

## **Today is a Day of Celebration for All Time** **Parashat Bo, 5781**

On the eve of the tenth and final plague, mere hours before their final release from bondage in Egypt toward freedom and a nation of their own making, God spoke to Moses saying, “This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD throughout the ages; you shall celebrate it as an institution for all time...You shall celebrate a sacred occasion on the first day, and a sacred occasion on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them; only what every person is to eat, that alone may be prepared for you. You shall observe the [Feast of] Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your ranks out of the land of Egypt; you shall observe this day throughout the ages as an institution for all time.” [Exodus 12:14, 16-17]

The scene set in the section of Parashat Bo is certainly a striking one. I think about this proclamation God issues to the assembled community of Hebrews often. In retrospect, it seems common and familiar to us, the reader. We are talking about celebrating Pesach (Passover), a holiday almost ubiquitously observed in some form in Jewish homes and

communities throughout the world in every generation, every place and time.

But think about that statement from the perspective of the ancestors of the Jewish people living in Egypt. They have been slaves for generations. They have suffered horrific and cruel punishments at the hands of a dictator who thinks himself a god. They have had their children killed and their lives written off as worth little. And yet, God tells them not only that they will be going free in the morning, but that they will be a free people for all time, looking back on this day as the turning point in their history. God would have them believe that their entire reality can and will change at this one, specific moment in time, that hard-hearted Pharaoh would relent, that they could escape Egypt, that a land they had never seen, flowing with milk and honey, was waiting for them and would be their future home.

How were they to believe such an idea?! How could a person, a people, who had only known strife and suffering believe that a better world was in the making, that a new life might soon be theirs? It would be utterly reasonable for the Jewish people to take this pronouncement with skepticism or disdain or to write it off completely.

But they don't. They see the possibility for a brighter future and they work together to achieve it. They make their way into a better world by working together, carrying one another, and emerging into a new and uncharted world.

This past Wednesday, the 46th President of the United States said much the same thing. President Biden addressed the nation, made his own pronouncement:

*[T]oday, at this time and in this place, let us start afresh. All of us. Let us listen to one another. Hear one another. See one another. Show respect to one another...Here we stand, in the shadow of a Capitol dome that was completed amid the Civil War, when the Union itself hung in the balance.*

*Yet we endured and we prevailed. Here we stand looking out to the great Mall where Dr. King spoke of his dream. Here we stand, where 108 years ago at another inaugural, thousands of protestors tried to block brave women from marching for the right to vote. Today, we*

*mark the swearing-in of the first woman in American history elected to national office – Vice President Kamala Harris.*

*Don't tell me things can't change.*

Our President, this week, laid out a vision of a nation brought together in unity, an experience that may seem far from our lived reality. He painted a picture of an ethical America, in which we don't have to all be the same in order to work together, in which we can overcome our historic differences and battles, our prejudices and our presumptions, our smallness and self-interest in order to work together for the common good.

It is, in my eyes, a glorious vision of a world renewed, hearkening back to the words of the prophet Jeremiah, who calls out in the Haftarah we read only moments ago:

וְאַתָּה אֶל-תִּירָא עַבְדִּי יַעֲקֹב וְאֶל-תַּחַת יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי הִנְנִי מוֹשְׁעֶךָ מִרְחוֹק וְאֶת-זִרְעֶךָ  
מֵאֶרֶץ שְׁבִיִּים וְשָׁב יַעֲקֹב וְשָׁקֵט וְשָׁאֲנָן וְאֵין מַחְרִיד:

But you, Have no fear, My servant Jacob, Be not dismayed, O Israel! I will deliver you from far away, Your folk from their land of captivity; And Jacob again shall have calm & quiet, with none to trouble him.  
[Jeremiah 46:27]

Human beings have the unique capacity, among all of creation, to imagine things they have not seen, to envision realities that differ dramatically from their daily experiences, and what's more, have throughout history had the audacity to work toward, and often succeed in, making those dreams into a reality.

Don't tell me things can't change, says the President. Don't tell me brothers and sisters at each other's throats can't sit down to talk and break bread together. Don't tell me that those on the margins must be confined there for all time. Don't tell me we can't do better in honoring the humanity of every person of every age, race, religion, background, gender identity, political ideology, creed or opinion. Don't tell me that we have reached our peak, that there is nothing more we can achieve.

I believe that we have only seen the beginning of who we are as a community, a nation, and a human race. I believe that this time will be one in which we will heal and repair, forgive and relent, fight for what is right and win the justice so many have deserved, but been denied. I believe that all that is ahead of us is promise and potential and that it is on us to make it real.

Let this be a day we remember for all time. Let us make a world where none will be troubled. Let us make this a world unified for the common good, a world where God's vision of justice is fulfilled, where a sacred peace can embrace all of humanity and our planet as a whole.

Shabbat Shalom.