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March 2002

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From the Desk of Rabbi David E. Fass *Nothing's Changed*

I don't think a day has gone by since September 11th that I haven't seen or heard or read some statement to the effect that "everything's changed." I beg to differ. As far as I can see, nothing's changed. Sure, for those who lost loved ones in the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, everything has changed. They are the ones most affected. Their lives have changed forever.

But for the rest of us, how has everything changed? There is still monumental evil in the world, perversions of humanity beyond our wildest imaginings. Horrible as it was, this current destruction pales before the slaughter of six million of our people and five million gentiles in World War II, the "ethnic cleansing" and religious wars currently still festering in Kosovo and Chechnya and elsewhere in Europe, and the hundreds of thousands of dead and an equal or larger number of living adults and children who have had limbs hacked off in the murderous tribal warfare in Rwanda and elsewhere in Africa that continues to this very day. Certainly not to belittle for a single moment the very real suffering the destruction of the Twin Towers caused, but, as a writer in the NY Times magazine section put it a few weeks ago, "When the history of our age is written, September 11th will be a mere, rather unimportant blip on the radar screen of crucial events."

I can practically hear some of you shouting, "We are changed. Now we are aware that terror can strike here, can strike anywhere. We have been shaken out of our isolationism our complacency." Perhaps to some degree and for a short period of time, but what has really changed?

What has changed? We are going after those we have labeled our enemies, yet still

bend over backwards to placate the Saudi chieftains who control the oil, and other despots and tyrants all over the world. We have yet to meaningfully intervene in Africa. We have yet to send our highly touted special forces to free those still being tortured in the dungeons even of many supposedly civilized countries. We are still raising generations of young people right here in America with no hope and no future, who fight for the twisted way of life they see as their only route to survival with combat-grade weapons on city streets. The proposed "Freedom Corps" may be of some help, but it has to exist first.

What has changed? Our political system is still far too corrupt, with current campaign laws almost guaranteeing that those elected will be beholden to whoever writes the biggest checks rather than to the constituency they're supposed to represent. What has changed? Charges and counter-charges, suits and counter-suits are boiling up all over Washington in what is only the newest in an interminable round of scandals as the rich and the powerful of both parties seek to make sure that the truth about the Enron failure is never known by the public. Meanwhile, thousands who were counting on that stock to fund their retirement have been wiped out, with little or no hope of relief.

What has changed? Millions of people go to bed hungry all over the world while the developed countries still destroy unconscionable quantities of surplus food. Millions of people die of AIDS, and only now have the big drug companies been shamed into even beginning to provide the life-saving medicines at a price that these developing, largely third-world countries can afford. Even more millions have no freedom, no future, no hope. Is it so hard to understand that if here on earth you have been condemned to a living hell, a suicide bombing that you believe will get you into heaven (whether there are 72 virgins waiting there for you or not) and, more importantly, provide your family with a ten thousand dollar windfall - the only way they will ever see that kind of money - becomes not just a viable but even an attractive possibility?

What has changed? Our emotions did, for a time. We cried and grieved and had tears in our eyes when we saw the flag and sang patriotic songs. But most of us are mostly healed, and life returns to normal.

And it shouldn't. It mustn't. A professor at Bard College, Valerie Paradiz, has written a beautiful poem about what September 11 has done to our hopes and dreams for a paradise here on earth. It is called:

Comfort

You may permit yourself to weep.

It's okay.

Go ahead.

Move forward.

**Whether you're suspended in belief or disbelief,
it's all yours.**

Weep and move forward.

When the images return, roll out a red carpet for them.

**Howl, if you must, into the stunning flames,
the strange confetti, and the asbestos smoke.**

Scream

**at the fine trajectory of the arc,
at the tilting plane that struck the tower and derailed you
and every soul you'll ever encounter.**

Go ahead.

I dare you.

**I double dare you, like the twin towers,
to cry, then cry again,
at the crushing news that came too late.**

I dare you to find the unknown trajectory that has grown inside.

**What is this suspension we're in?
Is it belief or disbelief?
Is it good or evil?
Is it us or them?
Jihad or consumerism?
Before you hang the flag up,
before you march without a word
into the false security of bloody retribution,
hunt down the deadly divisions in your soul.**

**Turn off the TV.
You may permit yourself to think.
Skip the headlines for the day, and try to remember
what it was you always wanted,
that other way of life
that felt so out of reach.
It's all yours.
Move forward.
Divine the unspoken and say it aloud.
It will be your only comfort.**

That "other way of life," that way of life of safety and clean sheets and hot food and warmth to keep out the cold, all that is already ours. "You may permit yourself to think," about all that is still wrong with our world that hasn't changed. "Divine the unspoken" cries of agony of so many of our fellow human beings. Understand that nothing much has really changed - yet. And if it doesn't, if, after all we've seen and heard the evil in our world is not changed into good, that will be the most terrible tragedy of all.

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Cantor's Notes

Passover is the time when each Jew embarks on a personal journey from slavery to freedom. In order to guide us in our quest, the Sages carefully wrote a book outlining 15 steps to freedom. As you all know it's called the Haggadah. The Sages say that Passover occurs on the 15th of Nissan, to teach us that just as the moon waxes for 15 days, so too our growth must be in 15 gradual steps. Thus the Haggadah consists of 15 parts: 1. Kadesh; 2. Urchatz; 3. Karpas; 4. Yachatz; 5. Maggid; 6. Rachtzah; 7. Motzi. 8. Matzah; 9. Marror; 10. Korech; 11. Shulchan orech; 12. Tzafun. 13. Barech. 14. Hallel; 15. Nirtzah. By assembling them all we get freedom!

Many of you probably have memories of Passover Seders in which the Zayde (grandfather) sat at one end of a table reading in Hebrew or Yiddish. Others, probably younger generation adults sat around reading in English or just shmoozing until it was time to eat, and the kids were bored if they could be persuaded to stay at the table for any length of time. The vast majority of these Seders ended with the meal, leaving a considerable portion of the Haggadah unread. So why do we read the Haggadah at all?

The holiday of Passover marks the anniversary of the birth of the Jewish nation. The story of the Jewish nation is one of individuals who became a family who became a people. The great individuals who laid the spiritual foundation of Jewish peoplehood were Abraham and Sarah, their son and daughter-in-law Isaac and Rebecca, and their son and daughters-in-law Jacob, Rachel, and Leah.

From Jacob, Rachel, and Leah came a family of seventy people who, due to a famine in Israel, were forced to migrate to Egypt. In Egypt this family grew and prospered to such an extent that they eventually came to be seen as a threat by their Egyptian hosts.

Respect and admiration turned to contempt, and finally to an organized program of enslavement and oppression. After two hundred and ten (210) years, and a series of unheeded warnings by Moses to Pharaoh, which resulted in the Ten Plagues, God liberated a nation, which had grown enormously from the original family of seventy people. Seven weeks later, this newly conceived nation received the Torah at Mount Sinai.

The Haggadah is the story of the birth of the Jews as a people. It deals primarily with the events in Egypt which led from slavery to liberation, though it also spans the entire period from Abraham to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. One could say that the Haggadah is our national birth certificate as well as our Declaration of Independence. More than just a historical document, it also speaks of the ideals and values, which constitute the essence of our national consciousness and identity.

The word haggadah means to tell, or to relate. The Haggadah is a vivid narrative, which is set in the context of a parent-child dialogue. Passover, with the Haggadah as its focus, tells every Jew three things: who you are, where you came from, and what you stand for.

Have a happy Pesach!
Cantor Schwartz

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