

Rabbi Leon A. Morris

Distorting 'Next year in Jerusalem'

When our 5-year-old daughter, Yael, came home from her Jerusalem school with a children's Haggadah, telling the Passover story, she was excited to show it to me. I sat at our dining room table with her, delighted in her ability to sing "Ha Lachma Anya" ("This Is the Bread of Affliction"), the Four Questions, and "Dayeinu." Reveling in her skills, her confidence and how much she had learned at school, I experienced the pride of an immigrant father that his children were already reaping the educational and cultural benefits of our aliyah from America less than two years ago. When Yael and I reached the last page of her Haggadah, my sense of pride and gratitude changed. Beneath the words "Next Year in the Rebuilt Jerusalem" was a disturbing photo: a deliberately distorted image of the Western Wall, with the Dome of the Rock removed from the background. Blessed is the miracle of Photoshop that can, with a click of a mouse, eliminate a place that is holy to 1.6 billion people and almost 20% of Israel's citizens. A publisher of children's educational materials had forced its triumphalist and intolerant fantasy of Jerusalem into our homes and the minds of our children. On the way, they also deceived kindergarten teach-

ers around the country who only wanted to have a Haggadah for their charges to explore and color — and who now unwittingly found themselves in a political and religious minefield.

This was not an image of the Third Temple, a religious aspiration that's expressed throughout the Haggadah text. No, this was a present-day political and fanatical fantasy surreptitiously inserted into a children's Haggadah by a publisher of educational materials. This image was not about building, but rather about destroying. The photo was not about what we affirm, but rather about what should be negated. This wasn't the first time this kind of deceptive image was forced upon an unsuspecting Israeli public. In 2011 the Israel Defense Forces Rabbinate featured a similar photograph as part of a Hanukkah packet for soldiers. A spokesman for the Military Rabbinate defended the photo, saying that it was a depiction from the time of the Second Temple, long before Dome of the Rock had been built. The problem with that explanation is that the Western Wall appeared as, well, the Western Wall, a remnant of the Second Temple, with Jews gathering for prayer in front, on the large plaza erected by Israel after 1967. Then, this January, parents in the Tel Aviv suburb of Givatayim were angered

after the municipality distributed a poster-sized photograph of Jerusalem to city schools, with the Kotel in the foreground — and the distinctive gold-plated Dome of the Rock above it airbrushed out. At this specific moment of tensions and violence, the publishing and dissemination of such photos is irresponsible. Rumors throughout the Muslim world falsely suggest that Israel has plans to demolish the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa, and those rumors have fueled the violence in which many Israeli Jews and others have died. Pictures like these contribute to that erosive atmosphere, in ways that are similar to maps on which Israel doesn't appear being handed out to Palestinian children. Beyond the inexcusable political agenda forced upon unsuspecting children and teachers, this propaganda Haggadah contains a failure of the religious imagination. I don't want our children to think that the rebuilt Jerusalem has only room for us and our holy places. I want Yael and her classmates to dream about a Jerusalem rebuilt on the foundations of tolerance and respect for others. A major impetus for us to make aliyah from America was to give our children a stronger Jewish identity, informed by being part of the majority culture, where their Judaism could

be experienced organically in a Jewish public square. Baruch Hashem, Israel has provided that for them and for us. But now that we've settled in, my fear is that their Jewish and Israeli identity won't allow sufficient space to see and to respect the other, particularly Muslims and Christians. In his post-exilic depiction of how the pilgrim would ascend to Jerusalem, the Psalmist speaks of the euphoria of being inside the walls of the holy city: "Jerusalem rebuilt, a city knit together..." (Psalm 122:3) It is from here that Israeli haggadah borrowed the word "ha'bnuyah" — next year in "rebuilt" Jerusalem. Rashi comments that there is a heavenly Jerusalem that is already rebuilt, and that, in the future, the earthly Jerusalem will become like that. This Passover, let's dream of a different sort of rebuilt Jerusalem, one that is about joining together and not tearing apart, a Jerusalem in which our dreams will not be realized by the destruction of the other, a city whose measures of beauty, wisdom and Torah will exceed its measures of suffering and hypocrisy. Jerusalem won't be rebuilt by Photoshopping away the other, but rather by seeing the other and finding a way to live together.

Rabbi Leon A. Morris is vice president for Israel programs at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America.