



Tifereth Israel April 8 · 🌐

Cantor Chomsky shares A Thought Before Pesach and Shabbat Because the holiday of Pesach begins Wednesday evening and the first two Festival Days are followed by Shabbat, this is one of the last messages you'll be getting from Congregation Tifereth Israel until at least the middle of the Festival.

You have certainly received a lot of messages from the whole Jewish world relating to Seder and dealing with the Zoom Environment in which we suddenly find ourselves.

I'd like to take a chance to look ahead a little, beyond Seder:

The First Day of Passover:

I lifted up earlier this week some thoughts about the prayer for Dew (Tal), along with a video of me chanting its mystical melody in our Sanctuary (filmed some years ago) ... in the Sanctuary we're really missing right now.

I encourage you to join us live on Thursday morning when we "turn the switch" from praying for rain (which we've done since Shemini Atzeret, in the fall) to praying for dew, in both cases, really focusing on what is needed in the Land of Israel at this season.

As I pointed out in the narrative accompanying the video, the melody of Tal and Geshem speaks more dramatically than almost anything in all our nusach - music and liturgy - to the understanding that life and death hang in the balance. Tal and Geshem recognize this in the context of whether or not we will receive the rain and dew that bring sustenance. This month, we are aware of the life and death implications of microbes and the choices we make to shelter from each other and keep each other safe.

Shabbat in the middle of it all:

On Shabbat Chol Hamoed Pesach, this Saturday, we add to our services the recitation of Shir HaShirim, the "Song of Songs". For each of our Three Festivals, there is a special megillah recited, the other two are Ruth (on Shavuot) and Kohelet or Ecclesiastes (during the Fall Festival). The sweet cantillation melody of these texts is shared across those holidays.

As traumatic as these last few weeks have been, it's a good idea to lift our gaze, to inhale the fragrance of flowers and trees in bloom, still happening all around us. Shir Hashirim is a pretty surprising text: It's one of the rowdiest, sexiest texts you'll ever see, certainly in a religious context. It seems like the Jewish people loved this poetry so much that the rabbis, in deciding what was "in" and what was "out" of our Tanach (our Jewish bible canon) excluded the Books of Maccabees but included Song of Songs. The way they did it, in part, was to declare that these sexy texts were really an allegory for the relationship between God and the Jewish people, to which I've always said, "Sure. Whatever." We'll be chanting Chapter 3. Among the chapter's verses: "I found the one my soul loves. I held fast, I would not let go, until I brought my love to my mother's house, to the chamber of my mother."

I especially want to bring this to your attention so that we think about reading love poetry this weekend, and not just story after story about the pandemic we're working so hard to overcome. I'm not saying that we need to ignore important information, but it is critical that we cherish everything that we can in everyday life.

The text of Chapter 3, which we will chant Shabbat morning, can be found by following this link: https://drive.google.com/open...

That which connects us to the next Festival (Shavuot):

Finally, I wanted to make my annual plea that you participate in Sefirat HaOmer, counting the Omer. The counting of the Omer/Barley harvest begins at Second Seder after dark. Counting the days (well, the nights) from then until the arrival of Shavuot some 7 weeks from that evening underlines that our exit from Egypt wasn't just going from someplace, but ultimately going to someplace. God's purpose of bringing us out from Egypt was to greet us at Sinai. We have struggled with that responsibility forever.

Please join me in counting the Omer from 1 to 49, then coming together again when that's done for a better-than-ever Shavuot (which will include, on the 2nd Day, our Adult B'nei Mitzvah!).

Thanks to the ingenuity of the Skolnik household, we have already been counting. We've been counting the days of the Hesger/Quarantine, which has been a positive response to a decidedly negative situation. We know that the Omer stops at 49, but we don't know when the hesger will stop. Acknowledging that it is a day-by-day deep, meaningful and realistic response to our situation.

As we seek to emerge from the spread of COVID-19, having been fortunate enough to respond swiftly and dramatically under the leadership of Governor DeWine and Dr. Acton, we need to keep in mind and heart the possibility that we will never be the same, in good ways, though, as well as bad, that we can turn the discipline we brought into our lives in the last weeks into actions that benefit us, our families and our country in ongoing ways.

May we choose what we do in life and what we don't do in these days. May those who risk their lives daily to care for the sick and keep goods and services available to all of us be protected by proper equipment and by God.

At the end of our Seders, we say "Next year in Jerusalem." For most of the history of the Jewish people, that was a far-away, Messianic wish. In our lifetimes, until this year, it seemed just like a potential travel choice. Suddenly, now it seems like a faraway idea once again.

Next year, may we remember this Passover as a difficult time, but a time we did our best, came together, and averted, as we say at the High Holidays, the severity of the decree.

Chag Sameach. Shabbat Shalom. Moadim L'simchah,

Cantor Jack Chomsky



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