

From Rabbi Weber

*Next year in Jerusalem* - the "famous last words" of the Passover *seder*, as well as the closing words of Yom Kippur. Jews have been saying these words for nearly 2,000 years, and this year we have to ask ourselves an important question:

*Do we mean it?*

If we do - if we actually mean it, rather than just saying it because the book tells us to - then I think we need to recognize the courage and the genius that led to United States recognition of Jerusalem as the capitol of Israel. And here is why.

First, a quick quiz: Where are all of Israel's governmental offices located? Where is the Knesset, the Supreme Court, the Prime Minister's office and residence, the President's residence? More to the point, if you go to Tel Aviv to conduct business with the Israeli government, how much will you get done?

In 1947, in a moment of post-Holocaust humanity, the United Nations voted to establish two homelands: One for the Jews and one for the Arabs. I am certain they believed that the Arabs would annihilate the Jews, driving them into the sea, and the world would be able to say, "Oh well, we tried."

But the Jews didn't lose. This fact has so annoyed the world that *more United Nations resolutions have been against Israel than all the other countries in the world combined*. And, as a pure act of spite, many countries refused to accept that Israel's capitol is Jerusalem.

But it is. Sorry, world. Just like every other country on earth, Israel chose its capitol city. Way before the Six Day War, Israel built its government in West Jerusalem - an area that was in Israeli hands since 1948. There is nothing "disputed" about West Jerusalem, except...

The only people who believe that West Jerusalem belongs to the Palestinians are those who believe that Jews should be expelled from the entire country. As their chant goes, "From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free." The river is the Jordan and the sea is the Mediterranean; if you don't have a clear picture in your mind of what that looks like, please take a minute to Google it now. The "freedom" that chant describes is a Palestinian country that is *free of Jews*. (Mr. Abbas of the Palestinian Authority has sworn, repeatedly, that "not a single Jew will live in the Palestinian state." Talk about apartheid!) So recognizing that West Jerusalem is, indeed, the capitol of the State of Israel is not giving away anything to the Israelis except an acknowledgment that Israel has a right to exist. Which it does. Once again - sorry, world.

But why now? Actually, the timing of this recognition was perfect. In the past, any move that gave an advantage to either side was answered with riots, demonstrations and a lot of political pressure on Washington. But right now, every one of Israel's neighbors, including the ones that would support the Palestinian riots and demonstrations, is tied up in its own *mishigas*. In several cases, those countries are relying on the United States to bail them out. Which is why there was nothing more than lip-service spoken against the recognition by any Arab nation. Only the Palestinians have continued to fight this, and right now they are fighting alone. Even their own people have shown little interest: their demonstrations have been few and poorly attended. Many Palestinians said they did not participate in the demonstrations because they didn't want to be arrested, they wanted to keep their jobs, they didn't

want their kids to miss school... and because they did not believe they could change this. Which does not, by itself, make it right. But it makes it smart.

I do not assume that everyone reading this holds the same ideas about Israel, the Palestinians and the Middle East. I believe there will need to be a separate country for the Palestinians, but I do not believe it can be accomplished now. Many things have to change for this to happen, and I support several joint Israeli-Palestinian programs which are creating those changes, but we are not there yet. In the meantime, Jerusalem is the capitol of Israel. We Jews have known it for 3,000 years. The world has known it since 1948. And now, finally, the United States has declared we are going to stop pretending it's not.

Our ancestors fought and died for Jerusalem crying, "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand lose its strength." In 1948, hundreds of Jews died trying to hold on to the city. And in 1967 Jews reclaimed it. It is worth fighting for and dying for, and now President Trump accomplished it with the stroke of a pen. Astonishing.

May your *seder* and your Passover be filled with joy, love, hope and pride. And when we get to that famous line, let's say it like we mean it. ***Next year in Jerusalem!***