



## ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel  
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of  
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

departed from the land of Egypt, I will show you miraculous deeds."

Indeed, we are witnessing wonderful sights and good days await us. In order to continue nurturing the great vision of the return to Zion, we must do away with the bitterness between us and cultivate the hope and power

we possess, by way of our shared fate, our unity of purpose and the chain of generations. (Israel Hayom Apr 10)

## Events...

### May 21-28

2017 marks the 50th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem and to mark this extraordinary year the BAYT Brotherhood is running a second mission – in addition to its annual mission in December – to celebrate Yom Yerushalayim. The BAYT Yom Yerushalayim Mission to Israel will incorporate the World Mizrahi mission, plus add additional touring and Shabbat in Jerusalem. For information email Larry Zeifman at [LWZ@Zeifmans.ca](mailto:LWZ@Zeifmans.ca)

## Commentary...

### Our Dreams Become Reality By Haim Shine

One of the most chilling poems I have ever heard is "the Last Seder in the Warsaw Ghetto," about a Jewish boy, one of the last who survived in the Ghetto, who sings his version of "Ma Nishtana?" (A four-question Passover poem recited around the Seder dinner table) and asks his father "why is this night so long and more terrible than any nights before? And will there be any Jewish children left to ask the 'Ma Nishtana?'"

Tonight, on the 74th anniversary of that bleak Seder in the Ghetto, my mother, who, as a young girl, stood humiliated and degraded at the Auschwitz -Birkenau train platform, will get to hear her great grandchildren sing "Ma Nishtana?" loud and clear in the independent State of Israel. No more dark nights, but rather a bright light of redemption and victory.

Indeed, the fate of the Jews has changed beyond recognition. The State of Israel, which had risen like a phoenix from the ashes, is now a global military power, recognized and respected by many countries worldwide. Finally, after thousands of years, we are no longer slaves to the Pharaohs. We are now the masters of our own destiny.

The sense of freedom that has animated our souls since the Biblical exodus from Egypt is still alive and there isn't a force in this world that could ever crush the spirit of our people. Against all odds, we are still alive and kicking, our heads held high, while great, tremendous empires have faded away. We have the privilege of witnessing, once again, a coming together of spiritual freedom and physical independence in the State of Israel.

Jews in every part of the Diaspora: in Morocco, in Yemen, in Polish towns, in Germany and France and in the African deserts -- all concluded the Haggadah reading with the words "Redeemed to Zion in joy, Next year in Jerusalem." To those exiled Jews, this was a distant dream unlikely to come true. And here we are singing in Jerusalem. We lived to see our dreams becoming a reality.

Over the course of the holiday, take a copy of the Bible and walk around Jerusalem. Peruse the verses of the prophets Zechariah and Isaiah. You will be surprised to see their ancient prophecies materializing in our time. Visit Samaria and the Binyamin region, where flowers blossom at this time of year, and feel the history. We have returned to our ancestral home for all eternity.

Several days before the Seder, I went grocery shopping at one of the supermarkets in central Israel. I encountered hundreds of people piling food into their shopping carts -- towering, impressive piles of the best of land. We all had to wait 45 minutes at the checkout counter. My companion in line informed me that these were just the people who decided to stay home for the holiday, as hundreds of thousands of Israelis traveled abroad.

On this Passover, most Israelis are happy and financially secure. And we have an age-old Jewish duty to help those who aren't.

In his prophecy, the Prophet Micah said "As in the days when you

## חג שמח

### AIPAC 2017 – 4th Pilgrimage Holiday By Yishai Fleisher

Last year I wrote about the annual AIPAC Policy Conference and called it the "Fourth Pilgrimage Holiday" or the "American Pilgrimage," and here I am again reporting on what I saw at the massive gathering of Jews and Israel lovers in Washington, DC.

#### An Awesome Gathering

Indeed, in terms of numbers AIPAC did not disappoint as 19,000 participants showed up, 4,000 of whom were school and university age, and bringing them all together is no small feat. The atmosphere was electric when US Vice President Mike Pence spoke and the crowd went wild when the new US ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, told the packed Verizon Center that "there's a new sheriff in town."

But for me, the real magic was at night, after the official program had ended. Young Jews gathered in bar events run by organizations like Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), The Israel Project (TIP), Stand With Us, Israeli American Council, Students Supporting Israel (SSI) and Young Jewish Conservatives, among others. Beer was flowing, business cards were exchanged, hearts were opening – and the huge ocean that divides Israeli Jews and American Jews dried up like the Red Sea on Passover.

#### Lame Messaging

However, while the physical gathering itself was inspiring, the messaging of it was, in my eyes, less so. You might have thought this year's 50th anniversary of the miraculous Six Day War and the triumphant reunification of Jerusalem would have been the overarching theme of the conference.

The Six Day War did get a few honorable mentions, including an outstanding movie clip from Christian Broadcast Network, but that's it. While we all remember the famous AIPACian phrase "Jerusalem will always remain the eternal undivided capital of Israel," this year the motto was noticeably absent.

The neglect of unified Jerusalem at AIPAC was made even more conspicuous in light of the Trump administration's exploration of moving the US embassy to the City of Gold. But while there was no finer moment to make an appeal to move the embassy than the giant annual pro-Israel gathering in Washington on the 50th year of reunification, alas, the issue was dropped.

#### Balfour - Not Dead, But Buried

Yet another theme which was amazingly absent at AIPAC was the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration of 1917. The key document to the birth of the State of Israel is celebrating its first centennial, precisely as Israel's international legitimacy is being threatened. Yet the instrument of American pro-Israelism, AIPAC, neglected to so much as mention Balfour. Why?

I heard from many insiders that AIPAC decided, in the wake of the divisive political atmosphere in the US, that messaging this year would be parve and inclusive. But to achieve this goal, the Policy Conference sacrificed the opportunity to connect participants to meaningful Israeli history, and lacked a powerful policy vision for the future.

#### Drowning in Water Tech

One group which did have passion was the hundreds of protesters, many of them Jewish, who gathered outside the convention and railed against Israel's "occupation" for the cameras. Yet inside the convention AIPAC's main argument for the legitimacy of the Jewish state was Israel's amazing technology – no answer to the recurring claims of Jewish land theft.

The peak of this watered-down defense of Israel came as Alan Dershowitz, one of the Israel's and the Jewish people's greatest advocates, came out and "sold" the giant AIPAC audience on Israeli technology that distills water from the air. Now, we are all very proud of Israel's technological achievements, but we don't need Dershowitz in that role. We need him out there fighting delegitimization, fighting anti-Israel lawfare, breaking up jihadist funding schemes, blocking Iran with sanctions, and of course, giving answers to American Jewish youth on campus.

#### *Judea and Samaria at AIPAC*

Just as the settlers refuse to be cut out of Israeli politics and the Israeli conversation, so too do they want a place at the American Jewish conversation. Therefore, the Council of Judea and Samaria (Yesha), along with other like-minded organizations, hosted an event celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Six Day War, the return to Jerusalem and our ancient ancestral lands in Judea and Samaria, as well as the 650,000 Israelis who now live in these places. Held at the posh "Loft" (and emceed by me!), it featured four Israeli ministers: Housing and Construction Minister Yoav Galant, deputy defense minister Eli Ben-Dahan, minister in the Prime Minister's Office Tzachi Hanegbi, Israel's consul general in New York Dani Dayan, and deputy foreign minister Tzipi Hotoveley who said "defense is important and security is important, but the most important thing is the moral claim of Israel."

An energized crowd of 350 participants imbibed award-winning wines of Judea and Samaria, took home samples of Ahava skincare products from the Dead Sea and were served as much DC sushi as they could eat. Many attendees told me afterwards that this was the highlight of their AIPAC experience. Maybe it was simply because we created a space for people to express their love of the land, their pride in the Six Day War and their appreciation of the right of Jews to be strong, without reservation.

#### *A Bad Guy We Can All Agree On Get*

At AIPAC 2017, the inclusive big-tent no-conflict atmosphere actually made it so that the traditional bad guys got a kind of pass. However, it was nice to see that there was one enemy which could penetrate the no-conflict milieu, an enemy we can all get behind fighting: the endemically anti-Semitic UN. With UN ambassador Haley unabashedly taking on that diseased organization, Israel's ambassador to the US Ron Dermer stated that moral clarity is finally going to come to the UN. It was precisely these moments where a fight for Israel was identified that AIPACers brought the house down.

#### *Get Some Israeli Wine*

Before the main conference itself, over a thousand participants gathered in Washington for the AIPAC Shabbaton. The Shabbat was fun (though the toilets were all electric flush) and the talks were, for the most part, thought provoking. However, once again, we were served cheap kosher non-Israeli wine. I wrote last year, and I say it again: the pro-Israel lobby should be serving wine from the Holy Land. It's a simple way to support Israel and to connect to the land on a bodily level. And it tastes good too.

#### *Passion Still Rules*

This year's Policy Conference was wonderfully organized but lacked passion. But passion for Israel is what will capture the hearts of the next generation while a lack of passion will lead them into the clutches of J Street and its ilk.

I have already registered and paid for next year's AIPAC conference, and with the help of God I'll be in attendance. If you love Israel, AIPAC is an certainly an important gathering – but if you love American Jewry and want to make sure that our people hold hands across the Atlantic and remain one nation, this pilgrimage is indispensable. (Jerusalem Post Apr 11)

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#### **Freedom and Jewish Identity** By Ariel Bolstein

On Monday afternoon, in the hours before the Passover Seder, I passed the time flipping through Facebook. The personal pages of thousands of my friends across the world were strikingly alike: Jews from Australia, Sweden, Russia, Argentina, the U.S. and Turkey posted pictures of their Seder tables, and while the place settings and foods may have varied, at the head of each one was a pile of matzot.

The piles of matzot reminded me of my childhood in Kishinev, modern-day Chisinau in Moldova, in the early 1980s. In my eyes, matzot were not the so-called "bread of the poor." The packages of matzot, which my father would bring every spring from the only synagogue left in town, were naturally meant to remind us of the Jews' Exodus from slavery in Egypt, but for us they were more of a symbol of our Jewish identity. These hard pieces of dough had something exotic and magnetic about them -- something light-years away from the Soviet reality around us, possessing a magical ability

to release Jews from the chains of the "Soviet homeland" and link them to the chain of generations of Jewish people. As we looked at the matzah and ate it, we could not help but think about how somewhere, in the promised land, our people were free.

It was symbolic therefore that the Soviet authorities spitefully chose to establish the Anti-Zionist Committee of the Soviet Public on Passover in 1983. The body, made up of Jews carefully chosen by the KGB, worked to erase any trace of Jewish nationalism among USSR Jewry and permanently separate millions of Jews from the Jewish people and Land of Israel.

The methods used in ancient Egypt, like tossing firstborn male babies into the river, were no longer acceptable. Instead, the modern Pharaoh in the Kremlin looked for new methods, no less brutal, that combined the stick and the carrot. Proud and brave Jews who dared to repeat the customs of their fathers, learn Hebrew and dream of immigrating to Israel were tossed into jail and work camps and punished in countless other ways. Jews willing to betray their own people, to conspire against Israel and to find fault in everything that connected us to our origins were rewarded with promotions, decorations and the government's caress.

The slavery of Jews in Egypt ended when one Jew dared to act as a free man -- first against an Egyptian who struck a Jew, and later against the all-powerful Pharaoh. The slavery of the Jews in the U.S.S.R. ended when hundreds of Jews dared to act as free men. The Jewish spirit of Yosef Mendelevitsh, Iosif Begun, Vladimir Slepak, Ephraim Kholmyansky, Ida Nudel, Natan Sharansky, Yuli Edelstein and a good many more I cannot add for the sake of brevity ended up being stronger than all of the modern Pharaoh's sticks and carrots put together.

The similarity between the two slaveries and two exoduses is uncanny. It is no coincidence the phrase "let my people go" was chosen as the slogan of the struggle to release the Jews from the "Soviet paradise." The Exodus from Egypt was the first stage in shaping our identity as a people, while the exodus from the Soviet Union brought back one of our people's largest branches. Remember that when you eat another piece of matzah. (Israel Hayom Apr 12)

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#### **The Burden of Israel's 1967 Victory** By Efraim Inbar

In June 1967, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) waged war alone against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. It achieved a stunning victory in six days.

The military skill demonstrated by the Israelis was remarkable – so much so that battles from the Six-Day War continue to be studied at war colleges around the world.

Israel's military achievement had another extremely important effect. It went a long way towards convincing the Arab world that Israel cannot be easily destroyed by military force; Israel is a fact the Arabs must learn to live with. Indeed, ten years later – after Egypt had lost another war to Israel, this one in 1973 – its president, Anwar Sadat, came to Jerusalem (November 1977) to offer peace.

The swift and decisive victory of 1967 became the standard to which the IDF aspired – and the kind of victory expected by Israeli society in future engagements. This is problematic, considering the ways Israel's opponents have changed and the means they now deploy.

The unrealistic anticipation that victories on the scale of 1967 should be the end result of any military engagement hampers clear thinking and impedes the adoption of appropriate strategy and tactics. Moreover, it encourages what is often an impossible hope for a quick end to conflict. In the absence of a clear-cut and speedy outcome, Israelis lose confidence in the political as well as the military leadership.

Israelis, many of whom have limited military experience, still long for decisive victories in the Gaza and South Lebanon arenas. The wars in which the IDF has participated so far in the twenty-first century, which appeared to end inconclusively, left many Israelis with a sense of unease. They miss the victory photographs of the 1967 war.

Slogans of the Israeli right, such as "Let the IDF Win," reflect this frustration. Similarly, the left claims that Judea and Samaria can be safely ceded to a Palestinian state because these territories can be reconquered, as they were in 1967, if they become a base for hostile actors. The calls for the destruction of Hamas also bear witness to a lack of understanding of the limits of military power.

But grand-scale conventional war, in which the IDF faces large armored formations and hundreds of air fighters as it did in 1967, is less likely today. The 1982 Lebanon War was the last to display such encounters. Since 1982, Israel has scarcely fought any state in a conventional war.

To a significant extent, the statist dimension in the Arab-Israeli conflict has itself disappeared. Egypt and Jordan are at peace with Israel. Syria and Iraq are torn by domestic conflict and are hardly in a position to challenge Israel militarily. Many other Arab countries, such as the Gulf and Maghreb states, have reached a de facto peace with Israel, an orientation buttressed by the common Iranian threat.

For the past three decades, Israel has been challenged primarily by sub-state actors, such as Hamas (a Sunni militia) and Hezbollah (a Shiite militia). Such organizations have a different strategic calculus from that of states. Because of their religious-ideological zeal, they are more difficult to deter than states, and their learning curve is much slower.

It took Egypt three military defeats (1948, 1956, and 1973) and a war of attrition (1968-70) within a span of 25 years to give up the goal of destroying Israel. In contrast, Hezbollah has been fighting Israel for a longer period and remains as devoted as ever to its goal of the elimination of the Jewish state. The heavy price inflicted upon Gaza since 2007 by the Israeli military has not changed the strategic calculus of the Hamas leadership, which still aspires to Israel's demise.

Hamas and Hezbollah do not possess arsenals of tanks and air fighters, which would be easy targets for Israel. The decentralized structure of their military organizations does not present points of gravity that can be eliminated by swift and decisive action. Moreover, their use of civilian populations to shield missile launchers and military units – a war crime – makes IDF advances cumbersome and difficult due to slower troop movement in urban areas and the need to reduce collateral damage among civilians. Urbanization among Israel's neighbors has greatly reduced the empty areas that could have been used for maneuvering and outflanking. The use of the subterranean by Israel's foes, be it in Gaza or South Lebanon, is another new element that slows advances.

It is naïve to believe the IDF can or should win quickly and decisively every time it has to flex its muscles. Yitzhak Rabin warned several times during his long career against the expectation of a "once and for all" victory. The defeat of Israel's new opponents requires a different strategy: attrition.

Israel is engaged in a long war of attrition against religiously motivated enemies who believe both God and history are on their side. All the IDF can do is occasionally weaken their ability to harm Israel and create temporary deterrence. In Israeli parlance, this is called "mowing the grass" – an apt metaphor, as the problem always grows back.

The patient, repetitive use of force is not glamorous, but it will eventually do the trick. Unfortunately, many Israelis do not understand the particular circumstances of the great 1967 victory. They have lost patience and do not realize that time is, in fact, on Israel's side. (Israel Hayom Apr 9)

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### **Spring Cleaning at the UN** By Danny Danon

While the Jewish People officially celebrate their new year in the fall, our tradition also tells us to treat Passover as a new year as well. Passover provides us with an important opportunity to take stock of what we have accomplished and what we hope to achieve in the year to come.

Now, as Jews around the world have finished searching and removing chametz from their homes, it is the right time to reinstate our commitment to clean house at the United Nations. By doing so, we are clearing the way for real progress and the chance for the UN to return its focus to its original goals.

We have already begun our spring cleaning.

Following the adoption of Resolution 2334, we put the UN on notice. After the Security Council declared that our presence at the Western Wall is "illegitimate," we made clear that we would not allow business as usual and that the rules of the game had changed. This is why Israel is cutting \$8 million from its contribution to the UN budget. This sum represents the portion of the budget allocated to anti-Israel UN bodies. Instead of supporting incitement and hateful propaganda, we will use these funds to directly assist and aid developing countries.

Our demand for change at the UN has already yielded real results. A few weeks ago, ESCWA, a UN body purportedly dedicated to bettering the economic reality in the Arab world, issued a report labeling Israel an "apartheid regime."

We took action immediately, and together with America's UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, demanded accountability. In a sign of progress, UN Secretary-General António Guterres had the report removed from UN websites. More importantly, Rima Khalef, an antisemite and promoter of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, resigned as the head of ESCWA. She clearly recognized that a wind of change is blowing

at the UN.

Over the past year, our mission to the UN has clearly demonstrated our "zero tolerance" policy for antisemitism and anti-Israel bias. When the Venezuelan and Ecuadorian ambassadors had the gall to compare Israel to the Nazi regime within the Security Council and General Assembly halls, we insisted on decisive condemnations from all relevant parties. Responding to our pressure, the Venezuelan ambassador called me to personally apologize for his hurtful remarks.

As we continue with our relentless insistence that the UN make real and palpable changes, we are beginning to see rays of light peeking through the darkness at Turtle Bay. Last May, right after Shavuot, I was elected to chair the UN's legal committee by 109 countries. This was the first time ever that an Israeli was elected to chair a permanent UN committee.

Last month, the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) adopted an Israeli resolution focused on curbing sexual harassment in the workplace. This is the first new, Israeli-sponsored resolution at the UN in five years. Even more significantly, this resolution passed by consensus, an extremely rare occurrence for Israel-sponsored UN resolutions.

When you add these victories to the ongoing events we host at the UN highlighting Israeli technology, innovation and art, we are reminded of the possibilities for good at the UN. The founding charter of the organization calls on the nations of the world "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom." If the UN would focus on the positive contributions Israel makes to the international community and shift away from its endless, biased obsession with our supposed faults, the whole world would benefit.

In the days leading up to Passover, we once again held a "model Seder" for UN ambassadors. Due to the popularity of last year's Seder – the first held in the UN headquarters – we had to reserve an even larger room this time. As we planned this year's Seder, we wondered why so many ambassadors from across the world were interested in attending this particular event.

We immediately realized that there is a profound reason. Of all of our wonderful holidays, Passover represents the desire that all people can connect with – freedom. While too many of the UN member states are oppressive dictatorships, we know that the peoples of these countries recognize in the story of our salvation the possibility for a better life.

Once we complete our holiday preparations and sit down for our Seders surrounded by family and friends, let us take a moment to appreciate all that we have accomplished and achieved, both as a people and as a country. Let us all be thankful that as a people, we are freer, more prosperous and more secure than we have been at any moment in history since we left the bondage of Egypt behind. Finally, let us conclude, as we have for thousands of years, by with the prayer to celebrate together as the Jewish people – next year in Jerusalem. (Jerusalem Post Apr 9)

*The author is Israel's ambassador to the United Nations.*

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### **A Game-Changing Law Against Illegal Construction** By Josh Hasten

Following a legislative initiative over a decade in the works, the Knesset last week passed the "Kaminitz Law," granting the state greater authority when it comes to enforcement with regard to construction violations throughout the country.

The legislation, known as amendment 109 of the Planning and Building Law, which passed 43-33 in a special session held during the Knesset's Passover recess, is a game changer.

The new law was introduced by the government following recommendations by a committee led by deputy attorney-general Erez Kaminitz, who sought ways to deal with the plague of illegal building in Israel.

The law gives the National Building Supervision Unit the power to supervise the work of the local municipalities, which until today went unchecked.

What you had was a phenomenon in which local mayors would simply ignore building violations.

The law also provides building inspectors with greater authority to stop illegal building dead in its tracks as soon as the construction commences. In addition the law calls for a huge increase in fines for building without a permit.

Our organization, Regavim, has been working on passing this type of legislation from the very beginning to help change the situation on the ground when it comes to the enforcement of building laws in this country.

The law also lessens the bureaucratic nightmare prevalent for decades,

in which those who knowingly build illegally were aware that if they played the “game” right, they could continue to make use of their illegal structures, whether homes, offices, or storage spaces, since appeal after appeal in the courts would lengthen the period of inaction, or lack of enforcement, for years at a time.

The Arab MKs are protesting against this new law, claiming that the state doesn’t allow the Arab population to build legally in their communities, hence they are forced to resort to illegal building. Regavim is aware of this recycled false narrative.

Taking a step back, obtaining a building permit throughout all of Israel is a multi-step process. Firstly, the National Building Planning Administration designs the overall layout of any given city or town.

Certain areas are designated for housing, other areas for open spaces, industry, agriculture etc.

Once that city plan is approved, the municipalities or private developers seeking to build in the recognized building areas must come forward with their detailed construction designs. The city then takes the detailed plan back to the building administration for final approval. Once that happens building can commence.

However, according to Regavim’s research, in 95% of the Arab towns and villages in northern Israel (where the majority of the Arab population resides), while the state has in fact put together long-term city plans, the local Arab municipalities don’t utilize those plans. It is for this reason that the residents of these areas are unable to obtain the proper building permits.

Whether it’s a lack of funds due to a failure to collect property taxes (arnona), or tensions between clans and tribes who fight over designated building areas, the municipal or private developers’ plans aren’t being brought for approval.

In other words, it’s not the state’s fault; the onus is on the local officials who aren’t taking responsibility for the construction demands of their populations.

As a result you get Arabs who resort to illegal building without approved plans. When the state points out the violations and seeks to demolish the illegal construction, it becomes the bad guy.

And that’s where the necessary new law comes into play – it allows for swift enforcement, before the above-mentioned scenarios can cause outbreaks of illegal construction.

As mentioned, while Arab MKs were critical of the new law, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed the exact opposite sentiment, showing his strong support for the legislation as a means to integrate the Arab population into Israeli society.

As he stated, “The government which I head has invested, and continues to invest more than any other [previous] government in the Arab sector in order to close the existing gaps – in education, wages, culture, as well as health.

“Israeli Arabs want to be a part of the State of Israel, they want to be a part of the prosperity of Israel’s economy, they want to be a part of the future of the State of Israel, of all the citizens of Israel, and therefore we are investing like no government before us has done. We want the integration of the Arab public into the State of Israel, but that also means integrating with the laws of the State of Israel.”

It’s important to note that the prime minister stressed that the new law wasn’t targeting Arabs only, but that enforcement of the law would be applied equally in all sectors.

“One state, one law, one enforcement. This is what we did today, and I thank you for the passage of this important law,” the prime minister concluded.

For Regavim the passage of the law was viewed as a major success. Leaders of the NGO said they were hopeful that law enforcement authorities would actively utilize the tools granted to them by the new legislation to strengthen the sovereignty of the State of Israel over all of its land. (Jerusalem Post Apr 13)

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## **Embracing the Christians Who are Embracing Passover**

By Tuly Weisz

As Jews we know that Passover has eternal messages for the entire world, but now that so many Christians are embracing the holiday, many Jews are uneasy about it.

Jewish media has been abuzz over the trend of increasing numbers of Evangelical Christians who observe a Passover Seder, often infused with Christological interpretations. “Why are these Seders different from all other Seders? Because Jesus serves as paschal lamb” read a Times of Israel headline last week. “Evangelicals are falling in love with Passover – is

there anything wrong with that?” asked a recent Forward article. Both outlets expressed queasiness at the religious appropriateness of non-Jews celebrating Passover.

Surely, it is suspicious that Christianity, which historically used the Passover/Easter season to attack Jews for the crime of deicide, is now embracing the message of matza. We are all familiar with the line in the Haggada, “in every generation they rise up against us”; perhaps Christian Seders are just the latest manifestation of Replacement Theology?

Unlike on Succot, where the Christian pilgrims who march down the streets of Jerusalem see themselves as foreigners participating in a Jewish holiday, many non-Jews feel that Passover is also a Christian holiday. They believe that since Passover was the backdrop for their religious development, it is theirs to infuse with their own symbolism and interpretations.

We’ve been following this sensitive issue closely on Breaking Israel News, a news site geared toward Christian Zionists. Our reporters have interviewed many non-Jews who host Seders throughout the American Bible Belt, trying to understand their motivations. As the publisher of Breaking Israel News and director of Israel365, an organization which serves as a bridge between Israel and Evangelical Christians around the world, I have a different perspective on this unusual trend.

To be sure, there are deceptive missionary groups like Jews for Jesus, who use Passover as a hook to snare ignorant Jews with a mixed message that you can celebrate the holiday both as a Jew and as a Christian. While we must oppose their harmful efforts, it is time to realize that, for the most part, the Christian Zionists of today are interested in faithful friendship with no proselytizing strings attached.

We have enjoyed decades of unqualified support from Christian friends of Israel who go to great lengths to be sensitive to us.

Therefore, I believe that while Passover emphasizes the significant distinctions between our two communities, we can still find common ground by focusing not on what divides us, but what unites us, even on this most sensitive of festivals.

This past week, I spoke about Passover with a number of Christian Zionist leaders who work tirelessly to defend Israel and support the Jewish People, and who all reject proselytizing Jews.

“I have had the opportunity to participate in many Seders in the homes of Israeli friends,” Reverend Rebecca Brimmer of Bridges for Peace told me, “and am always struck by Passover’s central message of freedom. As a Christian, I appreciate the freedom of worship that I have here in Israel, the only place in the Middle East where I can pray anywhere without fear of being arrested or harassed.”

When I asked Reverend Robert Stearns of Eagles Wings Ministries about Passover, Stearns also emphasized our common heritage and pointed to the Book of Exodus. “The overarching theme of God’s deliverance from slavery in Exodus 12:17, ‘on this day I have brought you out of the land of Egypt,’ is one that is central to our faith understanding.”

Stearns went on to say, “As we look at the darkness and enslavement to evil in our world today, we take heart from the story of Passover. The God that delivered the Children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt is the same God that still can deliver His people, lead them, and watch over them in the Promised Land.”

Another Christian leader, Dean Bye of Return Ministries, which helps Jews make aliya, told me that he finds inspiration in the model of Moses. “Moses is an amazing inspiration for most Christians. He also discovered his own roots later in life, facing an identity crisis and running away. In time, Moses returned in strength, wisdom and humility with God’s plan of redemption.”

Bye continued, “I believe Christianity is presently in a wilderness of sorts and also going through its own identity crisis, learning a deep humility as Moses had to. The hope is we will emerge by cooperating with God and identifying with His wisdom, and our unique role in this more glorious exodus and redemption plan happening before everyone’s eyes.”

As Jews, we recall our treasured past and look forward to our glorious destiny each Passover. The return of our people from the four corners of the earth to the Land of Israel is no doubt a redemption of biblical proportions.

I believe that our remarkable future is even more secure in our generation with so many non-Jews embracing their Jewish roots with sensitivity and humility.

This modern-day Passover miracle is strengthened, not weakened, by Christians who are discovering the Jewish roots of their faith, and who are now standing with Israel based on our common ground. (Jerusalem Post Apr 12)