

When warmer days come, I think of Passover. Passover is the holiday of spring, the holiday of rebirth, and the holiday of redemption. What does that have to do with Riverdale today, still in the throes of winter, with the prophet Elijah, and what does it have to do with the new Presidential Administration? Funny you should ask!

The greatest story in the Torah is that of the enslavement and ultimate redemption of the Israelites from Egypt. The rabbis of old said that this redemption was symbolic of all redemptions everywhere, and contained within it a promise of an ultimate redemption. We begin the story of the Exodus while still in the depths of winter, and certainly Moses' progress seems frozen at first. But in Exodus chapter six, verses six through seven, Gd makes four promises to the Jewish people. "Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am the Eternal. (1) I will free you from the burdens of Egyptians and (2) I will deliver you from their bondage. (3) I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. (4) And I will take you to be my people, and I will be your Gd."

We celebrate these four promises during the Passover seder by drinking four cups of wine. The other cup of wine on the table is Elijah's cup. Contrary to what hundreds of thousands of children have been told, the cup is not there for Elijah to drink from when no one is watching. The cup represents a fifth promise.

In Exodus chapter six verse eight, Gd continues: "(5) I will bring you in to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you as a possession, I, the Eternal."

The rabbis who created the Passover seder disagreed as to whether this promise called for a fifth cup of wine. So they compromised by deciding to pour it, but not drink it. When Elijah the prophet comes to tell us the Messiah is here, we will ask him if we were supposed to drink that fifth cup or not. Whenever the rabbis were completely stuck on what a Jewish law should be, they would postpone discussion until Elijah comes. Elijah will bring us all the missing answers.

So Elijah doesn't drink from Elijah's cup. Elijah will tell us if we are supposed to drink from Elijah's cup. But this leads to another question: why didn't the rabbis think the fifth promise deserved a fifth cup?

My theory is that it is because the first four promises have been fulfilled, while the fifth promise is not yet fulfilled.

How can I say that? Don't the Israelites enter the Promised Land in the Book of Joshua? They did, but the Passover Seder was written when the Jews were in exile, when their land was in the hands of a foreign power. The fifth promise is the promise of ultimate redemption, when the Messiah will come, the Jews will return from exile, and peace will fill the world. That promise has not come true yet, but we are so sure that it will that we fill the glass, ready to drink it at any moment. So it is Elijah's cup not only because Elijah will solve all the difficult questions of Jewish law, but also because Elijah will herald the Messiah, so when we see him, it will be time to drink that fifth cup.

What do we do in the meantime? The Torah tells us over and over that we must be kind to strangers, for we were strangers in the land of Egypt. In a way, the memory of our own redemption will pave the way for everyone's redemption. When we are kind to

strangers, we create a world receptive to the concept of redemption. We prepare the world for redemption by creating a messianic era.

This is why I was so disappointed to hear the new Presidential Administration indicate that it would limit the number of refugees coming into the United States. Not only because the Torah tells us to be kind to strangers for we were strangers in the land of Egypt, but because we Jews know what it is like to flee a murderous regime, only to be told that we are not welcome anywhere else. In the years leading up to World War II, we were told that the United States could not allow in any extra Jews because we were Jews, because we were suspected of being German spies and saboteurs, and because America is for Americans. The not so subtle message was that a Jewish person was never completely an American.

Today we see the same aspirations cast on others because of their religion, country of origin, or mother tongue. We must not allow people to be demonized because of who they are. I am not proposing allowing people into our country without vetting them. I am not proposing shrugging our shoulders at illegal immigration. But Judaism demands that we must let in as many refugees as we can. Judaism demands that we see each immigrant, even the illegal ones, as human beings. We must be kind to the stranger, for we were strangers in the land of Egypt.

If we are not, don't bother to fill that fifth cup. A beautiful warm day promises that spring will come. Spring promises that Passover will come, and Passover promises that redemption will come. But it won't come unless we let it come.

One of the great truths of Judaism is that everything we do matters, that everything we do has an effect, both here and in heaven. Let us take a step closer to redemption by opening our hearts to the stranger. I demand of the United States Government that it be as generous as it can be. If we err, let us err on the side of kindness, of welcoming. Let us err on the side of love.

The fifth promise is the promise of redemption. We Jews were redeemed from a murderous regime not once, but over and over. If we want the final redemption to come, it must come for all of us. For the many, not the few, for the Moslems as well as the Jews, for the Mexicans as well as the Europeans. We were slaves in a land not our own, and Gd freed us with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. And so may Gd do again, for all of us.