

# Resetting the GPS

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Once upon a time not so long ago when planning to travel from home to one's destination it was necessary to consult maps in order to work out the best and quickest route.

The problem of course was that these maps could not keep up with changes and more importantly could not predict traffic congestion and diversions. All this changed dramatically when the GPS was introduced. In Israel we use WAZE which is an Israeli-developed guidance system. There can hardly be any motorist who does not have this navigational aid and it has made traveling that much more efficient and hassle free, especially as one does not have to read maps but merely listen to the instructions in the language of your choice.

As Jews celebrate Passover this year I cannot fail to make a connection between this annual Festival and the navigational systems most of us use.

It seems to me that too many people sit around the Seder table without internalising the real meaning of what is being recited and why it has a relevance to them. Judaism is often described as a gastronomical religion because every celebration is associated with food of some exotic variety. Passover has more than its fair share of different culinary delights ranging from charoset (mixture of chopped apples, nuts, spices & wine), matza (unleavened bread), bitter herbs and of course kneidlach (matza balls) of the ultralight or dense cannon ball consistency.

Food, while symbolic and important, is really of secondary relevance. The main object of the exercise is the retelling of our ancestors' slavery in Egypt and their eventual liberation. Not only liberation but also the birth of the Jewish nation and the receiving of their constitution at Mount Sinai. There are two pivotal moments are crucial and which often are glossed over.

First is when we read the passage which reminds us that in every generation there are those who rise up to destroy the Jewish People/Nation but that despite everything we, with Divine help, thwarted their plans, albeit sometimes with horrendous collateral damage. It is a sign of the times we live in that some feel uncomfortable reciting these lines because they also include the promise that those who hate and murder us will themselves be held accountable. In certain circles where political correctness has replaced candid candour this part of the Seder service is either omitted or replaced with "touchy feely" expressions of kumbaya type moments. As soon as individuals or communities abandon references to reality you know that worse is to come.

The connection to a good GPS becomes essential when the second pivotal moment is reached in the recitation of the Seder service.

This is when everyone's navigation system needs to be activated. It occurs when towards the conclusion of the Seder we all recite "NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM." This prayer which has been expressed for millennia is the fundamental belief that sooner rather than later a return to Zion is the ultimate objective.

How many celebrants every year at Passover even realise that what we are celebrating is not just the liberation from slavery and exile in Egypt but rather the beginning of a 40-year trek to the Promised Land? Where is this land promised to the Hebrew Patriarchs and their descendants for ever? It certainly is not Europe, the USA, UK or even Australia or New Zealand.

The answer of course is clear. It's here in Israel. The road map and GPS was programmed at the dawn of Jewish history and all that Moses had to do was activate it at the appropriate time. Acting according to the instructions he received, Moses led the Israelites on a circuitous route which took

forty years. This was not a failure of the navigational system but rather a calculated way of ensuring not only the spiritual but also the physical survival of future generations.

From the time the Haggadah was composed, at every Seder on the eve of Passover, no matter where they resided in exile, Jews recited the fervent plea ***“next year in Jerusalem.”*** Unfortunately it was not physically possible for all but the most adventurous to make the hazardous journey to the land which after the Roman destruction of the Temple was illegally occupied by foreign forces and empires. With the re-establishment of Jewish sovereignty in 1948 the last obstacle to fulfilling this annual Passover prayer disappeared. Half of Jerusalem was admittedly still illegally occupied by the Jordanians and the rest of the world was totally disinterested but nevertheless at least it was now feasible to once again live in Jerusalem, Israel’s still unrecognized Capital. In 1967 when Israel defeated the Arab forces massed for its destruction the miracle of a reunited Jerusalem became reality. The ancient prayer could now be amended to read ***“next year in REBUILT Jerusalem.”*** Our generation is privileged to witness not only the return to Jerusalem but also to see its physical rebuilding. Those who visit are amazed at the pace of rebuilding taking place which is the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy in our day.

Why then are there still so many who have not even visited the Promised Land let alone made it their home? How come so many recite with fervour the wish to be next year in Jerusalem and then promptly forget to act? What’s the point of repeating an empty mantra every year and refusing to grab the available opportunity to fulfil a Torah mitzvah? Obviously their GPS needs to be reset so that they can rouse themselves from their Diaspora lethargy and make the journey. Next year in Disneyland after all is not exactly what was on the agenda.

If Pesach is not to be an annual reminder of our intended ultimate destination then what is the point of celebrating it? In today’s world where common sense is frowned on and political correctness worshipped, the spectacle of some denying their own history is mind-boggling. In an op-ed. written for Newsweek last December, Rabbi Menachem Margolin, the Director of the European Jewish Association, wrote: ***“how do we stop Europe’s Jewish Exodus to Israel?”*** Here is a religious Jew trying to devise a strategy to stop the exodus of Jews living in a Judeophobic continent from returning to their real homeland. It defies belief but unfortunately it merely reflects the twisted priorities of those for whom residing in a Jew hating environment is preferable to fulfilling the annual Passover plan to return to the Land of Israel.

This sickness goes even deeper. In the USA today we see the establishment of what has been described as “non-Zionist” communities. The rationale is that Israel is no longer a prime reason to be Jewish. The notion of a land promised to our ancestors and playing a central part of our Faith has instead been replaced by more politically acceptable causes.

Proof of where this sort of skewed amnesia leads was provided this week by UNESCO which declared that the Temple Mount and Western Wall Plaza were Islamic holy sites and in effect denied any Jewish connection to those places. This pandering to Islamic revisionist history in the week before Passover should make us more determined than ever to follow through on our desire to be next year in Jerusalem. If the phrase is not to remain a meaningless farce then visiting if not at least settling in Israel must become a top priority. Not doing so hands a victory to the deniers and delegitimisers.

Activate and reset your GPS this Passover so that by next year the dream will become a reality.

Chag Sameach from Israel.

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