

April 2010

Message From Rabbi Bob Mark

Passover is alternatively known as the Festival of Freedom. We also live in a nation where we have our freedoms. How sweet it is? Or is it really?

We are called in the Torah an “*Am Kischei Oref*” a stiff necked people. We are tough, we have survived for centuries suffering under every manner of persecution, physical, religious, economic. We have been disbursed to all corners of the earth and every now and then we find a group of people claiming to be descendants of Jews living in the most remote villages in the countries of Asia and Africa. People who have kept up the traditions they remember that have been handed down from generation to generation and now they would like to join the people of Israel. Recently, genetic testing has been done on such a group of people and it showed not only that they are descendant of Jews, but that even the people they classified as *Kohanim* had the unique gene which has been shown to exist in Kohanim all across the world wide population of Jews. These people want to be Jews, to practice in freedom to move to Israel to get involved. For seventy years the Jews suffered under the communists in the Soviet Union, denied their right to practice their religion freely. We fought, we resisted, we battled, we fled and finally we were released to emigrate as we choose. Now, there are tens of thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union getting involved and living as Jews in the United States. They celebrate the freedom to be Jewish every day, they do not wait for Passover.

Passover is the holiday celebrated by so many Jews, even Jews who find that they do not go to synagogue on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur identify with Passover – even if their practices are not necessarily up to snuff. So why complain?

Passover is one week and one day - a short time frame. It is certainly not enough to generate a strong positive feeling and pride in being a Jew nor does it give one the education and knowledge to hand down the traditions of Jews to the next generation. In fact, today’s current generation has an enormous percentage of people who are unable to transmit the heritage to the next generation for they themselves are largely devoid of the necessary knowledge to do so. BUT, it is never too late to learn, however little you learn, however little you add to your practice of Judaism, you generate a spark that may ignite a fire within someone else that you influence. Would it be nice if you could inspire a grandchild to become just a bit more Jewish? Perhaps, enough to inspire them to marry in the faith, light candles for Shabbat, come to shul? Would it be nice if your children

could learn enough Hebrew to say Kaddish when the time comes without breaking their teeth on the Hebrew.

You have a golden opportunity. You have the freedom. You can set an example!! Come to shul, take a class, light Shabbat candles, keep a kosher home – yes, you can start even now. Encourage your family - Ask them to join you.

April 11, is Yom Hashoa a day of remembrance. A day set aside to remember the Holocaust, its horrors, the destruction of half of the world's population of Jews. The Nazis had a plan that fortunately was not totally successful. But we those of us who live in freedom, are incredibly helping to complete the work that they started. The demographics in the Jewish community are such that even without persecution we will eventually fade away unless we are able to change the tide. Between averaging less than enough new births to replace ourselves and losing tens of thousands to assimilation and intermarriage we are well on the way finishing the job that Hitler started.

You have the power, **You** have the ability, **You** can demonstrate that we are indeed and *am kishei oref* a nation tough enough to keep our heritage and traditions intact even in a time when we do not have to fight for the right to do so.

Nothing would make me happier than for someone to tell me a year from now that I was wrong, that we are changing, we are coming to shul, we have new members, our children are involved, they are learning, they are going to Israel, they are lighting Shabbat candles, they are keeping kosher. Please do what you can to make me wrong. It will be my greatest joy.