

For the Sake of Israel

On Passover, we celebrate our redemption from slavery in Egypt. For hundreds of generations, all over the world, Jews have repeated the core narrative: we were slaves, and God miraculously freed us from Pharaoh and brought us out of Egypt.

That has been a foundational and sustaining story for our people, especially in times of oppression. This year, however, I think it is equally vital for us to consider not just the “leaving” but also where we were going. The story didn’t end with us free to do whatever we wanted in the wilderness. Immediately after the Exodus came the revelation at Mt. Sinai. And right after the thunder and lightning, came *mishpatim*, actual day to day instructions of how to build a moral society. We were freed for the sake of becoming a nation in a land.

This point especially weighs on me this year. The new Israeli government seems neither to value the contemporary value of democratic checks and balances, nor the Torah value of loving and protecting the stranger. And yet at the end of April, we celebrate the modern state of Israel’s 75th year of existence. Here at TBI and in collaboration with the Jewish Federation of Lane County, many volunteers are working hard to plan for a joyful event marking Israel’s 75th birthday.

Right now, there are many Israelis – and members of Knesset—still fighting for egalitarianism, for LGBTQ rights, for equity and freedom of religion, for peace . . . and the list goes on. As American Jews, we of all people know that no society is monolithic. Israel is a diverse and evolving society, and we all have a stake in its continued becoming. Each of us should find the elements of Israeli society that do resonate with us, and support them in the ways we can. We should show up and renew our relationship to her.

However we feel about Israel (or ignore Israel!) Israel is embedded in the Jewish story. We do not get to wash our hands of it as long as we are Jews—any more than we get to wash our hands or give up on the idea of the United States, if we are US citizens.

So I hope we continue to explore how we might support a vision of a just and democratic Israel, and I hope you’ll celebrate 75 years of Israel, with all its imperfections, on Yom Ha’Atzma’ut.