

RABBI ZEV'S REFLECTIONS

I hope everyone had a Freilich (happy, joyous) Purim! A special thank you to the



Purim players and The Villages Olde Time Radio club...I hope you had as much fun performing it as everyone had watching it! Also, a special thank you to Ritual committee

mishloach manot volunteers under the guidance of Joyce Leib for sharing the Mishloach manot with the whole congregation...it truly added to the joyous month.

Now with Purim behind us, April is a full month!

Pesach- a wonderful time for us to come together and celebrate the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. This festival of freedom invites us to share the story of the Exodus, to reflect on themes of freedom, justice, and redemption, and to enjoy the company of family and friends around the Seder table. The Haggadah is rich with lessons and traditions that have been passed down through generations. By recounting the struggles and triumphs of our ancestors, we are reminded of the continuing power of faith and perseverance, and may their legacy inspire us to work towards a more just and compassionate world. As we relive their journey from slavery to freedom, we reaffirm our commitment to fighting oppression and injustice in all its forms. Let's embrace the spirit of Passover by extending kindness and

compassion to those in need, and by striving to make our world a better place for all.

Which leads us to the period between Passover and Shavuot, when we begin the **Counting of the Omer**, which gives us a unique opportunity for spiritual growth and reflection. For 49 days, we count the Omer, beginning on the second night of Passover and ending on Shavuot, which celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. This sacred practice is a reminder that our journey from physical liberation to spiritual enlightenment is ongoing and requires our dedication and mindfulness. The Counting of the Omer encourages us to foster virtues such as patience, humility, and gratitude. As we count the days, let's take time to engage in sincere reflection and personal growth, recognizing that every step we take brings us closer to our spiritual goals. Join me each night of the Omer as we once again count together (on zoom), beginning on April 14th.

Also this month, we find Yom HaShoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day, a day for us to come together as a community to remember the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust and to honor the survivors. Observed a week after Passover, Yom HaShoah serves as a powerful reminder of the atrocities committed during the Holocaust and the strength of those who survived. Join us as we make sure that the horrors of the Holocaust are never forgotten, and educate future generations about the importance of tolerance and respect, on 4/24th at St. Timothy's for our observance, honoring the memory of those who suffered and those who perished.

RABBI ZEV'S REFLECTIONS

Which brings us to **Yom HaZikaron**, Israel's Memorial Day. A solemn day for us to remember the soldiers who have fallen in defense of the State of Israel and victims of terrorism, and honors the sacrifices made by those who have given their lives for the safety and security of their fellow citizens.

As we observe these significant holidays, we cannot turn a blind eye to the current situation in Israel. The region continues to face many challenges, including political tensions, security concerns, and the ongoing war. The Israeli government is working tirelessly to ensure the well-being of its citizens. But within these struggles, there is still hope and optimism for a brighter future. Efforts towards peace and cooperation with neighboring countries, advancements in technology and innovation, and the determination of the Israeli people all contribute to the nation's resilience. We continue to pray for peace and stability in Israel, as the Psalmist says, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you" (Psalm 122:6).

This month, being filled with opportunities for reflection and remembrance, it's important for us to connect our traditions with the present-day realities of our community and the world at large. Passover, the Counting of the Omer, Yom HaShoah, and Yom HaZikaron offer us opportunities to deepen our understanding of freedom, spiritual growth, and sacrifice. By participating in these traditions, we can draw strength from our heritage and apply its lessons to the challenges we face today.

As we celebrate Passover and count the Omer, let's remember the importance of unity, compassion, and perseverance. Let's honor the memory of those who have sacrificed for our freedom on Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron, and let's remain hopeful for a future of peace and prosperity for Israel and the world. May this season of reflection and renewal inspire us to work towards a better future for all. Chag Pesach Sameach, and may we find strength and comfort in our traditions and in each other.

B'y'didut - in Friendship

Rabbi Zev Sonnenstein