



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

LARISA M. DINSMOOR

Orange County Jewish Bar Association: Celebration and Reflection

April includes the last four days of Passover and Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day). In the spirit of connection, community, and unity, I highlight our affiliate bar, the Orange County Jewish Bar Association (OCJBA). OCJBA is unique from many other affiliate bar associations because the common denominator is law and culture/religion. As such, I would be remiss if I didn't mention Passover in this month's president's page. According to my Jewish friends and colleagues, Passover is one of the most significant holidays. It is a holiday about freedom and surviving a plague.

Jordon Steinberg founded OCJBA in 2010 to provide a social environment that engenders comradery among its members based on the Jewish traditions of Torah (law), Mitzvot (good deeds), and Tzedakah (justice/kindness) while practicing law and serving the community. OCJBA members include people from diverse Jewish ethnic and religious identities and denominations, and non-Jewish members.

OCJBA is famous for keeping meetings to less than five minutes to facilitate socializing. I personally enjoyed campaigning for OCBA Secretary at one of their meetings at Muldoon's in Newport Beach. OCJBA also serves the community and raises awareness about antisemitism, through education and partnership with multiple community organizations.

This year, OCJBA co-sponsored the California Lawyers Association's "Judaism, Law and Social Change," examining how inequality, antisemitism, faith, and culture inspired Jewish lawyers' roles in social justice efforts from the Civil Rights Movement to the Labor Movement. OCJBA also co-sponsored the OC J. Reuben Clark Law Society's annual "Religion & The Law Symposium," addressing the balance of religious freedoms with Emergency COVID-19 orders, and how the newly configured U.S. Supreme Court may approach religious freedom cases. OCJBA President, Sheila Marie Finkelstein, invites people to attend future events, such as a Holocaust Survivors Series (virtual) in collaboration with the Veterans Committee, a film festival, and law student mentoring program.

Celebration

OCJBA Board Member Susan Medwied states that Passover "is more biblical and historical than religious," and "involves retelling the story of Exodus when the Jews were released after 400 years of slavery and spent 40 years in the desert until reaching 'the promised land.'" The Honorable Judge Lon Hurwitz elaborates that "Passover is celebrated through a series of dinners over eight nights, and each dinner could take as long as nine hours as there are many prayers, and everyone participates." Sheila Marie Finkelstein explains that "The name Passover comes from the instructions the Jewish slaves received to paint their doors and stay inside so that their homes would be 'passed over' by the tenth plague." Passover is a time for Jews to celebrate, but it is also a message to us all that we can overcome anything, including a pandemic. This too shall pass over.

Reflection

In 2021, Yom HaShoah is observed on April 8. Congress established the Days of Remembrance for civic commemorations and Holocaust educational programs. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum leads observances and encourages remembrance activities, which will occur between April 4-11. I had the privilege to intern for Dr. Walter Laqueur, a Holocaust survivor, prolific author, and Editor of the *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, 2001. As his intern, I worked inside the Holocaust museum, choosing photos to be illustrated in the encyclopedia. It changed the way I viewed the world. Everyone should visit the museum at least once in their life.

I asked Jordon Steinberg about any meaning that could be associated between Passover and Yom HaShoah. He described the comparison of Passover to Yom HaShoah as "freedom to oppression, or love to hate." He queries: "Why are we as a nation still 'stuck' in deep-rooted racism that we tried so hard to extinguish? Hitler exterminated over six million Jews; Americans went to war to free slaves. What is the fear? . . . One lesson to be learned is that silence is deadly."

As our Jewish colleagues and friends celebrate Passover, I inquired how non-Jews can remember the Holocaust and ensure that it never happens again. Judge Hurwitz suggests: "Talk to your children or your grandchildren about what happened. Take them to the Holocaust Museum in L.A. Go to the museum's website. The most critical goal of Yom HaShoah is that what happened can never be forgotten; or it could happen again to other people." Justice Sheila Sonenshine adds, "When we see something wrong, we need to stand up, speak out, and do something." Several people I reached out to recommended that moving forward we should all remember the profound poem and message by Martin Niemöller:

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me. As we move through this year together, let us all make an extra effort to stand up to injustice when we see it.

The OCJBA is open to all. Please join them in their mission to uphold the law, encourage good deeds, and promote justice and kindness. Contact Sheila-Marie Finkelstein at smf@ahavalaw.com for more information.



Larisa M. Dinsmoor is 2021 OCBA President, an Orange County Public Defender, and co-chair of the OCBA's Racial Justice Task Force. She would love to hear from you at larisa@ocbar.org.