

## Passover, 2003 Stan Stahl, Ph.D.

Freedom is fragile. At no time is this more evident than at its birth. ... when old symmetries fracture apart and new, freedom-supporting ones, have not yet been formed. I imagine it as a kind of “big bang” where large-scale geopolitical forces and small-scale human forces collide to shape the emerging future of nascent freedom.

Freedom is very fragile in Iraq right now. We don't yet know whether Iraqi freedom will thrive or whether the opportunity it represents will wither and die in infancy. Much of this depends on the wisdom of our leaders and the strength of our will.

To survive, freedom in Iraq will have to grow from the inside-out, honoring, flowing with—not opposing—Iraq's long history and culture as one of the birthplaces of civilization. This is perhaps, the *sine qua non* of freedom: that it flow from the hopes and dreams and aspirations of the Iraqi people.

To survive, the values that are unique to freedom will have to be integrated into Iraq's values. The great words from our own Declaration of Independence—*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men [and women] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men [and women], deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed*—the values exemplified by these words will need to become integrated into “traditional Iraqi values.”

Iraqi freedom, if it is to survive, must be protected until it is strong enough to protect itself. Iraqi freedom has enemies, both inside and outside the country that would seek to subvert or destroy its freedom.

If it is to survive, Iraq's freedom must be genuine. We humans seem to have an innate ability to distinguish true freedom from such ersatz versions as are associated with paternalism and colonialism and communism and all the other “isms,” particularly when these are combined with economic exploitation.

Nothing would set back the cause of Iraqi freedom more than were America to be perceived to be using the liberation of the Iraqi people as a pretense to serve private American interests. Our interests in Iraq must be no more than the legitimate interests of America, as we defend ourselves against those who would do us harm. Using Iraq to serve other interests—particularly American oil interests—would not only set back the cause of freedom in Iraq, but would also amplify anti-American sentiment throughout the world. American know-how and technical capacity have a role to play in rebuilding Iraq. Nevertheless, it must be clear that this war was fought to serve America's interests, not Halliburton's. We, the people, should be prepared to hold the Administration accountable to this standard.

But let's expand our thinking. Let's not just think of the necessities for freedom's survival in Iraq. Imagine the opportunity in the Middle East if freedom in Iraq were to take root and thrive. Imagine 20 or 30 years from now, when, because of roots that took hold in Iraq in 2003, the Middle East is finally at peace.

I believe this opportunity—the opportunity for freedom to be a powerful force for good in Iraq, and, through Iraq, to the rest of the Middle-East—this opportunity imposes upon us a profound responsibility. I've always been moved by the key line in “Saving Private Ryan.” As Tom Hanks' Captain John Miller is dying from the German bullet he took saving Ryan, he says to Ryan: “Earn this.”

Lots of good people have died so that Iraqi freedom might be born. It is up to us, the living, to earn their deaths.

We must earn the deaths of so many thousands of innocent civilians, both in this war and the last, killed simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

We must earn the deaths of the thousands of Iraqi soldiers, who were forced into military service so they could die for Saddam Hussein.

We must earn the deaths of the thousands and thousands of people who were killed by Hussein and his legions over the last 25 years. America helped put Hussein in power, we supported him in his war with Iran, and we continued to support him until the day he invaded Kuwait. The fact that he was a necessary evil of the Cold War doesn't in any way diminish our obligation to those he murdered.

We have also to earn the deaths of our own soldiers, and the soldiers of our coalition forces. I've looked into the faces of our soldiers and seen their commitment to each other and to the cause of freedom. Our soldiers volunteered for service. In the cause of freedom, they courageously put themselves in harm's way. And for some ... they paid the ultimate price.

It is our duty to earn these deaths, so that they shall not have died in vain.

Wednesday evening is Passover, my favorite of the Jewish Holidays, for Passover celebrates the very birth of freedom on our planet.

On this Passover, let us all rededicate ourselves to the cause of freedom so that freedom may thrive not only in America, but in Iraq, in Israel, in Palestine ... indeed, in every nook and cranny of this large, but shrinking, world that is our home.

On this Passover, let us dedicate ourselves to the memories of those who died as slaves, never having the opportunity to bask in the warm glow of freedom.

On this Passover, let us dedicate ourselves to earning the gift we have been given by those who died so that we may be free.

This year we are free. Next year, may we all be free ... Let Freedom Ring.