

A Reflection for Jewish Passover

The festival of the Jewish Passover is a celebration of freedom from tyranny, slavery and oppression and its annual celebration by our Jewish sisters and brothers is a time of deep reflection on the themes of freedom, justice, and peace.

This year's Passover reflections will have a particular poignancy. Not just because of the current war in Gaza but because of growing realization that this is not a new war but one that was born in the creation of the State of Israel. Out of fear of being labelled anti-Semitic (it's about time we learned the difference between the evil of anti-Semitism and the justified position of both Jews and non-Jews to be anti-Zionist) we need some historical honesty about the manner of Israel's creation and the use of widespread violence against most of its indigenous Palestinian population who were not consulted and whose dispossession was deemed necessary to create the new state of Israel.

As Rabbi Judah Magnes (1877-1948) said at the time: *"It is unfortunate that the very people who could point to the tragedy of the displaced Jewish people as a result of persecution in Europe as the chief argument for Jewish immigration into Palestine should now be ready to create an additional category of displaced persons in the Holy Land - the indigenous Palestinians."*

To this day Israel, and the Western powers still haunted by the guilt of the holocaust, refuse to acknowledge the moral and legal obligations that flowed from the manner of the creation of the Israeli state. That is why it cannot be seen as a liberal democracy and why it has been unable to make peace with the Palestinians. It is also what set it on the road to today's carnage in Gaza.

The prophetic words of Rabbi Judah call the Jewish people to an honest reflection on their own history and a searching for that freedom, justice, and peace to which the season of Passover calls them. Not just freedom, justice, and peace for their own tribe but for both neighbour and stranger.

The Rabbi's words ought to also speak to modern Australia as we struggle to seek reconciliation with our own indigenous peoples. Like Israel we need a new enthusiasm for a national history that seeks truth rather than just a history dictated to us by the victors of conflict. As the gospels teach us: "it is the truth that sets us free".

And, as we celebrate ANZAC Day, we may also seek a little more truth in our own ANZAC traditions. Especially those surrounding our betrayal of our Palestinian allies who fought with our soldiers to defeat the Ottoman Turks in Palestine, only to be betrayed by us and our western allies once the fighting was done.

Fr. Bill