

There is in our community - and by that I include the whole of world Jewry as one people from Israel to the US and around the globe - a struggle developing between two camps with radically different visions of Jewish expression in the 21st century.

On one side of this struggle are those committed to our vision of time-honored Jewish and democratic values - grounded in respect for "the other," a tolerance for dissent, and a willingness to sacrifice territory for peace.

On the other side are those who seem willing to muffle dissent, view all conflict as zero-sum, and place retaining captured land and territory at the center of its value system.

For a while now, it has been popular to say that for Israel there is a choice ahead between the land, being Jewish, and being democratic. Many leading Israelis have come to see that it's possible only to have two of the three.

I think the choice for world Jewry is similarly profound and stark. As a people - do we line up with those who seek to hang on to all of "Greater Israel" and watch our Jewish and democratic values erode in Israel and in our community, or do we stand up urgently for territorial compromise and for behavior in Israel and in our community that reflects our cherished and long-held values?

More than ever, it's clear to me that we're not fighting simply over Israeli or American foreign policy. We're in a larger and more significant battle over who we are as a people in this new century and how our people are defined collectively for ourselves and for others by the behavior of the country that serves as our national expression.

*Q: Do you agree with Ben-Ami's statement about the choice we face? Which values do you believe should define world Jewry in the coming years? How can we safeguard Israel as a Jewish, democratic homeland—in keeping with our Jewish and American values—for decades to come?*

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# FOUR QUESTIONS

on

## Israel and Our Jewish Values

PASSOVER 2010

As Jews, Passover is our story. The Exodus experience is at the foundation of our Jewish values. How does the Passover narrative resonate with our global struggle to define what Israel will be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Deeply held values found in the Haggadah – Israel, social justice, and self-protection – sometimes come into tension in world Jewry's relationship with Israel. Tonight we ask four questions about our values and the choices we face today.

**J Street** 

## 1. Next year in Jerusalem

The Passover seder points towards a vision of redemption, and Israel is central to that vision.

“allow us to see the rebuilding of Your city of Jerusalem... We shall then sing to You a new song, a song of redemption and salvation.”

“Next year in Jerusalem!”

*Q: Israel has held a special place for Jews for millennia, both as a dream and a reality. What is Israel's significance to you? What do you love and what would you change?*

## 2. Do not oppress the stranger

The Haggadah asks us to re-live the experience of exodus. The Torah explains what we ought to take from that experience – the Jewish value of social justice.

“In every generation, every individual must feel as if [s]he personally had come out of Egypt.”

“You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the soul of the stranger, having yourself been strangers in the land of Egypt.”

*Q: At the core of the Exodus story is the value of “do not oppress the stranger.” In what ways is the State of Israel living out Jewish social justice values, and how could it carry out these values more fully? In your opinion, should these values apply to Israeli policies toward Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza? If so, how?*

## 3. Pour out your wrath

A challenging but very real theme in the seder – and in broader Jewish identity – is that of vulnerability and the need for self-protection as a people. Elie Weisel calls the Haggadah “a tale of Jewish survival.”

“For it was not one man alone who rose against us to destroy us. In every generation they rise up to destroy us.”

“Pour out Your wrath upon those who do not know You and upon the governments which do not call upon Your Name (Psalms 79:6)... Pour out Your fury upon them; let the fierceness of Your anger overtake them (Psalms 69:25).”

*Q: Even today, when Jews are as well established as we have ever been during the last two millennia, real threats exist and many Jews still fear being hurt or (heaven forbid) destroyed. To what extent does the urge for self-protection, or even pre-emptive action, resonate with you? When is this a helpful urge, and when does it backfire? How does this relate to the challenges of maintaining Israel's security?*

## 4. The choice we face

Passover is a time when Jews worldwide retell our stories and reaffirm who we are at our core. Today we face a choice about the direction we're going as a people vis a vis Israel and the Middle East. We must bring the varied and deeply rooted values of the seder into the conversation about our relationship with Israel. This passage comes from Jeremy Ben-Ami's letter following J Street's recent Congressional delegation to Israel.

I take away from the whole experience a troubling sense that beyond any particular issue of the moment - beyond Iran, Goldstone, Jerusalem, settlements, or Danny Ayalon - there is a fundamental conflict rising up to face the Jewish people as a whole.

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