

OPINION

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As Passover ends, we can't avoid reality



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Amid Passover week, children across the Jewish world raced one another to find the "afikoman" and receive its coveted prize. The afikoman, a piece of broken matzah hidden away for the children to retrieve, is the very last thing we eat at the Passover seder so that the taste of freedom will remain on our tongues. This tradition helps us to fulfill the commandment that in every generation, we are each to see ourselves as if we personally went out from Egypt.

This story of our liberation is so central to Judaism that we are obliged to remember it not only during Passover, but in our daily prayers as well.

For what purpose, though, were we freed? The Torah tells us.

Just after the Exodus, God instructs the Israelites that we were freed for the express purpose of keeping God's covenant and thereby becoming to God a "treasure." This idea that the Jewish people are a chosen people has been tragically misunderstood throughout time – it does not mean that the Jewish people are superior to other peoples.

Quite to the contrary, it means that just as every people has its particular role to play in human history, the role of the Jewish people is to fulfill the covenant of Torah.

Amid war and violence, are we fulfilling the covenant of Torah?

But are we fulfilling the covenant? Amid war with Iran and the ongoing violence since Hamas terrorists attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, Israeli extremists in the West Bank are violating the instructions from God.

As Rabbi Hillel, in the century before Jesus lived, summarized our covenant, "That which is hateful to you do not do to another."

The Jewish people were delivered from the physical bondage of slavery to instead organize ourselves within the bounds of divine law, defined by justice and righteousness. In other words, we were freed in order to serve as a living counterpoint to the pharaoh's harsh and oppressive reign.

The opposite of God's liberation is not slavery; it is lawlessness. But today,



Palestinian children on April 6 inspect a destroyed car, which Palestinians say was burned by Israeli settlers the night before, near Nablus in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. MOHAMAD TOROKMAN/REUTERS

subject lawlessness reigns in much of the West Bank.

Settlers are terrorizing their Palestinian neighbors, illegally seizing their land and committing unspeakable acts of physical brutality, humiliation and even sexual violence.

This is sadly not new, but has dramatically accelerated during this war with Iran.

Lawlessness is also being abetted by an Israeli government whose ministers openly advocate Jewish supremacy and, through words and deeds, encourage domination over Palestinians. A new law allowing death by hanging for Palestinian militants but not Jewish militants codifies Jewish supremacy and will embolden violent settlers, few of whom have ever been prosecuted for their crimes.

Jews will not be free until Palestinians are free

In the midst of a war that is causing millions of Israelis to run in terrible fear to bomb shelters at all hours of the day and night, extremist settlers are turning their backs on our tradition.

They are using the gift of freedom to brutally oppress their neighbors.

We must not avoid this shameful reality at our Passover seders – we are obligated to confront it.

Every Jew who stands for human dignity, for fairness, for freedom, for the covenant itself, should speak of this unfulfilled aspect of redemption – Palestinian redemption, and our own.

That is why many people in my community place an olive on our seder plates, to symbolize the Palestinian

connection to the land and what we know to be true:

We will not be free until they are free, too.

The ancient Rabbi Akiva taught that in the concluding blessings of the Passover seder, we should not only give thanks for our deliverance in the past, but also for our deliverance in the future. Specifically, he imagined that one day we will rebuild the city of Jerusalem in peace.

For more than 2,000 years, Jews have ended every seder with that dream. The heinous acts of the settlers are a desecration of this sacred vision and a violation of the very purpose for which our people were freed.

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