the reason that those in leadership positions do not speak up against the crazy, irrational, Marxist, revolutionary fascism being broadcast from the chaotic grounds of elitist bedrock.

In less than four years, the country's switch has been flipped and leftist zealots have taken over, steering the country down a terrible path. Those misguided souls who advocated in 2020 for the Democrats are witness now to what that party stands for and where it aims to take the country.

There is no more self-deluding as to what the upcoming election is about and that there will be terrible consequences should the wrong party win. But that is said as an aside and is not our focus today.

Many wonder what is at the root of the recent campaigns. The Gaza war was caused by a wanton murderous attack by Arab terrorists against thousands of innocent civilians. Is a country not allowed to defend itself and vanquish its attackers? In the scope of wars, though every loss of life is tragic, this one is not major. Millions of Africans are killed in ongoing wars, Syria's despot has killed untold numbers of his subjects, Russia bombs entire Ukrainian cities to oblivion, and the students and their teachers aren't concerned about any of those wars and genocides. All they are concerned with is going after Jews.

Why is that?

The Netziv wrote a treatise on this topic and published it with his sefer on Shir Hashirim. Named "She'er Yisroel," it is a classic and bears study, at least once a year, when we study and read Shir Hashirim.

He opens with our question: "Many ask about the hatred that dwells in the hearts of anti-Semites. Everyone tries unsuccessfully to find the proper response to this question, each according to his thoughts and ideas about Judasim and the way Jews should conduct themselves vis-à-vis those amongst whom they live.

"We will offer an explanation based upon Torah and faith, and we will say that the hatred towards the Jewish people is known to all Jews from the 'Vehi She'amdah' that we proclaim at the Seder."

He says that we begin the Seder with the passage of "Arami oveid avi" and the relationship between Lovon and Yaakov to teach us that since the time of [Avrohom and Yitzchok and] Yaakov, in every generation, the Jew-haters want to destroy us and Hashem spares us from them. In some generations, the desire for our demise is stronger than others, but it is always present. Even when it appears that we are loved, we have to know that the hatred is there, but it is suppressed until Hashem decides that we have veered from the path of Torah and need to be brought back to the proper Torah way. When we regain proper faith, Hashem watches over us and prevents any harm from befalling us, just as he watched over Yaakov when Lovon wanted to destroy him.

This has been the pattern of our exile until today. The Jews settled as refugees from a foreign land and prospered and integrated into the new host country. Things were looking up. Here we are welcome, respected and treasured. Here it will be good, they thought. And then the people turned on them, vilified them, and kept their distance, eventually dominating them, killing their children and tormenting them in every way they knew.

The Jews packed up their stuff and went on the road again, looking for a place that would allow them to live there. After beginning their sojourn in the new country as refugees, they slowly acclimated, began to feel at home in the new land, and then assimilated into the new culture, attending its schools and universities, marrying into its religion and feeling as if they really belong in this place this time. They thought that here it is different. Here they appreciate us, love us, care about us, and accept us as one of them.

Alas, after being there for years and generations, they find out that it is a charade, as the nation turns on them, shunts them aside, and begins accusing them of every crime. It is said that their money was illegally obtained, their patriotism is questioned, and they are accused of being a bunch of parasites who take advantage of the system. The charges are similar in each place, as are the results. The only difference is how long it takes.

We give it a name to make ourselves feel better, as if it is some type of malady that the country and world can be cured of. Anti-Semitism. We forget that what is happening today is a manifestation of the historic pattern set into place by the Creator to keep Am Yisroel separated from the outside culture and moral degeneration, and to keep them connected to Torah and Hakadosh Boruch Hu.

The latent hatred is always there, but as long as the Jewish people keep to themselves and recognize that Hashem watches over them with Hashgocha Protis, as they follow the mitzvos of the Torah according to the Shulchan Aruch, caring for each other and using their blessings for communal benefit, Hashem keeps the hatred hidden and the superficial love is apparent. When the people get so comfortable that they think that they need no protector and can veer away from Hashem and His commandments, the hatred rises to the surface and what we call anti-Semitism is manifest.

Following the First World War, the nations of the world, led by United States President Woodrow Wilson, formed the League of Nations with the stated guarantee that a world war would never again take place. From the ashes of the Second World War, the United Nations was formed so that a monstrous demagogue like Hitler would never again rise to power.

Unity, it was thought, would be a barrier that no dictator could overcome. The organizers didn't factor in apathy and indifference. They didn't factor in corruption and bigotry. Though it was founded in the shadow of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism was the least of their concerns. Instead, today, the United Nations lies about everything, especially Israel.

The media also regularly lies about Israel, twisting its coverage as it attempts to convince the world that the Jewish people are evil.

141 countries under the banner of the U.N. have recognized Palestine as an independent country. The latest to sign on was the tiny island country of Barbados, which has no Jews and knows nothing about Jews, Israel or history, yet its vote counts as much as a large, successful nation, thanks to the United Nations.

Iran, which has a stated public goal of destroying Israel, is afforded the same respect as a decent, rational country with a proper system of laws and ethics. It is even permitted to chair the UN Human Rights Council, the epitomic portrayal of the hypocrisy of the UN and a majority of its member nations.

As the Jews have become the victims of international hatred, the International Criminal Court now joins in this charade and threatens Israel's leader and anyone who supports him.

This is all part of the historical pattern, and nothing we can say to the nations and their leaders will change a thing. No amount of arguing, debating, or posturing, and no number of op-eds, will alter the current trajectory. It is only Avinu Shebashomayim who can bring about change, and that is dependent on our mitzvos, maasim tovim and tefillos.

The entire world witnessed on Simchas Torah that when Hashem removes His protection from Israel, the most sophisticated intelligence system and the world's mightiest army are powerless in the face of Israel's lowly enemies. When Hashem wants to remind Am Yisroel who their Protector is, who fights their battles for them, and Who it is who keeps their enemies at bay, inexplicable things happen, and the strongest, mightiest, and brightest are shown to be helpless.

All were able to see that the reason such a tragedy did not occur previously in Israel's history was because Hashem prevented it from happening. Just before Pesach, we saw evil Iran unleash an unprecedented number of powerful missiles on Israel. Miraculously, only one Bedouin girl was hurt. Hashem saved us.

Some years back, Israel instituted Holocaust Remembrance Day on the 28th day of Nissan, which fell this past Monday. Every year, they speak of the 6,000,000 kedoshim who perished in the Holocaust and offer a message of support to the Jewish people, proclaiming that now that there is a Jewish state, the Jewish people are much better off, as they are not alone and are protected by the state and its army. That proclamation grates on me every year, as I'm sure it does on believing Jews everywhere. But this year, it was especially painful in light of what happened when Hashem removed His protective dome the last day of Sukkos. Since then, Israel has been bogged down in a war that has unleashed much hatred and diplomatic regress. Yet, while this year's commemoration was muted out of security concerns, the ability to rely on the state and its army to prevent another Holocaust was front and center.

Now may not be the proper time to castigate other Jews, but it is a most appropriate time to remind our people Who protects us and what is incumbent upon us to do to earn that protection.

This week, we Iain Parshas Kedoshim, which instructs us to conduct ourselves in the manner of kedoshim, holy people. This is accomplished by observing the mitzvos discussed in the parsha, as well as the other parshiyos of the Torah.

The world today is defined not only by hate and hypocrisy, but also by dishonesty and depravity. Immoral people and lifestyles are vaunted and praised, and welcomed by the avant-garde culture.

But despite all the temptation and the many lures, we are to be kedoshim, living lives of uncompromised kedusha. We avoid any media that doesn't increase our holiness and abstain from activities that dull our kedusha and sense of right and wrong. The Torah is our guide in life, not glitzy presentations, charismatics, and the "in crowd," who could lead us away from a just and holy life. Torah combined with emunah and bitachon and deveikus in mitzvos and maasim tovim leads us to a successful, fulfilled and satisfying life, instead of sadness and vacuousness wrapped in a veneer of superficial joy.

It also earns us the protection we need in whatever we do and wherever we go.

May we merit the protection of the Shomer Yisroel and may the ongoing tensions and conflicts lead to the geulah sheleimah very soon.