

CHAPTER TWO

Judaism as an Exodus Religion: *Passover*

THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY of earth's human beings have always lived in poverty and under oppression, their lives punctuated by sickness and suffering. Few escape damaging illness; even fewer dodge the ravages of old age (except by untimely death); and no one, to date, has avoided death. Most of the nameless and faceless billions know the world as indifferent or hostile. Statistically speaking, human life is of little value. The downtrodden and the poor accept their fate as destined; the powerful and the successful accept good fortune as their due. Power, rather than justice, seems always to rule.

Jewish religion affirms otherwise: Judaism insists that history and the social-economic-political reality in which people live will eventually be perfected; much of what passes for the norm of human existence is really a deviation from the ultimate reality.

How do we know this? From an actual event in history—the Exodus. Mark the paradox: The very idea that much of history—present reality itself—is a deviation from the ideal and that redemption will overcome this divergence comes from a historic experience. That experience was the liberation of the Hebrew slaves, the Exodus from Egypt.

Around the middle of the second millennium B.C.E., the central Israelite family/tribe went down from Canaan to Egypt to escape from

famine. Although they were initially well received, the Hebrews later were reduced to slavery. Most of them sank into the apathy and exhaustion of servitude. Even a cruel decision by the Egyptians to destroy the people by killing all male infants stirred no action among the Israelites.

Then came a man named Moses, a Hebrew adopted and raised in the Egyptian court. He brought a message from the God of the Hebrew ancestors, calling the people to worship and to freedom. In a remarkable series of reversals, the Israelites were freed. When the Egyptians later pursued them, the Hebrews were miraculously saved and the Egyptian army destroyed.

On one level, this is a very specific incident in the particular history of a small Middle Eastern tribe. The entire event was so obscure at the time that no independent record of the liberation exists outside of the chronicle of this people. (It happens this people, brought into being by this particular event, went on to transform human consciousness. And its chronicle turned out to be the Bible, the single most influential book in human history.)

On another level, however, the entire experience is highly paradigmatic. Slavery is merely an exaggerated version of the reality endured by most human beings. Oppression and deprivation are not that dissimilar. The most devastating effect of slavery, ultimately, is that the slave internalizes the master's values and accepts the condition of slavery as his proper status. People who live in chronic conditions of poverty, hunger, and sickness tend to show similar patterns of acceptance and passivity. As with slaves, their deprivation derives from their political and economic status and then becomes moral and psychological reality. It is this reality that was overthrown in the Exodus.

The freeing of the slaves testified that *human beings are meant to be free*. History will not be finished until all are free. The Exodus shows that God is independent of human control. Once this is understood by tyrants and their victims then all human power is made relative. Freedom is the inexorable outcome, for only God's absolute power can be morally legitimate.

The Exodus further proves that *God is concerned*. God heard the cries of the Israelites, saw their suffering, and redeemed them. But the God of Israel who acted in the Exodus is the God of the whole world; God's love encompasses all of humankind. God's involvement with Israel is a concrete expression of God's universal mother love. In Jewish history, Exodus morality, from which Jewish ethics and Jewish rituals are derived, was made universal and applied to ever-widening circles of humankind. So the Messiah and the concept of a messianic realm are really implicit in the Exodus model itself. Messianic redemption is the Exodus writ large.

The initial impact of the redemption experience was to *set the Jewish people apart*. The Exodus is the beginning of Jewish existence as a holy (that is, unique) people. After the Exodus, Jewry remains anchored in history; the way of the world goes on with injustice, oppression, suffering. Therefore, there is enormous tension between the Exodus claim and the operational norms of every day. This puts faithful Jews at odds with the world, out of step with reality. It makes Jewish faith a testimony that Jews must give constantly until the rest of the world is persuaded. So the Jews are witnesses, outsiders and challengers, not infrequently the object of fear and anger. Jews and Judaism do compromise with the realities in an unredeemed world, but a special level of ethical behavior is demanded nevertheless—to meet the standards of Exodus.

A case in point: "Because you were outsiders in the land of Egypt" Jews were instructed to treat the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the landless—those who are vulnerable and marginal in every society—with compassion, generosity, and love. The land was distributed to all families. Debts were wiped out at the end of the sabbatical year so that no one need lose his land by foreclosure. If, nevertheless, the land had to be sold, then the family's relatives were commanded to redeem it. Finally, if all else failed, the land was restored to its original possessor in the jubilee year so there would be no permanent landless.

Yet, the redemption experience does not blot out reality. The Bible itself describes at some length how the liberated Jewish slaves carried the moral scars, the dependence, and the despair of slave status with them into freedom. In fact, Pharaoh remained in power and sought to undo the Exodus. This led to the final shattering of Pharaoh's power at the Red Sea. Still, the Bible tells that many other powers remained in the world to carry on policies similar to Pharaoh's—Amalek, Midian, Moab, the Emori, and so on.

No, the Exodus did not destroy evil in the world. What it did was set up an alternative conception of life. Were it not for the Exodus, humans would have reconciled themselves to the evils that exist in the world. The Exodus reestablishes the dream of perfection and thereby creates the tension that must exist until reality is redeemed. This orienting event has not yet been converted into a permanent reality, neither for Jews nor for the whole world, but it points the way to the end goal toward which all life and history must go. Thus, history counts, but it is not normative; it is something to be lived in, yet challenged and overcome.

The Exodus model implies that a partnership between God and humanity will carry out the transformation of the world. Despite the glorification of God and divine power in the biblical accounts, God is, from the beginning, dependent, as it were, on human testimony for

awareness of the Divine Presence. The accessibility of God is subject to the behavior of the people of Israel. The Jewish covenant, the people's undertaking to live by the Exodus, points to a mutual dependency. Furthermore, inasmuch as the Exodus occurred in history, so will the messianic age also remain in history. This idea is in contrast to the development of Christian messianism. The early Christians experienced Jesus as the redeemer in their midst. Having experienced the Messiah's "actual presence," the Christians were tormented by the contradictions between his coming, which should have brought the Exodus for all, and the reality of a world that was still unredeemed. One way to resolve this conflict was by denying that the Messiah had come. But for some, the experience of his coming was too strong to deny. Another interpretation was then explored. Somehow the nature of messianic redemption had been misunderstood; the true messiah was not in the external *physical* world but in the internal *spiritual* world. Driven by the dissonance of the continued existence of a suffering world in which abuse of power remained unchecked, Christians ended up changing the very notion of messianism. They translated the concept of messianic redemption into a state of personal salvation, thus removing it from the realm of history. In coming up with this solution, they were acting on the Jewish Exodus model but resolving its tensions in a manner that eventually turned them away from Judaism.

The Jews who remained Jews, who remained faithful to the historical character of the Exodus, continued to insist that redemption could not be fully realized without social, political, and economic liberation as well as spiritual fulfillment.

Where does Israel get the strength—the *chutzpah*—to go on believing in redemption in a world that knows mass hunger and political exile and boat people? How can Jews testify to hope and human value when they have been continuously persecuted, hated, dispelled, destroyed? Out of the memories of the Exodus! "So that you remember the day you went out of Egypt all the days of your life" (Deuteronomy 16:3). The Jewish tradition takes this biblical ideal literally.

But the more people comprehend the Exodus lessons of human value and love, the greater their pain in experiencing the exploitation routinely encountered in the world. The enormity of human suffering, which continues to exist as if there had been no Exodus, challenges the belief that there *ever was* an Exodus. The world taunts the believer, suggesting that being bound by the Exodus ties one's hands. In a society that accounts personal power supreme, why limit one's gains for a will-o'-the-wisp dream? So the Exodus faith must be renewed continually if Jews are not to surrender its norms.

How can we create a continuing set of Exodus experiences powerful enough to offset the impact of present evil? The challenge is to make

the Exodus experience vivid enough in an ongoing way to counter but not blot out the unredeemed experiences of life. The goal is not to flee from reality but to be motivated to perfect it. To cope with contradiction and not to yield easily, the memory must be a "real" experience, something felt in one's bones, tasted in one's mouth. This is why much of Jewish religion consists of reliving the Exodus. "Remember . . . all the days of your life," says the Torah. The Rabbis added that the Exodus should be recounted every night as well. It is as if the hope would crumble if it were not reaffirmed every few hours.

Ceremonial remembrances of the Exodus event are included in the Pentateuchal texts inside the *tefillin* (phylacteries) which are donned every weekday. The Exodus story, complete with the song of redemption at the Red Sea, is recited daily in prayers, shortly before the community gives the affirmation in the Sh'ma prayer that "the Lord our God is the One Lord." The essence of the Exodus event is retold and the blessing for redemption is uttered immediately before Jews rise for the silent central Jewish prayer (Shmoneh Esrei) to ask for their personal and communal needs. The tzitzit—a special fringed undergarment—is worn every day; it reminds of the Exodus. By following a spiritual regimen of choosing and restricting food, Jews remind themselves that God took them out of Egypt to be holy in order to witness to the world. Shabbat becomes *zecher l'yetziat mitzrayim*; Jews live this day in memory of the Exodus. Every week, on the seventh day, Jews assert their Exodus freedom by not working; their servants and even beasts of burden are released from labor on the Sabbath.

The "reliving" model shows the thin line between the sacred and the secular in Judaism. The celebration of Passover, the annual commemoration of Exodus, seems to be all ritual or "sacred" activity: prohibited foods (leavened bread), specially prepared and required foods (unleavened bread, bitter herbs), and holy time when work is prohibited and sacrifice and prayer are required. Yet reliving the Exodus directly translates into political behavior (overthrowing tyrants, freeing slaves), economic behavior (distributing land to all families), legal behavior (justice for strangers and orphans).

The psychological function of religious observance is to confirm and strengthen the conviction that the Exodus happened. But one would be guilty of trivializing to see the "reliving" model in purely psychological terms. Underlying Judaism's ritual system is a metaphysical statement about the nature of reality—specifically, of time. The Exodus teaches us that history is not an eternal recurrence—ever repeating but never progressing—but a time stream with direction. History is not a meaningless cycle but the path along which the Divine-human partnership is operating to perfect the world. Time is linear, not merely circular; all humans are walking toward the end

time when the final peace and dignity for humankind will be accomplished.

Throughout the generations this view of history has been an enormous source of hope, galvanizing humans to major efforts to improve their conditions. Especially in modern times, this concept—in secularized forms—has powered liberalism with its promise of progress, and revolutionary radicalism with its expectations of breakthroughs and even of apocalypse. But in modern cultural understanding, time is perceived as only linear; once lived, it is gone. Hence there is a strong tendency to put aside the past as irrelevant. Indeed, many modern movements dismiss sacred time as pure projection, as an opiate of the masses. Yet Judaism insists that the past is available and still normative. Judaism celebrates it as a present channel of access to the Eternal and as a source of hope and renewal for the masses. Through the holiday cycle of the year and other rituals, the past can be summoned up to infuse the present with meaning. Passover, the Exodus, is not some antiquarian past experience: It is present reality. The taste of perfection in a Passover or a Shabbat creates dissatisfaction; that prevents the Jew from slipping into equilibrium with the current reality that he/she inhabits. Thus, in true Jewish dialectical fashion, time is both linear and cyclical. The implied claim of Passover is that in sacred time and ritual, believers can step outside the stream of secular, normal time and *relive the Exodus itself*.

THE REENACTMENT

Passover is the ultimate attempt to involve people in the experience of Exodus. On the yearly anniversary of its occurrence, the entire Exodus from slavery to freedom is recreated in song, story, food, and dress so that it is experienced as an actual happening. Although some models for reenactment are found in the Bible, it is left to every generation and every family to create the total experience. Everyday, homey aspects of life—food, table setting, cooking, dress, conversation, singing—are shaped and fused to create a transcendental reality. What could be frailer than flesh and blood and the gossamer thread of words? Yet together they establish a foundation so powerful that it can carry the weight of the centuries-old drive to perfect the world.

The goal is to go back thousands of years and to experience, first, the crushing bitterness and despair of slavery and, next, the wild, exhilarating release of freedom. The reenactment stretches for seven days, eight days for traditional Diaspora Jews. On the first nights at the festive meal or seder, through use of the haggadah, the family restages the night of the actual exit from Egypt.

Properly staged, the seder is the climax of liberation. On this night oblivion yields up its prey. Pharaoh's tyranny and genocide stalk the land again. But the Jewish people rise up and set out for the Promised Land—slave again, free again, born again.

Two major observances of the Passover holiday are still practiced by most Jews. One is the exclusion of chametz (leavened grain products) and the eating of the matzah (unleavened bread) and associated observances; the other is the retelling of the Exodus story in the haggadah at the seder and in the Torah reading in the synagogue.

In the biblical era there was a third major observance: bringing the Paschal sacrifice, the lamb. The entire family joined in one common sacrifice. The size of the lamb was chosen to suffice the family (or associated families and guests) at that meal. No one ate alone on this evening and nothing was to be left over from the sacrifice. If an individual had no family, he or she joined with friends or another family so there would be a group to share the lamb fully. One of the primary hallmarks of freedom is this capacity for solidarity. A slave thinks only of himself and the next meal. The reassertion of the family unit was the first signal that the Israelites were readying themselves for freedom.

Jewish tradition understood the sacrifice of the lamb to be the first step of liberation. Even when God is the deliverer, freedom cannot simply be bestowed. People must participate in their own emancipation. According to the biblical accounts, on the tenth of the month of Nissan, the Hebrew slaves acted for the first time on their own initiative (Moses' instructions rather than Pharaoh's) and sacrificed a lamb so they could sprinkle its blood on the doorpost and be spared the final plague. Because the lamb was worshiped in Egypt, sacrificing one to Israel's God constituted an act of self-assertion and repudiation of the master.

In biblical times, the Paschal sacrifice was so central that the word Pesach (Passover), simply used, could refer either to the sacrifice or to the holiday. Failure to join in the Passover sacrifice meal meant cutting oneself off from the Jewish people, denying the common destiny and experience of the folk. When the Temple was destroyed, ending all sacrifice, the central ritual act was ripped out of the Passover holiday, so rabbinic Jews expanded every other procedure to focus on communicating the lesson of liberation. What the sacramental Temple sacrifice could not fully accomplish, the participatory seder could.

Today, the Paschal lamb is remembered by the presence of the shank bone (Hebrew *zeroa*) on the seder plate. There is also a tradition not to eat dry roasted meat on the seder night. Since the Paschal lamb was roasted dry, the absence of such meat dramatizes the missing sacrifice. (The holiday Torah reading also incorporates an account of the sacrifice.)

PREPARING FOR FREEDOM

Freedom is not given in a day or reached overnight. The house of bondage is within you; it will accompany you unless you are psychologically ready to be free. It follows that people must prepare themselves, mentally and physically, before they can relive the liberation experience. In Jewish tradition, getting ready for the Exodus begins a month before the holiday itself. It is customary to start studying the laws and procedures of Passover thirty days before the holiday. The other anticipatory step is to begin collecting "money for wheat" (*maos chitim*), a fund for matzot, wine, and other food necessary for the poor to celebrate Passover properly. All Jewish holidays and celebrations are occasions to share with the needy.

Psychological preparation for emancipation focuses on rejection of *chametz* (bread and other leavened grain products). Bread is a leavened grain product that has undergone fermentation. Fermentation is achieved by adding liquid and/or yeast to dough, then baking, with sufficient time allowed for the fermenting process. The heat and chemical reaction drive air through the dough, causing it to rise. The Bible mentions that in the Exodus the Hebrews had to prepare food hastily, at the last moment. In ancient times the primary food was bread; the Israelites "baked the dough that they took out of Egypt in the form of matzot [that is, unleavened cakes]; it was not leavened because *they could not delay*" (Exodus 12:39). Jews now eat matzah to identify with that liberation. Turning one's back on all forms of leaven (*chametz*) became a central metaphor for escaping slavery.

Chametz is the Hebrew technical term for any one of five basic types of food grain (wheat, rye, spelt, barley, and oats) that is mixed with water and allowed to ferment. Fermentation generally takes eighteen minutes, assuming that the mixture is not worked or kneaded during this time. In preparation for Passover, traditional Jews totally eliminate *chametz*—not just bread but any and all forms of leaven—from the house and the diet. This is a symbolic statement of cutting off from the old slave existence and entering the new condition of living as a free person. The decisive break with previous diet is the outward expression of the internal break with slavery and dependence. For the modern celebrant, it is a critical step in the process of liberation that finally leads to freedom.

In an expansion of the metaphor, *chametz* became a symbol of what is allowed to stand around. *Chametz* signified staleness and deadening routine; getting rid of it became the symbol of freshness and life growth. Since Passover occurs in the spring, the total cleaning of the house to eliminate leaven was easily expanded to a comprehensive

spring cleaning. Throwing out accumulated staleness and the dead hand of winter, cleaning the house and changing utensils became a psychological backdrop for reenacting emancipation. Thus, house-cleaning became part of a cosmic process.

Jewish law not only prohibited eating chametz but forbade its presence during Passover. It was not to be found in the house or even to be seen there at that time.

It may be that the total ban is meant to underscore the stark opposition between the realm where Exodus is the rule and the world according to the status quo. There will be time enough in the Shavuot covenant to temporize with human nature or on the Sukkot journey to compromise with entrenched evil. On this, the breakthrough holiday, the Torah wishes to draw a line in the sand. Choose the God of freedom or choose the Baal of oppression. If you choose the freedom of God, then not a trace of the past servitude is allowed in your life.

The chametz boycott went to great lengths. Not only were bread and cookies forbidden, but whiskey, beer and beverages derived from one of the five types of prohibited grain were also considered chametz. According to Orthodox practice, the shunning is extended to include any product in which chametz is merely an ingredient (ta'arovess chametz). When most other forbidden substances are accidentally mixed with a kosher product, the product may still be eaten if the nonkosher element is less than one part in sixty. But if a product is mixed with even the most minor traces of chametz (less than one part in a thousand!), it may not be used on Passover. Special supervision of manufacturing processes and rabbinical certification that no chametz ingredients have been used are sought for foods that year-round contain admixtures of chametz. In the United States, soda, dried fruits, ground pepper, vinegar, horseradish, and seltzer are among the likely candidates and need reliable supervision. (Since there are numerous complexities in these laws, it is wise to consult with a rabbi if any problem arises.)

Since the emotional dynamic in Passover's special dietary laws is an attempt to act out total avoidance of chametz, Jews of every generation sought additional ways to express the cutoff. In the medieval period, it was noted that grains other than the original five were being ground to obtain flour for food preparation. Although these grains do not undergo fermentation, a flour or breadlike substance could be made from them. Those products resembled chametz products. Thus, in Ashkenazic (north European) Jewish communities, products made from lima beans, kidney beans, peas, rice, corn, peanuts, buckwheat, and mustard were guilty by association and were added to the proscribed list. Because these foodstuffs were not really chametz, only the *eating* of these products was prohibited. Use of non-edible forms (such as corn-

starch for pressing shirts) was not banned. Interestingly, Sephardic (Iberian and Mediterranean) Jewish communities never made this association (except for some Turkish communities that shun rice). This explains why devout, observant Sephardim freely eat products on Passover that equally devout Ashkenazic Jews prohibit.

A chametz-free total environment is the Passover goal, so any place where chametz was or might have been used during the year is thoroughly checked and cleaned lest any chametz has been left behind. In devout homes, this search is so detailed that it compares with the need to manufacture computer chips in totally dust-free environments to avoid flaws or failures in operation.

There is a story told about Rabbi Joshua of Kutno, a nineteenth-century east European rabbi considered an expert on the laws of chametz prohibition. His wife cleaned the kitchen surfaces and poured boiling water over them as per various kashering requirements. She took out every book in the library and opened it by the binding so the paper fanned out to release any crumbs of chametz that might possibly have fallen into the books while someone was eating and reading. Then, in an excess of zeal, she took the rabbi's favorite bench, scoured it, and poured boiling water over it. The poor rabbi sat down on a hot, wet bench, leaped up in consternation, and said to her, "Why did you do that? There is no halachic basis for such acts. Why, the Shulchan Aruch [the authoritative Code of Jewish Law] does not require you to ritually cleanse a reading bench!" To which his wife indignantly replied: "Hmph! If I was so lax as to operate by the rules of the Shulchan Aruch alone, this house would be *chametz-dig* (*chametz-y*)!" The rabbi had the legalities right, but the rebbitzen was expressing the psychology of centuries of Jews who "made" Passover.

In early times, chametz and its products were used up, thrown out, or given away before Passover. But as commercial (or at least large) quantities of chametz grew, forced disposal of them could cause heavy financial losses. A new procedure was developed to reduce the economic burden: A nominal amount of chametz was disposed of by burning, but valuable or irreplaceable chametz was locked out of sight and "sold" to a Gentile so that it was not owned by the Jew on Passover. In time it became convenient to arrange sale through an agent. Today, the process is usually done through the rabbi of the synagogue. The sale must be completed by the sixth hour on the day before Passover.

In *mechirat chametz* (chametz sale), a contract is drawn up stipulating all the possible types of chametz to be sold. The immediate location of the chametz is listed and is leased to the purchaser. In this way, the principle of not having chametz in one's own home is upheld. The seller authorizes the rabbi to act as his agent in selling the chametz on

any terms. (The chametz is not being sold to the rabbi but by the rabbi.) The rabbi pools all the chametz of all the sellers into a master contract (somewhat like a mutual fund) and arranges to sell it to a non-Jew who understands the legal niceties of the contract.

Since the sum value of all the chametz may be quite large, the rabbi typically sells it in a contract that specifies a nominal down payment and a promissory note for the rest. Final and full payment is stipulated for the night following the eighth day of Passover. The rabbi is given a lien on the property. Failure to make the final full payment constitutes default by the buyer. Legal possession of the property is then reclaimed by the rabbi, who transfers it back to those who have appointed the rabbi their agent. Should the buyer decide to make the final payment and collect on the purchase, a problem would arise; mysteriously enough, no Gentile in history has ever made the final payment.

The rabbis were so anti-chametz that if a Jew kept possession of chametz on Pesach, they ruled that chametz should never be used nor should one derive any profit or pleasure from it. Traditional Jews buy new chametz products right after Pesach from a non-Jew or from a Jew who definitely sold his chametz before the holiday. In my childhood in Boro Park, most of the supermarkets were part of such Jewish-owned chains as Food Fair and Waldbaum's. In those days, they did business as usual on Passover. The A&P, then owned by Gentiles, was the great beneficiary of this rule because we bought our cereals there right after Passover. If in doubt about whether a Jewish supermarket's chametz stock was sold, traditional people wait to buy chametz until they can be reasonably certain that a new, post-Pesach delivery of chametz has been made.

In further preparation, refrigerators, sinks, and tables are cleaned thoroughly. Stoves and food preparation surfaces are cleaned and covered with foil or other materials. In Orthodox practice, special Passover pots, dishes, and silverware are used because the year-round utensils may have absorbed trace elements of chametz. Since this shift is not always possible or a family might not be able to afford the extra ware, a process of *kashering* (that is, making fit for kosher use) is used. The principle of kashering is that the process by which a substance is absorbed into a vessel is the same process by which it is removed. After thoroughly cleaning off all visible surface chametz, the chametz residue is removed by cleaning or heating equivalent to the maximum use that may have caused the chametz absorption. The oven, for example, is cleaned thoroughly with chemical cleaners and not used for twenty-four hours. Then it is heated to its maximum temperature, the fire kept burning for several hours or as long as its longest use.

Top burners of the stove are cleaned thoroughly and the flame turned on for at least one hour. (They turn red hot.) In an electric range, the filament is cleaned the same way. Since microwave ovens do not generate much heat during cooking, they are kashered by full cleaning, a twenty-four-hour wait, and then steaming with a pot of boiling water.

Following the same heat purification principle, sinks are kashered by pouring boiling water over all surfaces; racks are then placed on the bottom of the sink for the duration of the holiday period to prevent contact between Passover utensils and a surface that had been in use all year. Year-round utensils directly used on the fire without the intermediation of water (pans, broilers, barbecue spits) require heating to the point where they glow. Pots and flatware are totally immersed in boiling water. Earthenware and china cannot be kashered because they are considered too porous and absorbent for chametz removal. Glassware is kashered by soaking in cold water for seventy-two hours, changing the water every twenty-four hours (the water must overflow the vessel). Glassware with a small neck cannot be kashered, nor can Pyrex dishes that have been used directly on the fire. Beaters and cutters on motor-driven mixers and food processors are replaced; but first the motor housings are opened so that chametz can be brushed off the coils.

If all this sounds like overkill, understand that it was the outgrowth of a fierce desire to really begin a new life.

This whole process of chametz can be likened to preparation for an orbital mission: The goal is a successful liftoff into freedom. The final countdown begins on the day before Passover.

Twenty-four hours to Passover!

On the evening of 14 Nissan, after dark, preferably immediately after the stars come out, the house is given a final check. This is known as *Bedikas Chametz*, the chametz hunt. *Bedikas Chametz* is not just a ceremony. Every room in the house is searched thoroughly for chametz, usually by the light of a candle, although the use of a flashlight may be safer. Traditional kits include a candle, a feather to sweep up the chametz, and a bag to deposit it in. (Refer to a *haggadah* for the full text of the ceremony.) This is an excellent ceremony in which to involve children. One can offer prizes for MVC (Most Valuable Chametz-finder), for the kid-who-did-not-set-fire-to-the-bedspreads-this-year, or straight cash ("find chametz, get bread"). Customarily, some pieces of chametz are "hidden" in advance to ensure that the search will be successful and the blessing not said in vain. Following the search, people set aside any chametz to be eaten before end time, and they disown and renounce any other unsold chametz that may still be in the home. At this point, well-organized fami-

lies have already put away their year-round utensils. Dishes, silverware, and utensils specially dedicated to Passover use are brought out.

Nine hours to go: By the fourth hour of daylight, all eating of chametz ceases. Nevertheless, one refrains from eating matzah, so that the first taste of matzah (freedom) at the seder will be fresh and exciting. All unsold chametz remaining in the house is disposed of by burning, preferably, or by any other means of annihilation. Following the burning, Kol Chamira—the formula of renunciation—is recited again.

Seven hours to go: Authorization for the rabbi to sell chametz to a Gentile must be given by the sixth hour of daylight because it takes time to consummate the sale. (Similarly, some time is allowed after the holiday for the rabbi to reclaim ownership of the chametz.) In the last hours, it is customary to prepare the seder table and the Passover foods, to shower and change into holiday clothing, and to get into the spirit of Passover. Households are often quite chaotic at this juncture, with all the pressures of a last-minute countdown.

Another custom of emancipation also developed for the day before Passover. Firstborn sons fast until nightfall; a parent can fast on behalf of the firstborn if he is still a child. This act signals gratitude that Jewish children were spared when the firstborn of Egypt were decimated in the tenth plague. In lieu of fasting, a tradition has grown for the firstborn to attend a special occasion called a *siyum* (completion). An individual or group completes study of a tractate of the Talmud in public and then invites everyone to participate in a *seudat mitzvah*—the celebration meal that follows. Those who take part are permitted to eat for the rest of the day as well.

THE BREAD OF FREEDOM

Just as shunning chametz is the symbolic statement of leaving slavery behind, so is eating matzah the classic expression of entering freedom.

Matzah was the food the Israelites took with them on the Exodus. "They baked the dough which they took out of Egypt into unleavened cakes [matzot], for it was not leavened, since they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared provisions for themselves" (Exodus 12:39). According to this passage, matzah is the hard bread that Jews initially ate in the desert because they plunged into liberty without delaying. However, matzah carries a more complex message than "Freedom now!" Made only of flour and water, with no shortening, yeast, or enriching ingredients, matzah recreates the hard "bread of affliction" (Deuteronomy 16:3) and meager food given to the Hebrews in Egypt by their exploitative masters. Like the

bitter herbs eaten at the seder, it represents the degradation and suffering of the Israelites.

Matzah is, therefore, both the bread of freedom and the erstwhile bread of slavery. It is not unusual for ex-slaves to invert the very symbols of slavery to express their rejection of the masters' values. But there is a deeper meaning in the double-edged symbolism of matzah. It would have been easy to set up a stark dichotomy: Matzah is the bread of the Exodus way, the bread of freedom; chametz is the bread eaten in the house of bondage, in Egypt. Or vice versa: Matzah is the hard ration, slave food; chametz is the rich, soft food to which free people treat themselves. That either/or would be too simplistic. Freedom is in the psyche, not in the bread.

The halacha underscores the identity of chametz and matzah with the legal requirement that matzah can be made only out of grains that can become chametz—that is, those grains that ferment if mixed with water and allowed to stand. How the human prepares the dough is what decides whether it becomes chametz or matzah. How you view the matzah is what decides whether it is the bread of liberty or of servitude.

The point is subtle but essential. To be fully realized, an Exodus must include an inner voyage, not just a march on the road out of Egypt. The difference between slavery and freedom is not that slaves endure hard conditions while free people enjoy ease. The bread remained equally hard in both states, but the psychology of the Israelites shifted totally. When the hard crust was given to them by tyrannical masters, the matzah they ate in passivity was the bread of slavery. But when the Jews willingly went from green fertile deltas into the desert because they were determined to be free, when they refused to delay freedom and opted to eat unleavened bread rather than wait for it to rise, the hard crust became the bread of freedom. Out of fear and lack of responsibility, the slave accommodates to ill treatment. Out of dignity and determination to live free, the individual will shoulder any burden.

The great Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, whose analyses always portrayed the people of Israel in a favorable light, insisted that the willingness of the Israelites to enter the desert with hard bread continues to evoke God's love. Levi Yitzchak asked: Why does the Torah continually call Passover *chag hamatzot*—the feast of unleavened bread—while the Jews call it *chag haPesach*—the feast of Passover? Because as lovers they stress each other's goodness. Israel praises God who *passed over* the homes of the Jews when destroying Egypt. God praises the Jews who went so trustingly out of the fertile plain of Egypt into a barren desert with meager food.

Tradition specifically requires eating unleavened bread on the first two nights of Passover. (Dieters will be happy to learn that during the

individuals typically are passive consumers. The seder challenges each family to narrate its own version of the Greatest Story Ever Told with each member actively involved. Over the years a script has evolved called the Haggadah, the book of retelling.

No two family seders are alike. Each seder leader is a director who is challenged to fascinate the audience. Over the years I have observed every kind of seder director, from very traditional to very creative. Most lead a standard seder, but some have attained the level of *auteur*. Some can be compared to Alfred Hitchcock striving for mystery, surprises, concrete details that arrest the mind. Some are like Cecil B. De Mille—popular, full of sweep and schmaltz and grandiosity. I have even heard of Woody Allen-type seders—full of self-mocking humor and understatement. (Let's face it. The Exodus wasn't that successful. Look at how many people got their feet wet in the Red Sea, caught cold, and sneezed their way through the Ten Commandments, missing half the lines. "Thou shalt [sneeze!] commit adultery.")

Every detail of the seder is designed to deepen the feeling of well-being and freedom. Traditional Jews recline when eating, recalling an old Persian tradition that masters (free people) reclined on divans while servants waited on them. Many families follow the custom of providing pillows or chair cushions to give participants a sense of being treated like royalty. In some medieval Sephardic communities people enhanced their reenactment by dressing for a journey—with girded loins, sandals on feet, a staff at hand, and packs on their backs.

The centerpiece of the seder is the plate on which traditional symbols of Passover are arranged. The plate includes three matzot used at different times during the meal. In a popular interpretation, they symbolize the three kinds of Jews: Kohanim (priests), Levites and Israelites. One of the tasks of a people seeking independence is to establish its unity of vision and purpose as well as its unity in struggle. Slaves are set one against another. Some are totally subservient to the masters; some try only to save themselves; some try to break out. Jewish unity is as indispensable to survival now as it was then. The three types together symbolize the unity of fate of the Jewish people.

Among the other seder symbols is a remembrance of the Paschal sacrifice, the zeroa. This Hebrew word also recalls the *zeroa netooyah* [outstretched hand] with which the Lord redeemed Israel. The plate also contains an egg, boiled and then roasted, in remembrance of the *chagiga*, the regular holiday sacrifice in the Temple; *maror*—bitter herb (romaine lettuce or horseradish root) to summon up the bitterness of servitude; and *charoset*—a melange of chopped nuts, apples, wine, and cinnamon. In folk imagination, charoset resembles the mortar used by the Israelite slaves building for the Egyptians. At the meal, the maror is dipped in charoset to temper the bitterness of the taste. In

addition, there is salt water for dipping and a special cup set aside as the cup of Elijah (reserved for Elijah the Prophet, the bearer of tidings of the coming of the Messiah, that is, of the final redemption).

The preparation of the seder is part of the anticipation and "tuning in" process. All members of the family are encouraged to help prepare (make charoset, set the table, practice reading parts of the haggadah narration, research the history or geography of the Exodus, and so forth). It is traditional to invite others—the poor, the extended family, friends. Sharing or reaching beyond the self is a fundamental mark of free people.

The seder uses games, songs, and special actions to involve everyone. Dialogue, question-and-answer, and text-and-elaboration formats also serve to keep participation high. Parents initiate the story, but children's questions, songs, riddles, and arguments all underscore their key role in fulfilling the biblical instruction to "tell the saga in the hearing of your children and grandchildren . . . and you will know that I am the Lord" (Exodus 10:3).

The unfolding of the story follows a traditional arrangement, immortalized under the following rubrics:

Kadesh (sanctify): Kiddush (the sanctification blessings) is recited after nightfall. This consecrates the holiday. Jewish celebrations and holy days are usually marked by reciting a blessing and drinking a cup of wine. The human being is a union of body and soul. A drop of alcohol as well as good food are part of the celebration for the well-being of the body creates the context for uplift of the soul.

The opening kiddush is the first of four cups of wine drunk on this night to exult in the four types of redemption with which God blessed Israel: God took them out of their burdens and suffering, saved them from hard labor, liberated them with mighty acts, and dedicated them as a holy people. Each of these steps is a different experience; after all, the process of liberation takes struggle and new self-insights. The first stage during the Exodus involved the removal of hard labor, but overthrow of oppression may leave a people empty of meaning. The final stage is the dedication of Israel to a new calling—becoming God's witnesses.

Each cup should have a different effect. (The larger the cup you drink from, the more likely each will have an additional impact.) Tradition suggests that the cup should contain at least three and a half ounces of wine. If you cannot drink wine, dilute it with or even substitute grape juice; in a pinch, you can even dilute grape juice with water.

Although women are generally not obligated to fulfill time-bound commandments in the Orthodox tradition, on this occasion women are required to drink four cups as well because "for the sake of

rest of the holiday the only requirement is *not* to eat chametz.) Eating hard bread during the holiday of liberation stimulates appreciation for the flavor of freedom and summons up empathy for those still in need. At the seder, the Exodus retelling opens with the phrase, "This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in Egypt." The moral consequence follows immediately: "Let all who are hungry enter and eat; let all who are in need come and join in the Passover with us. This year [we are] slaves. Next year [may the slaves be] free." The hard crust commands us to help the poor, the stranger, the outsider.

The Torah states: "You shall watch over the matzot" (Exodus 12:17). This verse was interpreted as instruction to guard against fermentation during the preparation and matzah-baking process. Since fermentation takes eighteen minutes, properly supervised matzot will be baked within that time frame. All pieces of dough not baked are removed before the next batch is inserted. Only in the past century did machine-made matzot for the most part replace hand-prepared or baked matzot of old—and not without significant resistance.

Among traditional Jews the concept of watching over the matzot was expanded to mean supervising the preparation so that all ingredients are set aside from the very beginning for the express purpose of fulfilling the mitzvah of eating matzah. Some Jews try to obtain—at least for the first two nights of Passover—matzot that have been under continual supervision from the time of cutting the grain until baking. This is known as *matzah shmurah* (that is, specially watched matzah). Since the market is limited, preparation of matzah shmurah is generally in the hands of noncommercial bakers. Like vintage wine, it costs more and has to be specially ordered.

If this tradition discourages you, keep in mind that we are just getting down to fine points and that, as in all things, one can be a "connoisseur" of halacha. (There are two levels of matzah shmurah, for example: machine-made and handmade.) Aficionados insist that different Chasidic groups make matzot of subtly different taste.

Eating shmurah does require intestinal fortitude. Still, if you like to live dangerously, you should arrange to purchase hand-baked matzah shmurah made by various Yeshivot and Chasidic groups. The regular machine-made matzah often seems too pleasant to be truly the bread of affliction, whereas this handmade matzah will give you that old-time flavor of slavery.

RELIVING THE EXODUS: THE SEDER AS THE EXODUS MEAL

As twilight turns toward night, candles are lit to usher in the holy time of liberation. The two blessings, "to light the holiday candle" and *She-*

hecheyanu ("who has kept us alive...until this time"), deepen the sense that redemption is in the air. Then services in the synagogue intensify the mood; in the central Amidah prayer, Passover is described as "the time of our freedom."

But the seder meal is the most powerful vehicle for recreating the Exodus. The seder meal takes place on the first night of Passover (on the first two nights, in traditional communities outside of Israel). The seder is a family meal. This accounts for its great popularity. Over ninety percent of American Jews report attending one annually. But behind a facade of eating and pleasant socializing, a stunning pedagogical drama unfolds. The seder script lays out the actions by which the participants mime the liberation process. In its details and, more important, in its very structure, the seder induces the experience of going from slavery to liberty, and it offers a definition of the nature of freedom.

The family character of the meal is not adventitious; it is a central part of the message. What happens in the seder? In the first phase one reenters the world of slavery through food experiences and story. Then comes a transition-to-freedom phase as the meal gradually turns into the sumptuous feast of the free. Reaching freedom, one has a powerful sense of appreciation and gratitude. The seder, then, teaches that freedom involves making a livelihood and taking care of others, especially one's family. Often such responsibilities create daily frustrations. But compared to slavery...

It is the mark of freedom that one can have a family, enjoy a meal with its members, look out for it, and protect it. A slave is unable to maintain a family. The slave woman is available to the master; children's paternity is doubtful. A slave cannot protect the children from being sold, or worse. The ability to sit together as a family at the seder and sing a song of liberation is in itself the most powerful statement of being free.

In the initial phase, the slave often longs to go back to slavery. The taste of freedom is designed to communicate the permanence of freedom. In transition, particularly, the slave often thinks of freedom as the right to be carefree or to abuse others and to lord it over them, as was done to him or her. But true freedom means accepting the ethics of responsibility. Family is a great symbol of that commitment. Freedom does not mean avoiding involvement or being free of cares. Freedom means freely choosing commitment and obligations that bring out the individual's humanity; servitude means carrying out orders dictated by others.

The word *seder* means order, a ritualized progression. It is like a dramatic pageant in which symbolic and ritual acts create a reality to move the actors and the audience through a reappropriation of the Exodus. This is in contrast to most of life's other dramas in which

righteous women, we are delivered from Egypt." In the egalitarian traditions, women should certainly share this observance.

U'rechatz: Hands are ritually washed; a cup of water is poured over each hand three times. This symbolizes the removal of impurity, the routine of previous activity. For this first washing on the night of Passover, no blessing is recited. Some explain that this extra washing is designed to elicit children's questions. In other words, some behavior on this night should be offbeat, to arouse awareness that something unusual is happening.

Karpas: A vegetable is dipped in salt water. The blessing recited before it is eaten, "*borei pri ha'adamah*" (who creates the fruit of the earth), applies to the maror (bitter herb) eaten later as well. Some say the salt dip is a symbol of the tears of the Jews in Egypt. Others explain that dipping is merely another way to pique the children's interest.

Yachatz: The three matzot are now uncovered, and the middle matzah is split. Poor people who cannot afford whole loaves often eat broken loaves, so the breaking of the matzah expresses the concept of matzah as the bread of affliction. (The whole matzah that is used to make the blessing over the matzah, then, is the symbol of the bread of freedom.) In the early part of the seder, participants relive slavery. The saltwater dip and the broken matzah communicate the tears and deprivation.

The larger part of the broken matzah is hidden to be used as *afikoman*—another routine designed to involve children—while the smaller half is used for the matzah-eating ceremony later in the seder. Traditionally, the children seek out the hidden matzah half, "steal" it, and hold it for ransom at the end of the meal.

Maggid (Telling): The formal narrative of the redemption of Israel from Egypt now begins. The story is embellished, using the imagination and the learning of those present; the significance of the event then and now is dramatized. The commandment to tell of the Exodus is considered to be truly fulfilled only when the story is passed from parent to child in a meaningful manner so that it comes alive for both.

Since the involvement of the child is crucial to learning, the story-telling begins with four questions, traditionally asked by the youngest one present. The child's curiosity has been aroused. In effect, the question is: Why are you acting so strangely tonight? Why do Jews act differently? The answer that unfolds is: Something extraordinary has happened. The lives of the Jewish people and of all the people in the world will never be the same. Exodus is the sounding of hope for eternity.

As the story unfolds, the past becomes present, so that old and young relive it together and are united in the experience. Jewish religion grows out of a shared memory; if grandparents or other older

persons are at the seder, they tell of their past, the suffering they have experienced, the redemption they have lived through.

The Mishnah, the first stratum of Talmudic material,* states that the central seder experience intended by the rabbis who composed this liturgy was to recapitulate the contrast of earlier Israelite degradation and later dignity. Thus, the narrative initially quotes and elaborates on the biblical account of Israelites' sufferings. The heartbreaking stories of slavery and the drowning of Jewish infants are told. In time, the story shifts to the ten plagues and the breaking of Egyptian power.

In the Talmud there is a debate between two colleagues, Rav and Samuel. What is the essential transformation one should undergo through the seder experience? Samuel teaches that its essence is political—participants should experience the move from slavery to freedom. Rav argues that the key experience is a spiritual transformation—to live through the contrast of the idolatry of our ancestors and the religious liberation of Exodus-Sinai that Jews celebrate. These two interpretations are, in fact, complementary. In Judaism's view, slavery draws legitimacy from idolatry; democracy is ultimately grounded in the God-given dignity of every human being. The God who created and loves us gives us freedom as our right and denies absolute authority to all human governments and systems. Totalitarianism or total worship of any human system is the idolatry of our time. Typically, such absolutism—be it Communism or Fascism or even super patriotism—focuses against the Jews, for it senses that Jewish testimony contradicts these absolute claims. Thus, idolatry and totalitarian enslavement are alike—they deem absolute that which is relative. The Exodus challenges both.

The contemporary contrast of the slavery and genocide of the Holocaust and the redemption of Israel reborn should also be included in the tale. The Exodus is a past and future event. In this generation it has literally occurred again. It is no accident that the most famous ship to bring Jewish survivors of the concentration camps to Israel was called *Exodus '47*.

In consonance with the dynamic character of Jewish tradition, prayers for the martyrs of European Jewry and for Israel have been inserted here in the haggadah by some, and in the later part by others (see Appendix B). The goal of the narrative is to reach the level of involvement at which each person must feel that he/she personally had gone out of Egypt. You will note some of the playful and ingenious ways the Rabbis elaborate: Drops of wine are spilled at the mention of each plague, to express the idea that our joy is diminished by

*Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim, chapter 10, Mishnayot 4-10 and following.

the suffering of the erstwhile masters. To dramatize the event by hyperbole, the Rabbis multiplied the number of plagues. They also introduced songs of praise such as "Dayenu" to engage all those around the table. The elaboration is long enough to be vivid but not too long because people are hungry. During this section the second cup of wine is drunk.

Rachtzah: The hands are ritually washed again. This time a blessing is recited because the meal is about to begin. In the psychic movement from storytelling to eating, the hands are washed to break the routine of the story and to awaken consciousness of the festive meal. This is also the transition from the dry crust of slavery to the rich, varied feast of free men and women. Thus, feasting and biological pleasure confirm the psychological liberation experience.

Motzi matzah: The two whole matzot and the remaining part of the middle one are lifted and the blessing, "*ha-motzi lechem min haaretz*" (Who brings forth bread from the earth), is recited. The bottom matzah is set down and the blessing, *al acheelat Matzah* (on eating matzah), is recited. Traditionally, each participant eats a minimum of about one-half of a regular matzah during the seder to get a real taste of the bread of affliction.

In many Jewish households a new custom has been established: setting aside an additional matzah as a symbol of the bread of slavery for Jews, wherever they are oppressed, such as in Soviet Russia, Syria, and Ethiopia. A prayer for their deliverance is said at this time. The message is clear: Liberty is indivisible. As long as others remain oppressed, my freedom is diminished. Appropriate readings of letters or statements from Soviet or Ethiopian Jews may be read.

Maror: The bitter herb is dipped into charoset and eaten, reclining. About an ounce of horseradish root (good luck!) or a large leaf of romaine lettuce is eaten after the blessing, "*al acheelat maror*," is recited.

The maror serves as a reprise of the earlier enslavement theme. The tradition wants to summon up—once more, in a state of freedom—the bitter, wrenching taste of slavery, for there is always a real danger that those who have gone forth into freedom will turn their backs on those still in slavery. The maror and matzah remind participants that though this family may be at ease, it dare not forget that many others—Jews and non-Jews alike—still live in need.

Korech: From portions of the bottom matzah, a sandwich of matzah with maror and charoset is made and eaten while reclining. This is a reenactment of the way Hillel, a leading first-century rabbi, ate the Paschal sacrifice. Our hero Hillel made a sandwich with matzah and maror—the original hero sandwich—to fulfill the biblical instruction that the Paschal lamb be eaten on matzot and with bitter herbs (Exodus 12:8).

Shulchan Orech: The festive meal is eaten. A wide range of seder specialties have been developed in various Jewish communities over the centuries. What is important to remember is that in freedom people can choose what to eat. As a result, the seder meal menu varies all over the world and is a culinary guide to Jewish history.

Tzafun: *Tzafun* means hidden; the reader will recall that one-half of the middle matzah was hidden at the beginning of the seder and "stolen" by the children. Now is the time to ransom the afikoman because the seder cannot proceed without this matzah. This is the moment the young ones have been waiting for. The afikoman is their bargaining chip to obtain their heart's desire. The afikoman game serves to sustain the children's interest since they look forward to "selling" the afikoman.

Many commentators believe that the afikoman is reserved for the end of the meal so that matzah would be the last taste of the celebration. A striking commentary by Rabbi Harold Schulweis suggests that the afikoman is the matzah of the future (messianic) redemption. The matzah is broken because the world is still unredeemed; the matzah is eaten at the end because our hope is still unbroken.

Barech: The grace after meals is recited, followed by drinking the third cup of wine. The fourth cup is now filled, though it is not to be drunk yet; the "cup of Elijah" is also filled.

During the Middle Ages, in an outpouring of anguish and frustration, Jewish tradition inserted here a malediction on those who destroy the Jewish people. It is characteristic of the dialectical nature of Judaism that keening over oppression is linked with the cup of final redemption. Stark reality is faced down with the fullest intensity of yearning for a world free of all torment. In recent times, CLAL, the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, has developed a ritual of remembrance for the Holocaust to be inserted into the haggadah at this point. On this very day, the Nazis began their final liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto; on this very night, those Jews began their incredible revolt.

The message of redemption cannot be reenacted today as if there had never been a Holocaust. Speaking of the Holocaust at the seder does jar the mood of joy, but at the same time, the contrast gives tremendous additional depth to the proclamation of the once and future Exodus. In our generation, the witness to redemption and human dignity is not casual, nor is it based on any illusions about the dangers of such testimony or on any underestimation of the power of evil. This makes the witness all the more heroic and valued.

The ritual of remembrance (see Appendix B) seeks to capture these themes. Beyond the four sons whose varying commitments to Judaism are of such great concern in the haggadah—because the future de-

pends on the new generation's taking up the call—the ritual called "The Fifth Child" summons up the memory of the more than a million children who did not survive to ask any questions. The ritual affirms that silence is the only answer to the question: Why? But the unextinguished hope in the ghettos and camps expressed in such songs as "Ani Maamin" ("I believe in the coming of the Messiah, even though Messiah tarries") and the "Partisans' Song" ("Never say you go on the final road") is also affirmed. In a concluding ritual act, each seder participant pours some wine into Elijah's cup to express personal determination to bring the Messiah and to work for a final triumph of life.

Hallel: The songs and prayers of praise are completed. This constitutes the outpouring of gratitude as Jews savor the stage of freedom. Following the Hallel, the fourth cup of wine is drunk.

The Fifth Cup: In the Talmud (Pesachim 118) we are told that Rabbi Tarfon used to drink a fifth cup of wine on Passover night. The first four cups stand for four of the five stages of redemption promised in Exodus 6:6–7. Rabbi Tarfon drank a fifth cup to commemorate the fifth stage of redemption: "And I shall bring you into the land which I raised my hand and swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I give it to you as an inheritance, I am the Lord" (Exodus 6:8).

Rabbi Menachem M. Kasher, in his *Israel Passover Haggadah*, proposes the adoption of the fifth cup by all Jews: "And now in our own time, when we have been privileged to behold the mercies of the Holy Name, blessed be He, and His salvation over us, in the establishment of the State of Israel which is the beginning of redemption . . . as it is written: And I shall bring you into the land. . . . It is fitting and proper that we observe this pious act, the drinking of the fifth cup, as a form of thanksgiving."^{*}

Jewish tradition is not static. Adding this fifth cup is our testimony that Israel's rebirth is revelation and redemption in our own time. The fifth cup is also a statement of hope and trust that this is a lasting redemption that will not be destroyed again. Our joy and our faith in Exodus is increased because it happened again in this generation.

Of course, drinking all this wine can in itself be a bit much. But the joy is appropriate, and those who can handle it should drink to it.

Nirtzah: The haggadah is now completed. The family expresses its prayer that this service is acceptable and that Zion will be fully established soon. The recitation of the Exodus story is now elaborated and connected to other saving events. Rabbis of old would stay up all night to tell the story. Passover songs such as "Chad Gadya" are sung.

The entire seder is an experience in which normal social and struc-

tural patterns are suspended or transcended. Generation gaps are overcome as the contemporary people of Israel go into freedom alongside those led by Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. The Jewish people are reshaped into a *communitas*, an undifferentiated communion in which neither status nor power rules. All are united in common liberation.

Miraculously, all this is done in the context of family, with eating, talking, and singing, the most natural of human activities. Jewish faith uniquely combines the affirmation that nothing less than fundamental and revolutionary change must take place in history with the assertion that the transformation will be accomplished by human action on a human scale. Not by overriding the normal feelings of family, not by building some Pharaonic—or Stalinist—megaliths and offering up hecatombs of human sacrifices, but by creating community and extending it outward, by recalling the family's liberation and sharing it with all humans will the final triumph of humanity be achieved. On Passover night Jews experience that triumph—not as hope but as event.

FREEDOM'S ROAD

The Season of Freedom: While the liturgical peak of Passover is reached on the night of the Exodus, the rest of the holiday sustains the imagery of the march to freedom. In the prayer liturgy that developed in post-biblical times, the festival is called *zman chayrutaynu* (the season of our freedom). No work is done on the first and last days (first two and last two in Diaspora). In earlier times no secular work was done on the intermediate days, but economic realities of our times have tended to turn these middle days into working days, albeit semi-holidays.

Hallel: Psalms 113–18, songs of praise for the redemption, are chanted every day. Psalm 114 best captures the Exodus exultation:

When Israel went out of Egypt,
The House of Jacob out of a people of foreign speech,
Judah became God's holy one
Israel, God's dominion.

The sea saw—and fled,
Jordan turned and ran backward,
Mountains skipped like rams,
hills like lambs.

What is happening to you, O sea, that you flee?
O Jordan, that you turn and run backward?
Mountains, that you skip like rams,
hills like lambs?

^{*}Menachem M. Kasher, *Israel Passover Haggadah* (New York: Torah Shelaymah Institute, 1957), p. 335.

O earth, shiver and shake
 Before the Lord, before the God of Israel,
 Who turned the rock into a pool of water,
 the flinty stone into a water fountain.

On the first two days, the complete Hallel (consisting of six Psalms) is fully recited. Thereafter, parts are omitted—as a mark of mourning for the Egyptians who drowned in the Red Sea. The Egyptians were vicious taskmasters, yet their pursuing army consisted of sons of Egyptian mothers and fathers. Later generations of Jews felt empathy with the pain of their parental loss. The death of any human being is a sorrow.

A special prayer known as the *Yaaleh V'yavo*, after its opening Hebrew words, is inserted into the Shacharit, Minchah, and Maariv (morning, afternoon, and evening) Amidah prayers as well as in the grace after meals recited throughout the holiday. This same prayer, appropriately adapted to each holiday, is added as well to the Shavuot, Sukkot, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur liturgies. This prayer adds a flavor of the festival to life several times a day. In the *Yaale*, petitioners request that God especially remember all Israel and take this occasion to bless and redeem the people.

Crossing the Red Sea: The Bible tells us that Pharaoh regretted letting the Jews go free and set out with an army to recapture his slaves. Pinned down at the Sea of Reeds, the Israelites panicked; but then, under Moses' leadership, they crossed the sea. The Egyptian army, crossing the sea behind them in hot pursuit, drowned. (The Reed Sea location is commonly identified as the Red Sea of today, but the identification is not certain.)

According to tradition, the miraculous rescue at the Reed Sea occurred on the seventh day out of Egypt. Therefore, on the seventh day of Passover, the story of the crossing is recounted in the synagogue in the Torah reading. The song of the Red Sea deliverance is triumphantly chanted before a standing congregation that relives the event.

In furtherance of the reenactment model, Chasidic tradition in the nineteenth century created a ceremony of "crossing the sea." Water is poured on the floor, and the family or group dances across, singing songs of deliverance and joy. (Wall-to-wall carpet fanciers may prefer to put the water in a bucket and then jump over it.) In some Chasidic groups, the men dance, and as they pass by, water is sprinkled on their shoes to represent the lapping of the waves and the wet sea floor as the Israelites marched across to safety.

Marching Toward Sinai, Counting the Omer: The spring harvest begins

at Passover time. In biblical times, sheaves of the new crop were brought to Jerusalem and prepared and eaten there in thanksgiving for God's bounty. The Omer (a measure of grain) was brought daily and counted for forty-nine days until the onset of Shavuot. This ceremony is still commemorated in the counting of the Omer (*Sefirat HaOmer*), a nightly blessing and count for seven full weeks starting from the second night of Passover.

Rabbinic tradition (collectively called *Torah Sheh-B'Al Peh*, the Oral Torah or Law) identified Shavuot as the holiday of Revelation, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Therefore, each passing day, from the night of Exodus on, is experienced as a day's journey toward Sinai. Sinai was the goal and object of the Exodus. Counting the days becomes the bridge from the social liberation that occurred on Passover to the constitution of freedom accepted and ratified at Sinai. Through the act of counting the Omer, traditional Jews affirm that the purpose of freedom (Passover) is to live the holy life and ethical regimen of the Torah.

THE EXODUS PARADIGM

The Torah places great stress on the fact that Passover occurs in the spring. In biblical times the month in which the holiday fell was called Aviv (spring). During the first exile in Babylon, the months were given Babylonian names. Passover's month was renamed Nissan. Although the name shifted, the Hebrews upheld the Torah's insistence on the link of spring and Passover. Critical scholars believe that the date connects spring festivals (the Feast of Unleavened Bread from pastoral roots and the Paschal lamb from shepherd traditions) that were absorbed into the Passover holiday. In this view, the earlier ritual elements were incorporated and reinterpreted as historical reminders of redemption. Many traditional scholars have objected to any attempt to place the Torah in a cultural context. Some, such as Maimonides, have seen no religious objection to having the Sinaitic revelation transform earlier elements into the Torah's theological/historical pattern, as long as its divinity is upheld.

The Torah stresses both the agricultural and the historical aspects of Passover. There is a strong but subtle relationship of nature and history in the Bible's teachings. The human being is a body/soul fusion. Somatic states affect the mind just as strong emotions—jealousy, anger, lust—rack the body. Because the spiritual and the biological are intertwined, shifts in one dimension translate into shifts in the other. The reward of righteousness is long life; living in harmony with the divine blessing yields prosperity and fertility. Moral evil pollutes the

land; cruelty to other humans drives away the Divine. The fullest spiritual development will take place when the people feel secure and rooted in the land. In the messianic age, when humans will "know" God, people will dwell under their own trees and vines in peace and harmony.

Thus, in the Bible, human and natural phenomena are read at two levels simultaneously. The Hebrew Scriptures are this-worldly. Nature is true substance; the world of biological phenomena is not illusion. Yet, while these phenomena are real, they also reflect the divine realm, which transcends nature. The people of Israel are at once a human family with self-interests, sibling rivalries, and daily cares, and also witnesses of Divine Presence in the world. The land of Israel is at once a land of milk and honey, of rain and mountain springs, and the land on which God keeps a divine eye from year's beginning to year's end.

Biblical language and symbol point to spring as the proper season for deliverance. The rebirth of earth after winter is nature's indication that life overcomes death: Spring is nature's analogue to redemption. Life blossoming, breaking winter's death grip, gives great credence to the human yearning for liberation. A correct reading of the spring season would hear its message of breaking out and life reborn at the biological level simultaneously with an Exodus message of good overcoming evil, of love overpowering death, of freedom and redemption. The Bible envisions a world in which moral and physical states coincide, when nature and history, in harmony, confirm the triumph of life. The Exodus paradigm suggests that the outcome of history will be an eternal spring. Read with a historical/theological hermeneutic, spring is Exodus.

All great symbols resonate at many levels of meaning. Later kabbalistic tradition, including certain forms of Chasidism, developed an outright mystical interpretation of Judaism and all its symbols. The mystics transposed Exodus from a historical journey into a deeply personal, spiritual one. Passover/Exodus symbolized the struggle of the spirit/soul to break out of the slavery of the material/body. Egypt (in Hebrew, spelled *mtzrm*, pronounced *mitzrayim*) is the same root word as *mitzarim*, which means narrow straits. These are the spiritual straits that the soul must negotiate to avoid being shipwrecked on its voyage to the promised land of spiritual salvation.

To the mystics, all the acts and gestures of Passover were deeply personal and spiritual in their intent. Appropriate spiritual *kavvanot* (intentions) would ensure that each observance played its proper role in nurturing the cosmic forces and unifying the upper world with the lower world. The extreme concentration on eliminating chametz was nothing less than a spiritual purification of the cosmos. Proper preparation of matzot from the moment of cutting the grain to the final

baking brought closer the cosmic *tikkun* (perfection) of the world. In the hands of the mystics, the historical experience of the Jewish people became an allegory of the endless spiritual search of the soul for salvation.

Many modern Jews dismiss Christianity as excessively spiritual and otherworldly and argue that such spiritualization is foreign to Judaism. But that view simplifies Judaism and filters out the resonance of the Exodus model. The Exodus paradigm can be interpreted at every level—historical, material, and spiritual. Tendencies toward each of these directions exist within various schools of Jewish thought and religion, and each of these approaches reappears continuously within Jewish history. When two different schools take a polar position within Judaism and push it to an extreme, they end up very far from the initial common ground. They may appear to be foreign to each other, yet a closer look shows that each is the metamorphosis of a commonly held model.

The mystical spiritualization of Passover within the Jewish tradition is methodologically not unlike the systematic spiritual reinterpretation of the Passover/Exodus symbols that ultimately defined Christianity as a separate religion. Of course, the Christians repudiated the physical base of the holidays and its observances, whereas the Jewish mystics upheld the unity of body and soul as they added a layer of spiritual meaning to the commandments.

In the first century, it was relatively easy for the early Christians, operating out of Jewish context, to reinterpret Exodus/Passover as a spiritual paradigm. As the followers of Jesus came to grips with the relatively unchanged political/natural realm after his death, they concluded that the Kingdom of God was not of this world. Jesus had observed Passover. The Last Supper was probably a seder. It was natural for his followers to play off these Jewish models but give them new meaning in the light of Jesus' life and death. Passover was reinterpreted as the season of spiritual liberation. In the new interpretation of redemption, Exodus meant freeing humans from the slavery of sin through love and forgiveness. Represented again as Easter, the Passover holiday celebrated the triumph of life; resurrection broke the shackles of death.

The Christian interpretation can be hermeneutically derived from the Passover/Exodus model by those who experience Jesus as Messiah, as the early Christians did. The vast bulk of Jewry did not accept this experience because God did not intend them to do so. The Jews were and are called to carry forth their covenantal way. The subsequent Christian denial of the legitimacy of the ongoing Jewish covenantal interpretation was an illegitimate annexation of the role of God's people. It was imperialistic to claim exclusive ownership of the very sym-

bols that were revealed and lived out in the Jewish community. Such a claim denied the plain logic that Jewish interpretation was closer to the sources than the Christian commentary. Christianity claimed to know the mind of God exhaustively so that there was room for no other interpretation. It also underestimated God's capacities in its assumption that if God were calling Christians, there was neither logic nor strategy left to use the original people and faith of Israel in any way to achieve the divine goals.

The main Christian tradition went on to put down Judaism as a carnal religion, implying that in the Jewish religion the concept of redemption is arrested at the politico-economic stage instead of shifting to the spiritual level. According to this polemic, the Hebrew Scriptures' call for justice falls short of the New Testament message of love. In actual fact, the Rabbis offered similarly spiritual interpretations of Exodus, spring, and redemption. However, for the most part, rabbinic Judaism stubbornly upheld the inseparability of biological and spiritual redemption. The Rabbis affirmed the interconnection of the natural and the historical triumph of life.

The Rabbis' theology is expressed in their halachic practices, such as in their choice of Torah readings. For the Shabbat of Passover, they selected a Torah portion that includes references to the three pilgrimage holidays but dwells on divine forgiveness in the context of history and human fallibility. The Torah reading deals with the mystery of divine nature and the revelation to Moses that the ultimate truth about God is that "the Lord is a merciful God, full of grace, slow to anger, and abounding in transforming love and truth, conserving mercy for thousands of generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin..." (Exodus 34:6-7).

Similarly, the Rabbis chose Ezekiel 37, the prophetic vision of resurrection, as the reading from the Prophets for the Shabbat of Passover. Of course, the Rabbis intended a dual message. The past Exodus points to a future redemption in which Israel will be restored to the land. This gives hope to the people of Israel who languish in Exile. But the resurrection imagery ("O my people, I will open your graves and bring you back to the land of Israel!") is deliberately chosen to affirm the final triumph of life as the climax of the spring and redemption motifs of the Exodus holiday.

The Rabbis ordained the reading of *The Song of Songs*. By tradition, this biblical book is read after the seder as well. *The Song of Songs* includes vivid nature poetry: "The winter is over, the rain is past and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of song is come." The

*This is where the list of divine attributes cuts off, according to rabbinic interpretation.

book is full of love poetry as well. "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys... like an apple tree among the trees of the forest so is my beloved among the youths." "How wonderful are your kisses my [soul] sister, my beloved, your kisses are sweeter than wine, your fragrance better than all perfumes."

Popular wisdom has it that in the spring a young man's fancy turns to thoughts of love. Here again biology and psyche coincide. The rising sap evokes the renewal of human libidinal energy. The Rabbis saw the book as an allegory of the love between God and Israel, the same love affair that leads to Exodus and covenanted love for each other.

Human love is the most apt metaphor for the human-divine encounter. The climactic union of man and woman is the most basic experience of the unity that undergirds all of existence. The Exodus paradigm is driven by love. Divine love validates the value of life; divine love drives the engine of redemption. But human love is the corresponding response of humanity to the intrinsic dignity of life and freedom.

In the spirit of their interpretation of the Exodus paradigm, the Rabbis inserted into the liturgy of the first day of Passover the prayer for dew—the source of moisture that keeps the crops in Israel alive through the dry months ("Give dew to renew the earth and its green"). To make their intentions clear, the Rabbis inserted the dew prayer in the second blessing of the central prayer, the Amidah—that is the blessing that proclaims the resurrection. The dew prayer, "For you are God our Lord who brings the wind and dew drops... for life not death..." is directly connected to "You sustain the living with loving kindness and revive the dead with great mercy... You bring death and restore to life, You make salvation grow. You are trustworthy to revive the dead..." The action of the dew moisture, giving life to dried-out greenery, gives credibility to the promise of future resurrection.

To close the circle of interpretation, on the last day of the holiday the prophetic portion, taken from Isaiah (Chapter 11), articulates the futurist dimension of the Exodus. In that final fulfillment, the Lord will "recover the remnant of God's people and gather the dispersed of Israel... from the four corners of the earth." The ingathering will be a new Exodus. "The Lord will dry up the inlet of the Egyptian sea... so that it can be crossed dry-shod. Then it will be a highway for the remnant of God's people to return." This restoration will be messianic: "A shoot shall grow out of the stump of Jesse [King David is the son of Jesse]". It will be associated with universal justice ("He shall judge the poor with righteousness and decide with justice for the lowly") and universal peace—no more "nature red in tooth and claw." "The calf and the young lion will graze together... the suckling babe will play

over a viper's hole. . . . They shall not harm nor destroy throughout My holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowing the Lord as water covers the sea." Thus will come the Exodus for all people, the future universal Exodus whose source and guarantor is the original Exodus celebrated on Passover.

AFTERWORD

Periodically, scholars survey historians' opinions as to what is the most influential event of all time. In recent decades the Industrial Revolution has often appeared at the top of the list. For the politically oriented, not uncommonly the French Revolution wins; for Marxists, the Russian Revolution. Christians often point to the life and death of Jesus as the single most important event of history. For Moslems, Mohammed's revelations and his hegira have a similar transcendental authority.

Yet when Jews observe Passover they are commemorating what is arguably the most important event of all time—the Exodus from Egypt. If for no other reason than the fact that the Exodus directly or indirectly generated many of the important events cited by other groups, this is *the* event of human history. That it was a Jewish event is an eloquent tribute to the extraordinary role the Jewish people—so minute a fragment of the human race—have played in human history.

The Exodus transformed the Jewish people and their ethic. The Ten Commandments open with the words, "I am the Lord your God who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Having no other God means giving no absolute status to other forms of divinity or to any human value that demands absolute commitment. Neither money nor power, neither economic nor political system has the right to demand absolute loyalty. All human claims are relative in the presence of God. This is the key to democracy.

Exodus morality meant giving justice to the weak and the poor. Honest weights and measures, interest-free loans to the poor, leaving part of the crops in the field for the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, treating the alien stranger as a native citizen—these are all applications of the Exodus principle to living in this world. Thus, the Exodus, as articulated at Sinai, transformed the Jewish people and their religious ethical system. Inasmuch as Christianity and Islam adopted the Exodus at their core, almost half the world is profoundly shaped by the aftereffects of the Exodus event.

In modern times, the image of redemption has proven to be the most powerful of all. The rise of productivity and affluence has heightened expectations of the better life. Widely disseminated scientific ideas and conceptions of human freedom carry the same message:

Do not accept disadvantage or suffering as your fate; rather, let the world be transformed! These factors come together in a secular concept of redemption. By now, humans are so suffused with the vision of their own right to improvement that any revolutionary spark sets off huge conflagrations. In a way, humane socialism is a secularized version of the Exodus' final triumph: The liberator is dialectical materialism, and the slaves are the proletariat—but the model and the end goal are the same. Indeed, directly revived images of the Exodus play as powerful a role as Marxism does in the worldwide revolutionary expectations. In South America, the theology of liberation directly touches the hundreds of millions who strive to overcome their poverty.

The secret of the impact of the Exodus is that it does not present itself as ancient history, a one-time event. Since the key way to remember the Exodus is reenactment, the event offers itself as an ongoing experience in human history. As free people relive the Exodus, it turns memory into moral dynamic. The experience of slavery that breaks and crushes slaves does not destroy free people. It evokes feelings of repulsion and determination to help others to escape that state. As participants eat the bitter herb, they remember the heartbreaking tale and the death of the children. They also remember that slavery gradually conditions people to accept servitude as the norm. The Israelites fell into that trap and were delivered, not by their own merit. The lesson is that a slave needs help to get started on liberation.

In the seder ritual, the family also acts as the transmitter of memory. The past is not excised but becomes an active part of the lives of the participants. Parents tell the story to children. At the same time, the children are not merely dependent. They ask questions and participate in the discussion. They must become involved for it is essential that they join in the unfinished work of liberation. This is why when Pharaoh offered to let the adult Jews leave Egypt to worship God if the children were left behind, Moses rejected the offer: "With our youth and our elders we will go." The seder order is deliberately designed to hold the children's attention, to fascinate them with their people's history so that they will feel impelled to take up the covenantal task. Thus, by the magic of shared values and shared story, the Exodus is not some ancient event, however important; it is the ever-recurring redemption. It is the event from ancient times that is occurring tonight; it is the past and future redemption of humanity. The Exodus is the most influential historical event of all time because it did not happen once but recurs whenever people open up and enter into the event again.