

## Preface

AT THE PROSPECT OF PUBLICATION of this, my first book, my heart is filled with joy and gratitude. I have been sustained and nurtured by other people and have been shaped by their models, influence, and help. This book, in particular, reflects the ongoing impact of others on me. I would like in this small way to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to them.

This book bears the imprint of two people, above all. One is Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the master philosopher/poet of halacha (Jewish law) of our time. Even with the perspective of thirty-five years, it is hard to overstate the electrifying impact on me of the initial encounter with Rabbi Soloveitchik's model and mode of thinking. I was twenty years old, emotionally open and intellectually absorbent, on my maiden flight out of the warm, loving cocoon of the East European refugee yeshiva in which I had studied and been ordained. I had been raised to study and observe all the traditions and rules of halacha; Rabbi Soloveitchik opened my eyes to the patterns of meaning therein. In his analysis the halacha became more than the sum of its thousands of observances and details. It was a system by which to live humanly, a way to seize life whole, a confrontation with the dilemmas and anxieties of existence. The details were the products of divine revelation and an ongoing historic confrontation, love affair, and partnership be-

tween God and the Jewish people. Under the light of his illumination, every detail—even those that appeared obscure or mechanical—turned out to be an articulation of a psychological or moral state or an attempt to induce the individual to give deeply human responses to life situations.

If that was not enough of a contribution, Rabbi Soloveitchik went on to show a personal model of open encounter with modern culture and a willingness to influence and be influenced by it. In his Bible and classic text study groups, he brought out the deeply human qualities of those God-intoxicated figures. He showed how to ask questions of the tradition that others didn't dare ask and, thus, to get the sources to yield remarkable answers that otherwise would not have been heard. He combined all this with a deeply spiritual approach to life and a poetic temperament, leavened by humor that always bubbled near the surface, and a winning warmth. I did not study full time with him, but I did have the privilege of hearing his sheurim, of spending individual personal time with him, and of reading his writings over the years. Yet only when I put pen to paper did the full extent of his impact emerge clearly; the manuscript revealed how he had shaped my thinking on Jewish observance, both conceptually and in myriad details. This is not to imply that Rabbi Soloveitchik would agree with all the views expressed in this book; I take full responsibility for this writing. However, I acknowledge with deep gratitude his extraordinary impact on my understanding all these years. My only regret is that he is now too ill for me to be able to express these thanks to him personally.

The other person whose signature is to be found on every page is my father, Rabbi Eliyahu Chayim Greenberg זצ"ל. More than any other individual, he shaped me, challenged me, taught me. In a sense, my father shaped the primordial structures of my thought at the level before ideas are grasped or put in words. Thus my father's influence is less overt, less quoted by name but more universally present in this book. His passion for justice and desire to help the underdog, his love for Jews and his demand that they be defended and justified, his conviction that the Jewish people can be trusted and that they are endowed with profound spiritual judgment marked all halachic decisions and guidance that he gave to countless others. His great thirst for learning and his belief that, properly used, Torah must be an instrument of life and love overwhelmed all who studied or lived with him.

My father's ardor for stories and storytelling in sacred sources balanced his fervor for halacha in all its details. His wit and ability to see humor in the most solemn texts continue to shape my ways of perceiving everything I read and study. I am sorry that most of the original jokes in this book were removed by the various editors and readers

whose judgment I respect, although perhaps this is appropriate since my father's style of humor, like mine, was more oral than written. I miss him; how I wish I could have given him the nachas of this book in his lifetime.

One reason that I so internalized the Jewish tradition is that I grew up in a nurturing family. My wonderful mother, Sonia Greenberg, *סוניה*, was the rock of that family. With her quiet strength and unceasing selflessness she labored all her life for her children's benefit with no thought for herself. Her elemental piety, her continuous conversation with God filled the house with the light of faith. My sisters, Gertrude and Lillian, and my brother, Aharon, were like an extra set of parents in their constant giving to me. I identify the way of life with all that kindness and love.

I thank Arthur Samuelson, who as editor of Summit Books commissioned this work; Peg Parkinson, who did the first editing; my dear friend David Scheinfeld, who never lost faith in the book and who stepped in to help when I needed it; Dominick Anfuso, the new senior editor at Summit, whose editing—done graciously when he had no obligation to do so—improved many passages. Bambi Marcus typed and retyped with unfailing good spirit and intelligence. Rabbi Shalom Carmy gave me the benefit of a thorough and complete reading and made many constructive suggestions. Rabbi Natan Greenberg critiqued three chapters from the extraordinary spiritual perspective of a Bratslaver. He left me wishing that I knew more about mysticism or that he would some day write a book incorporating the mystical interpretations of the holidays. Rabbi David Harbater graciously checked many footnotes and citations for me. Deborah Greenberg, in accordance with her usual talents and helpfulness, labored intensively and under deadline of galleys to produce a most thorough index.

The germ of this book started as a pamphlet on the High Holy Days for the congregants at Riverdale Jewish Center. My warm feelings for them, for their love of tradition and their response to my ideas remain unabated. Two good friends influenced my thought over the years—Zev (Willy) Frank of blessed memory and David Hartman. Their model and inspiration continue to resonate in my mind and heart.

Approximately half of this book originally appeared in a different form, in a series of holiday guides authored for CLAL—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership. The encounter through CLAL's programs with the lay leadership of American Jewry had a profound effect on my life and thinking. The challenge of making the tradition meaningful to them and of incorporating their insights and values into meaningful tradition is always with me. I owe an extraordi-

nary debt of friendship and gratitude to CLAL's supporters, founders, and primary leaders.

I would like to express special thanks to Ben Leuchter, founding chairman, friend, and helper; Irvin Frank, who saved CLAL and sustained me in difficult days with his quiet strength, deep feeling and thought; Herschel Blumberg, whose incisive thinking reshaped CLAL—and made a substantial contribution to the chapter on Yom Ha'Atzmaut; Aaron Ziegelman, whose own initiative, vision, and constructive approaches helped all of us to go forward; and Bob Loup, warm friend, who encouraged me to concentrate more on writing and teaching and thus speeded up the completion of this book. All my colleagues at CLAL have earned my thanks for their model of devotion to learning and teaching. However, I must thank especially Paul Jeser and David Elcott for the joy and privilege of working with them. Paul's professional leadership in tandem with lay leaders turned CLAL into a vital organization and relieved me of a thousand pressures and cares. David took over the educational program and developed a remarkable scholarly staff. Without the two of them, I never could have found the peace of mind and heart to complete this book.

My extraordinary parents-in-law, Rabbi Sam and Sylvia Genauer, powerfully affected our family's religious life. Our children, Moshe, David and his wife, Mindy, Deborah, J.J., and Goody have been my patient listeners, challenging questioners, favorite students and teachers; they have been an unfailing source of love and joy all these years.

My wife, Blu, has been intellectual companion and best friend, inspiration and early warning system, source of constant appreciation and most honest critic. I have learned to depend on her judgment and to ignore her wisdom only at my peril. Her humanness and love, her religious model, her ability to juggle the contradictions of life without self-pity or resentment have been the anchor of my life for more than thirty years. The dedication of this book to her is but a grain of sand on the shores of a boundless sea.

Irving Greenberg  
Riverdale, New York  
Nissan 5748  
April 1988

# Contents

PART I: THE VISION AND THE WAY	15
1. The Holidays as the Jewish Way	24
2. Judaism as an Exodus Religion: Passover	34
3. The Covenant of Redemption: Shavuot	66
4. Journey to Liberation: Sukkot	94
PART II: PERSONAL LIFE ALONG THE WAY	119
5. The Dream and How to Live It: Shabbat	127
6. Rebirth and Renewal: High Holy Days	182
PART III: WALKING THE WAY— THROUGH JEWISH HISTORY	217
7. Confronting Jewish Destiny: Purim	224
8. Assimilation, Acculturation, and Jewish Survival: Hanukkah	258
9. Destruction and Response: Tisha B'Av	283
PART IV: UNFOLDING THE WAY: JEWISH HOLIDAYS IN OUR TIME	305
10. The Shattered Paradigm: Yom Hashoah	314
11. Resurrection and Redemption: Yom Ha'Atzmaut	373
AFTERWORD	405
APPENDIX A: Two "Minor" Festivals: Rosh Hodesh and Tu B'Shvat	411
APPENDIX B: Passover—Prayer for the Seder	421
APPENDIX C: For Study and Discussion	426
Bibliography	429
Glossary of Names	442
Index	449



## A Word to the Reader

**T**HE FOCUS OF THIS BOOK is on Judaism as it expresses itself in the Jewish holidays. Through these days Judaism is most visible and most easily accessible. But this is meant to be more than a book about the holidays; rather, it is a book about the Jewish way through life and history. To celebrate the holidays is to relive by reliving the Jewish way. Over the centuries Jewish thought and values have been crystallized in religious behavior. Judaism's underlying structures of meaning—the understanding of the world, the direction of history, the values of life—have come to their classic expression in the holidays. This book seeks to uncover those patterns.

All halachic behaviors are dramatic/mimetic gestures articulating a central metaphor of living. Grasping the metaphor adds depth to action and joy to life. Entering into the holidays with this understanding widens the range of emotion and brings a whole new set of roles and personae into even the most conventional life. Living the Jewish way calls for a highly developed capacity for fantasy and playacting. If you will, one must be a bit of a ham to be a kosher Jew. I hope that by pointing out the roles we are summoned to play, this book will help release the creative imagination for religious living present in every person.

This is not to suggest that practice of the Jewish faith is all play, all

fun and games. There have been times when this religion has brought painful memories, moral problematic conflicts with others, oppressive minutiae, and obligations so great I felt guilty no matter what I accomplished. Yet on balance the overwhelming effect has been to fill my life with a sense of Divine Presence and human continuity, bondedness, joy, textured living experiences full of love that make everything worthwhile. No wonder that over the course of history millions of Jews were willing to die, if necessary, for this faith. Through this book, I hope to show others why it is worth living for this faith.

This book is written for different types of readers: nonobservant Jews who seek new experiences to deepen their Jewish identity; observant Jews who wish to avoid the pitfall of practicing the details while missing the overarching goal; those lacking Jewish education who search for more information and learned Jews who search for new insights; and non-Jews who wish to understand the underlying visions of Judaism and who may find that it resonates in their own religious living.

It is a privilege to be able to write at such a unique moment in our people's history. The age of self-evident identity and of no alternative in values is over. The age of exclusion and stereotyping by Gentiles is drawing to a close. "Jewish flight" to achieve success or integration in the broader society is declining. Many observant Jews have put aside the fear that tradition cannot stand up in the presence of choice. Thus, this is one of those rare moments when we can open a dialogue between Jews and the tradition, between Jews and Jews, between Jews and non-Jews, between the people and its God.

To those readers who come to this subject with a fixed mind, I would like to say a special word:

In human history, freedom and awareness of alternatives generally have led to higher-level choices, more mature faith, and stronger commitment. This book is predicated on those optimistic assumptions. Respectful awareness of alternatives, deep consciousness of choices made along the Jewish way, and trust in the wisdom of both partners in the covenant can only deepen our appreciation for the courage and love of those who lived the endless chain of life that has brought the Torah to us to this moment.

This is the heroic age of the Jewish people, an age of resurrection and rebirth. It is simultaneously an age of awakening and new hope for humanity. Bliss it is to be alive in this dawn, but to be committed is the very heaven. May this book help some find that meaning in deeper involvement.

PART ONE:



*The Vision  
and the Way*



**T**HE HOLY DAYS are the unbroken master code of Judaism. Decipher them and you will discover the inner sanctum of this religion. Grasp them and you hold the heart of the faith in your hand.

The holy days are the quintessential Jewish religious expression because the main teachings of Judaism are incorporated in their messages. Recurrent experience of these days has sustained the Jews on their long march through history. By interpreting and reinterpreting the holidays and by applying their lessons to daily life, the Jewish people have been continuously guided along the Jewish way.

There are thousands of details and practices associated with each Jewish festival. Though customs have grown and changed over millennia, and each community and every age has added its own special flavor and detail, each holiday has one central metaphor that orchestrates myriad details into one coherent whole. By understanding a few key models one can hear and interpret the central messages of Judaism and its development over the course of history.

What makes decoding even more of an adventure is that the pattern is not fixed; it is still unfolding. Judaism itself is a pattern of meaning and direction for human history. Every time there is a major new event or a decisive turn on the road through history, new insights and patterns emerge. These are marked and inserted into the record by add-

ing a new Jewish holiday to the calendar. Thus, the sacred days are the register of Judaism in history. And just as Judaism and the Jewish people are not finished, neither is the role of the holidays. Out of the twentieth century, in response to the two momentous historical events of a new era in Jewish history, two holy days—Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Commemoration Day) and Yom Ha'Atzmaut (Israel Independence Day)—are struggling to be born.

As in a brilliant kaleidoscope, emergent patterns often give new coherence and constellation to already existing ones. In the same way each new Jewish holiday has affected the meaning of all the others. Each holiday pattern projects its own central image and also reflects additional highlights in relation to every other holiday. As each new holiday has refocused the understanding of the existing holidays and thus has shed light on the Jewish way in general, so will Yom Hashoah and Yom Ha'Atzmaut color the fundamental understanding of all of Judaism.

What, then, is the key to Judaism's cipher? Is there some fundamental, unifying principle underlying all the Jewish holidays?

The central paradigm of Jewish religion is redemption. According to the Bible, the human being is created in the image of God. According to the Rabbis this means that every single person is unique and equal, endowed with the dignity of infinite value. But in history most humans have been degraded or denied their due. Judaism affirms that this condition should never be accepted; it must and will be overcome.

The Jewish religion is founded on the divine assurance and human belief that the world *will* be perfected. Life will triumph over its enemies—war, oppression, hunger, poverty, sickness, even death. Before we are done, humanity will achieve the fullest realization of the dignity of the human being. In that messianic era, the earth will become a paradise and every human being will be recognized and treated as an image of God. In a world of justice and peace, with all material needs taken care of, humans will be free to establish a harmonious relationship with nature, with each other, with God.

Jewish tradition has dreams, not illusions. It knows that the world is not now a Garden of Eden. Redemption is a statement of hope. The Torah offers a goal worthy of human effort, to be realized over the course of history. Through the Jewish way of life and the holidays, the Torah seeks to nurture the infinite love and unending faith needed to sustain people until perfection is achieved. It becomes even more necessary to develop staying power—for beyond Judaism's incredible statement that life will totally triumph, it makes an even more remarkable claim. The final, ideal state will not be bestowed upon humans by some miraculous divine fiat. According to classic Judaism, God alone is the divine ground of life but God has chosen a partner in the perfec-

tion process. The ultimate goal will be achieved through human participation. The whole process of transformation will take place on a human scale. Human models, not supernatural beings, will instruct and inspire humankind as it works toward the final redemption. Realization of perfection will come not through escape from present reality to some idealized utopia but by improving this world, one step at a time. Universal justice will be attained by starting with the natural love and responsibility for one's family, then widening the concern to include one's people, and eventually embracing the whole world.

The perfect world can be reached only by an endless chain of human effort. The actions of any one people or any single generation are not enough. It would almost seem futile to begin the work unless others could be counted on to complete the work. According to the Bible, God set this process in motion first by covenanting with all humankind (the children of Noah) and then by singling out one people (the children of Israel). The Jews were charged with the mission of being the vanguard of humanity as it walks through history toward the messianic end goal. The Bible teaches that the Jews have pledged their lives, their fortunes, their sacred honor to make this hope finally come true. By their acceptance of the Torah, the Jews promised not to settle or stop short of that goal. This is the Jewish covenant. Jews have given their word to go on living as a people in a special way so that their lives testify to something greater than themselves. With that testimony they bear witness to a final, universal redemption.

Thus, the Torah—the distinctive way of life of the Jewish people—is part of a covenant with all people. This particular people has committed to journey through history, exploring paths and modeling moments of perfection. But the testimony and example are for the sake of humanity. The Jewish witness affects all people and is affected by them. When the final messianic redemption is achieved, the Jewish testimony will be complete. All humans will live in a divine/human perfection.

The messianic dream is the great moving force of Jewish history and of the Jewish role in the world. It is the natural unfolding and universal application of the Exodus experience. The central biblical event—the overthrow of tyranny, the redemption of the Jewish slaves, and the gift of freedom and dignity—will become the experience of all humankind in the future kingdom of God. This idea has proven to be one of the most fertile and dynamic concepts of all time. The lesson that humans are entitled to a better life has unleashed a thousand liberation movements—spiritual, political, and social. By communicating its dream of redemption to others, Jewry has shaken and moved humanity. Setting in motion a subversive discontent, creating an explosive tension between the ideal and the real, Judaism has transformed the

world again and again. And in Christianity, Islam, and modern secular messianic movements, the redemptive seed cast by Judaism has borne fruit yet again.

The above claim expresses a fundamental Jewish self-understanding. By some astonishing divine grace and by the peculiar experiences of their history, a people—the Jews—have become a key vehicle for the realization of the perfect world. Their task is to enter deeply into present reality while holding fast to the vision of the end days that far surpass it. And through their lives, Jews are to lead the way to a unification that will overcome the tormenting gap between the present and the final messianic perfection.

This is not to claim that the Jews are a super race. As the record shows, the Jews are all too human. Jewish history and religious development reflect the interaction of a people and its mission—sometimes living up to the ideal, sometimes failing miserably. Often, the people are divided over the proper direction to go. Yet somehow they manage to go on. But in their flawed humanness and through their recurrent displays of limitations and greatness, Jews prove the possibilities for all finite humans to reach for infinite life and freedom. These people who often “dwell alone” point the way for all humanity.

To ensure the fulfillment of the Jewish role is a staggering pedagogical challenge. How to inspire the people with the vision of the final perfection? How to supply the strength to persevere for millennia on the road to redemption without selling out? How to prevent the extraordinary range of experiences along the path from turning the Jewish way into a set of discontinuous events experienced by unrelated communities? How to undergo the radical transformations of condition over the course of history without losing the continuity of vision essential to completing the mission? The answer to all these questions is one and the same. The key is found in the *halacha*, the Jewish Way (of life), and its primary pedagogical tools: the Jewish calendar and the Jewish holidays.

Orthodox Jews believe that the *halacha* and its principles and methods were revealed to Moses at Sinai. In modern times, others may dispute the claim that it all began at Sinai, but all Jews acknowledge that the process did not stop at Sinai. *Halacha* includes law, custom, institution; it is a strategy for getting through history. Above all, *halacha* is what the name literally means: the walking, or the way. Add together a set of memories and values with commandments and goals, and you have the *halacha*, a total life-style that sustained the Jews even as it guided them toward the final goal.

Building on biblical commandments and modes of living, the *halacha* took every aspect of life—food, dress, sex, names, parenting—and oriented them to affirm Jewish distinctiveness. To make it through

history intact, Jews needed to maintain themselves, so the halacha developed boundary practices and group rewards to keep them going. Special obligations were placed on Jews to care for Jews; special penalties were placed on Jews who betrayed Jews; special efforts were required to save Jews. The halacha constantly reminded the down-trodden Jews that, whatever their external circumstances, they were still royalty in God's kingdom of priests.

The crucial factor in Jewish perseverance was that, against the risks of being Jewish, the halacha also provided the rewards of being Jewish. Alongside the sense of overarching purpose, the halacha offered seasons of joy, strong bonds of family, a sense that the others cared, a system of justice and law, and the hope that sustained people even on days of despair.

Many of the halacha's messages were communicated through the distinctive Hebrew calendar that Jews live by, a lunar one. The solar New Year occurs in January; the lunar New Year generally comes in September or October. The solar day begins after midnight, the morning comes before the evening. In the Hebrew lunar calendar, evening precedes morning and the day begins with the night before. The solar calendar knows the variation of the length of days and the seasons of the sun's distance from the earth; the lunar calendar knows the rhythm of the moon's waxing and waning in a monthly cycle. Thus, dates and anniversaries and time locations reinforce the Jewish sense of otherness. Since Jews lived amid a Gentile majority, in the realm of physical space Jewish identity was "deviant." By contrast, the calendar provided a framework of Jewish time that enveloped the Jews. It was a "total institution" into which the Jew entered. In this way, personality and identity were reworked in light of Jewish memory and Jewish values. The calendar was a vehicle of Jewish solidarity. For example, on Shabbat, when non-Jews worked, Jews stayed home and went to their own institutions. When weekdays coincided with holy days, Jews withdrew from society and came together to share the Jewish past.

The Talmud contains stories of the coincidence of Jewish festivals with Roman mourning days and ways in which anti-Semites sought to exploit the contradiction in order to harm the Jews. In America, the Fourth of July falls, in one out of three years, during the three-week period when Jews mourn the darkest days of ancient loss of national independence. The effect is jarring, and it tends to lift traditional Jews out of the present. Through such juxtapositions, the Jewish calendar guides the Jews through history even as it guides each individual through life. As long as people live in the consciousness and rhythm of the Jewish calendar, they will go on living as Jews.

This does not mean that the march of time in the Jewish community

is paced by a totally different beat. Judaism's message is dialectical—Jews are distinctive yet are part of society. In this spirit, the Hebrew lunar calendar was intercalated so as not to tear loose from the seasons of the solar year. Passover was always to occur in the spring (see Exodus 13:4) and Sukkot in the fall (Exodus 34:22). Since the lunar year is only 354 days long, an unadjusted lunar calendar would wander eleven days per year—further and further away from the original seasons. (This is what happens in the Islamic lunar calendar.) Such a calendrical arrangement would have separated Jews totally from the flow of time in their host societies—except for the later Moslem culture in which their calendar would be totally congruent with local practice. Instead, by the mandated insertion of an extra month a year (in seven out of every nineteen years), the Jewish calendar was permanently synchronized with the solar one. Thus, the Hebrew calendar remained distinctive yet integrated in all the host cultures. The Jews walked on the path of their own elected mission even as they remained in step with the general society.

The Jewish year has an inner logic of its own. The joy of Passover in the spring is linked through seven weeks of counting to the ascent of Sinai on Shavuot and the climax of the Jewish covenantal commitment to live by the Torah. In late summer, the year dips to its low point as the community retells and reenacts the greatest tragedy of its early history: the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the people. Thirty days later, at the onset of the sixth month, a new cycle begins: the awakening to self-renewal and repentance—individual and national. This builds up to the thunderous climax of judgment on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. (Because life and death hang in the balance of these days, this period is also called the Days of Awe.) Then, on the heels of the High Holy Days, comes the joyous celebration of Exodus and the harvest that is the holiday of Sukkot. Months later come the two winter holidays—Hanukkah and Purim—that celebrate deliverances along the historic Jewish way.

So the calendar constantly shapes and deepens group memory. Individual Jews might have absorbed, through cultural osmosis, contemporary values, role models, and heroes from the street, but from the calendar and the holy days, Jewish values and ideal types enter the bloodstream. In an annual cycle, every Jew lives through all of Jewish history and makes it his or her personal experience.

Through the power of the calendar and the community, each individual life is linked to a cause that transcends it. Each action is given cosmic significance. Redemption is steeped in little acts that finally add up to a new heaven and a new earth. Judaism plucks eternity in a flower (or a palm branch) and holds infinity in a grain of sand (or a pinch of maror). Even the passion of a young man for his beloved,

unleashed by the arrival of spring, became a paradigm of divine-human love (Song of Songs—Passover). Not only the heroic love and self-sacrifice of a widow but also the petty self-interest of the anonymous cousin who could not see beyond momentary advantage and refused to marry the future mother-ancestor of the Messiah (Book of Ruth—Shavuot), and even the world-weariness of a cynical old man whose experience pointed out the limitations of materialism (Kohelet—Sukkot) were woven by human effort and divine plan into the warp and woof of the tapestry of final perfection.

Thus, the experiences garnered from the sacred days made every day a special day. That sense of being special sustained the Jews and gave them the strength to carry the burden of the covenantal way.

## CHAPTER ONE

# The Holidays as the Jewish Way

**T**HE JEWISH RELIGION affirms the life that is the here and now. At the same time, Jewish tradition insists that the final goal of paradise regained is equally worthy of our loyalty and effort. Judaism is the Jewish way to get humanity from the world as it is now to the world of final perfection. To get from here to there, you need both the goal and a process to keep you going over the long haul of history. In Judaism, the holidays supply both.

In the face of widespread evil and suffering, the holy days teach the central idea of redemption. They keep the idea real by restaging the great events of Jewish history that validate the hope. In their variety, the holidays incorporate rich living experiences that sustain the human capacity to hold steadfast on course. Sacred days give sustenance to spiritual life and a dimension of depth to physical life. The holy days provide a record of the struggle to be faithful to the covenant. While chronicling the history, they distill the lessons learned along the way. And because they are popular, the holidays make the dream and the process of realization the possession of the entire people.

### *THE HOLIDAYS OF THE VISION*

The Exodus is the core event of Jewish history and religion. The central moment of Jewish religious history is *yetziat mitzrayim*, exodus

from Egypt. In this event, a group of Hebrew slaves were liberated. The initiative for freedom had to come from God, for the slaves were so subjugated that they accepted even the fate of genocide. Moses, called by God, came to Pharaoh with a request that the slaves be given a temporary release to go and worship in the desert. Then, step by step, the power of Pharaoh was broken; step by step, the temporary release escalated into a demand for freedom. Thus, the Torah makes its point that the entry of God into history is also a revelation of human dignity and right to freedom and foreshadows the end of absolute human power with all its abuses.

The Exodus inaugurated the biblical era of the Jewish people's history. In Judaism's teaching, the Exodus is not a one-time event but a norm by which all of life should be judged and guided. The Exodus is an "orienting event"—an event that sets in motion and guides the Jewish way (and, ultimately, humanity's way) toward the Promised Land—an earth set free and perfected. And as they walk through local cultures and historical epochs, people can gauge whether they have lost the way to freedom by charting their behavior along the path against the Exodus norms. An analogy: A rocket fired into space navigates by a star such as Canopus; it even makes a mid-course correction by measuring its relationship to the celestial marker. So does the Exodus serve as the orienting point for the human voyage through time and for mid-course corrections on the trajectory toward final redemption.

The Exodus is brought into life and incorporated into personal and national values through the classic Jewish behavior model—reenactment of the event. The basic rhythm of the year is set through the reenactment of the Exodus (Passover), followed by the covenant acceptance (Shavuot), and then by restaging of the exodus *way* (Sukkot). For the Israelite living in biblical times, the holidays were concentrated in two months: the first month, Aviv, in later times renamed Nissan, which incorporated the seven days of Passover; and the seventh month, Eytanim, in later times renamed Tishrei, with one day of Rosh Hashanah, one day of Yom Kippur, seven days of Sukkot, and an eighth day of closure (Shemini Atzeret). Both months were dominated by the Exodus holidays. The only other annual holiday was Shavuot, which occurred on one day in the third month.

Passover, marking the liberation, and Sukkot, commemorating the journey, are the alpine events in the Hebrew calendar. Shavuot is the link between the two major Exodus commemorations, marking the transformation of Exodus from a one-time event into an ongoing commitment.

Forty-nine days after the Exodus, the people of Israel stood before Sinai. There, in the desert, on the fiftieth day, the Israelites accepted a covenant with God. Shavuot marks the second great historical experi-

ence of the Jews as a people—the experience of revelation. Shavuot is the closure of the Passover holiday. On this day the constitution of the newly liberated people, the Torah, was promulgated.

In the land of Israel, both holidays had strong agricultural foundations—Passover linked to the spring and Shavuot to the summer. From Passover to Shavuot, the holiday of freedom leads to the historical conclusion of liberation—the establishment of the covenant at Sinai. From Passover to Shavuot, sowing the seed in the spring culminates in the summer harvest.

Each year on Shavuot, the Jewish people reenact the heart-stopping, recklessly loving moment when they committed themselves to an open-ended, covenantal mission. Through song and story, Torah study and Torah reading, the congregation of Israel is transported to Sinai and stands together again under the mountain of the Lord.

The third core holiday, Sukkot, celebrates the redemption way itself. Sukkot reconstructs the wilderness trek, the long journey to the Promised Land. The festival explores the psychology of wandering, the interplay of mobility and rootedness, and the challenge of walking the way. By reliving the Exodus in a distinctive way (focusing on the process rather than the event), Sukkot ensures that encounter with the Exodus will bracket the Jewish year. Thus, the three core holidays combine to communicate powerfully the origins and vision of the Jewish religion. If, as the prophet said, in the absence of vision a people perishes, then the halacha can truly affirm that in the constant presence of vision, a people lives on eternally.

How can the great redemption events be brought so powerfully into the present? Part of the answer lies in the brilliant pedagogy and rich variety of observances in each holiday. The primary thrust of the holidays is to make the event so vivid and so present that all of current life and the direction of the future will be set by its guidelines. Telling the story and living through these events, liturgically recreated, Jews experience them as *happenings in their own lives*. The Exodus is tasted (matzah, maror, festive seder, Paschal lamb), narrated (haggadah), and celebrated (Psalms 114–18). On Shavuot, the covenant is proclaimed (reading the Book of Exodus, Ten Commandments/Sinai portion), studied (all night), accepted (symbolically), and explored. On Sukkot, the Exodus way is walked, its huts erected (Sukkah), its bounty shared (with the poor), and its exhilaration danced (the Rejoicing of the Water Drawing). Through repetition, the Exodus became so real that the Israelites remained faithful to its message in the face of an indifferent world—even in the face of oppression or defeat.

Beyond this answer there is a deeper Jewish teaching as well. The past is not over; by tapping into the deeper layers of time, the Jew brings the past revelation event into life now. The Sh'ma prayer states:

“And these words which I command you today shall be on your heart” (Deuteronomy 6:6). Say the Rabbis: They are commanded *today*—every day.\* In a mystical sense, under the surface of normal time there courses a parallel stream of sacred time. In it, the Sinai revelation and other great events are carried in tandem with present existence. This is the meaning of the rabbinic dictum: “Every day a voice goes out from Horeb (Sinai).”† Ritual calls up that voice into the life of the present-day believer. Energized by that voice, Jews persist on the road to redemption.

A people does not live by vision alone. After communicating the goal, the Torah turns to the next key challenge: how to develop the incredible human capacities needed to carry the burden of the mission. Judaism places this nurturing of human capability at the center of its religious life. Experiencing the event through reenactment gives one the strength to assume the burden of being both witness and trail-blazer and enables one to wrestle with the unrelenting, ratcheting pulls of dream and reality without releasing either.

By summoning the future into the present reality, Judaism cultivates the fundamental quality of hope in humans. In certain liturgical moments, the believer encounters the future and draws its strength into life today. The entire Shabbat experience anticipates the future messianic redemption and gives human beings a foretaste of the kingdom. One can view this layering of time in which past, present, and future coexist from the perspective of God before whom there is no passage of time but only eternity. Or one can view this conception from the perspective of human psychology. Other animals have only the present and the past remembered through instinct or conditioning. Such experiences program the animal and shape its response to stimuli in the present. Uniquely, the human being can anticipate the future redemption and bring it closer. Thus, an event that has not yet occurred can have a profound impact on the present, an impact strong enough to overcome even powerful past conditioning. Beaten, tormented, and totally ground down, human beings, inspired by the future, have arisen and reversed all the conditioning of despair. The human is a future-oriented creature to whom hope is life-giving.

The focus on developing human capacity is particularly exemplified in the Sabbath and Days of Awe, the primary holy days that nurture personal life along the way. The Shabbat, on a weekly basis, and Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, annually, are the key periods of individual and family renewal. These holidays accomplish their goals primarily

\*Sifre on Deuteronomy 6:6.

†R. Travers Herford, editor, *Ethics of the Fathers* (New York: Schocken Books, 1962) pages 150–51, chapter 6, Mishnah 2.

by lifting the individual out of the routine that controls and, too often, deadens daily life.

The central metaphor which shapes the pattern of Shabbat observance is that of creating a "messianic reality" for a day. In the course of that day, one enters into a preenactment of the world's final state of perfection. The core paradigm of Rosh Hashanah–Yom Kippur is that of being on trial for one's life. In the course of that trial one moves from life through death to renewed life.

Shabbat offers total release from work and daily routine; it brings the family together in relaxed intimacy and mutual support. Although the greatest event of redemption anticipated by Judaism—the universal messianic redemption—has not yet occurred, on Shabbat the future event is made manifest through imagination, liturgy, and ritual. For more than twenty-four hours community space is transformed into the messianic realm. The vivid glimpse of perfection combines with the delights and peace of the day to restore the soul. The Shabbat experience gives the strength to go on for another week . . . and another.

The dialectical interplays of ideal and reality that run through the Sabbath day are matched by the striking juxtapositions of death and life, of guilt and forgiveness, in the Rosh Hashanah–Yom Kippur period. Shaking people out of their routines, shattering the crusts of arrogance and complacency, these days of awe lead to fundamental self-renewal. Those who have encountered their own death have a different perspective on life's choices. Moved, the individual removes the detritus of evil deeds and guilt; afterward, a reborn person walks the Jewish way.

The first five holidays—Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot, Shabbat, and Days of Awe—present a stationary model of Judaism, coherent, revealed, structured. Equipped with these biblical paradigm holidays, the Jewish people set out on their journey through history.

### *THE HOLIDAYS ON THE WAY*

Judaism is intrinsically open to history. It looks forward to a future event—the messianic redemption—that will dwarf the importance of the Exodus. By wagering its truth on the claim that the real world will be transformed, Judaism opens itself to further historical events that can challenge or confirm its message. And whenever an event has truly challenged or confirmed the covenantal way, that event has become another "orienting event" for Judaism. The orienting events have become the nuclei of new holidays.

History is full of the unexpected. Through changing societies, locations, circumstances, and through countless cultures, the people of

Israel wended their way. Wherever they stopped, they took root. In each host country, within each population, they participated, yet remained distinct—their eyes set upon the final goal. At times, Jewish life flourished; at others, it flickered close to extinction. Sometimes the people gloried in their role; sometimes they stumbled like an ignorant army on a darkling plain. There were times when the Jews turned chosenness into self-seeking complacency, and slept away a kingdom. There were times when the people were surprised and even unprepared for what happened to them. How does one deal with experiences that do not fit—nay, challenge—one's categories of meaning? The agony of working them through is part of the record of Jewish spiritual heroism. Each culture, each major crisis of victory or tragedy, of loyalty or betrayal, became part of a record that guided the next and future generations. Those hard-won understandings are codified in the later holidays that were added to the first five.

Around the fifth century B.C.E., as told in the Book of Esther, a decreed genocide of the Jews of the Persian empire was narrowly averted by the heroic actions of an unlikely pair—a queen hitherto known for her shyness and beauty (rather than for her initiative) and a hanger-on in the king's courtyard, a man of controversial reputation. The incident brought the Jews face-to-face with the absurdity and randomness that (contrary to the idealized moral universe of much of Jewish theology) determined life or death in the Persian empire. The highly integrated Jewish community suddenly was confronted with the vulnerability of Diaspora existence. The pattern of meaning that emerged was eventually spelled out in the holiday of Purim, a holiday that tickled the risibility of the masses who created it but baffled the scholars and theologians. In time, Purim was absorbed into the cycle of the year and proved to be a turning point in Jewish understanding of life in the Exile and of God's actions in history.

In the second century B.C.E., a civil war in the house of Israel almost tilted the balance of Jewish history into assimilation and disappearance. A great power intervened and ended up invading the sacred precincts of Israel. The Jewish revolt that followed barely triumphed—or, rather, partially triumphed—only long enough to save the religious way. The event was incorporated into the calendar as Hanukkah, the festival of lights. Hanukkah is actually a case study of three Jewish strategies in response to a dynamic external culture: separation, acculturation, and assimilation. Each of the groups that pursued these policies alone proved inadequate to take charge of Jewish destiny. The shifting alliances and interactive development among the three groups led to the defeat of the assimilators. The coalition that saved Judaism did not last long enough to forge the course of its future

development. The victorious ruling group received relatively short shrift in later rabbinic Jewish sources. Yet, by saving Judaism, the Maccabees enabled the rabbinic tradition to emerge triumphant. The effect on world history was even greater, for Christianity also grew out of those groups saved by the Maccabean victory.

As the holiday cycle expanded, tragedies, in particular, proved to be central to the maturation of Judaism, beginning with the destruction of the First Holy Temple, the principal sanctuary of God, by a Babylonian army in 586 B.C.E. The surviving Jews had to face the question of whether the covenant was invalidated by this defeat of unparalleled proportions. They found consolation and a sense of Divine Presence in Babylonia by studying the Scriptures and the story of the Exodus. They intensified prayer. They expressed in words what heretofore had been manifest primarily in sacrifice. They learned to feel the presence of the Lord in subtler, more hidden forms. People placed greater stress on studying the Torah. Personal participation in religious activity was stepped up. After the destruction of the Second Temple in the first century C.E., these tendencies blossomed. After that catastrophe, following past models, the event and its lessons were incorporated into the calendar of holy days in the form of four permanent fast days. The chief fast day of the four was Tisha B'Av, the anniversary date of the great destructions.

Tisha B'Av taught Jews how to deal with tragedy and catastrophe, how to give way to sorrow while yet incorporating it into the round of holy days, thereby purging grief and emphasizing renewal. The four fast days served as spiritual buffers, absorbing repeated tragedy and diverting the shock waves of defeat so they would not crush the inner resources of the people. Strengthened by these days and by rabbinic theological interpretation, the surviving Jews did not yield to despair or to political *force majeure*. Rather, they grew more religiously faithful than before. They became more participatory and more able to discern God's presence in every aspect of life, including the divine sharing of the state of Exile.

Nor did the process of growth stop in the first century. The twentieth century is one of the great generations of revelation and transformation in Jewish history. Two historical events of extraordinary magnitude have occurred in this century: the Holocaust, which is as great a crisis for Judaism as was the destruction of the Temple, and the recreation of the State of Israel, which can only be compared to the Exodus.

It is easy to look back thousands of years, with reenactment and liturgical patterns of the Bible and Talmud in hand, and see the overarching vision of Judaism. It is more difficult in the midst of crisis and rebirth to predict what will emerge. Many faithful Jews have tried to

go on without confronting these events. Some great spiritual leaders have opposed incorporating their observances out of fear that they will dominate the religion and distort its message. In particular, many have argued that by entering the Holocaust into the Jewish sacred calendar the Jewish people will fixate on death and thereby defeat the message of redemption.

Yet the events of Holocaust and Israel reborn are too massive and too challenging for us to go on as if nothing has happened. Jewish faith and loyalty are deep enough to cope with these events. "Leave it to the people, Israel—if they themselves are not prophets, then they are the children of prophets."\* The people—without asking permission from theologians and halachists—already have begun to respond.

One guesses that the covenant and the Jewish people's role in it—as well as the understanding of holiness and secularity—will be renewed before all is done. The Jewish people will be preceded, in the next stage of their journey, by the cloud of smoke and pillar of fire that are the Holocaust and Israel. Therefore, though it may not complete the work, this generation is not exempt from taking up the task of interpreting their lessons for the covenantal way. This will inevitably lead to adding new holy days to the calendar.

One final feature of the Jewish holidays needs highlighting: These celebrations are oriented toward human needs. The operating assumptions of each special day incorporate a fundamental affirmation of the dignity of humans. Although flawed and fallible, every human being is nevertheless precious to God and central to the divine plan. In the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel: God is in search of man. Some religions seek to escape from our all-too-mortal daily round of life to the eternal presence of God. Judaism, conversely, seeks to draw the Divine into the world. In a thousand little details of the holidays, the presence of the Divine is made manifest.

The very human texture of Judaism is evident in the way holy days focus on family and the simple delights of shared pleasure. Coming back home to be together for special days; advance shopping and cooking with each person's favorite foods in mind; talking or singing together at the table—all contribute to the ambience of holy days. Festival meals are occasions for collective nostalgia, for exchanging family news and community doings, for catching up with one another, for welcoming guests. This is how Jews bring a perfect world closer.

Just as the holidays provide the community with spiritual suste-

\*Babylonian Talmud, Tosefta Pesachim, chapter 4, Mishnah 11.

nance, so their dialectical nature expands the individual soul. The burden of redemption is so heavy that it threatens to undermine the ability to get through the demands of daily life; then comes the Shabbat as a corrective, a day of release and family time. The acceptance of gradualism and of everyday reality is so powerful in Jewish tradition that the culture could easily raise a conformist, materialistic, don't-rock-the-boat generation. The countervailing force is the Sabbath, with its foretaste of redemption. The Shabbat atmosphere creates a counter reality; it generates a human appetite for *paradise now* so the individual will not settle for less.

When complacency and self-congratulation threaten, the holiday cycle responds with the radical self-criticism and guilt of Yom Kippur. When depression looms, it is opposed with the balm of hope on Passover. The chastening experience of Rosh Hashanah, with its vision of cosmic Lord and universal judgment, corrects hubris and excessive self-sufficiency. The halacha punctures pompousness with the satire and playfulness of Purim. The ritual drunkenness of Purim challenges repression. Yet the tradition also prevents drunkards by inculcating moderation in drink in the kiddush and Havdalah of the Sabbath and festivals. Just when the individual is overwhelmed by the sense of being puny, a mere sport for great historical forces, the tradition tells the tale of Hanukkah, the triumph of few over many, the story of the handful of loyalists who defied a world empire and won. Yet, when unbridled messianism takes over, the cycle retorts with Tisha B'Av, the story of revolutionaries who overreached and brought catastrophe down on the nation. To those who would like to forget, it offers reenactment of the tragedy. To those who can never forget it offers the High Holy Days' forgiveness of sins and renewal of the past.

In short, the holy days nurture extraordinary dialectical capacities in the individual and the community. Trust in God, but help yourself; demand justice, but take it one step at a time; save the world, but start with your own family; bleed for humanity, but be sure to preserve your own group because "all of Israel are responsible one for the other."<sup>\*</sup>

The vision of messianic perfection generated the need for a community that combined faith with action, hope with realism, universalism with particularism so that it could work persistently toward the final goal. No other people has faced so unrelenting a pattern of hostility and destruction while continuing to preach the ultimate triumph of life. Some argue that anti-Semitism and persecution have kept the Jews Jewish, but that claim grossly simplifies Jewish history. A people

<sup>\*</sup>Babylonian Talmud, Shavuot 39A.

continuously defined by its enemies would end up internalizing the hatred and committing mass suicide. And no people could carry the burden of a mission to bring perfection without being eaten up by the strain and guilt of the task. Without the holidays, the Jews would never have lasted. "Were not your Torah my delight, I would have perished in my oppression" (Psalms 119:2).

Living the Jewish way means dreaming a dream of total perfection so vivid that you can almost touch it, while affirming and working with what *is* in order to make the dream come true. The life-style designed to teach the hope and pass it on—the specific acts and images needed to nurture the people who must live out this challenging way—is what this book on the Jewish holidays is all about.

## 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'aroves 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

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

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 positive time-bound commandments in the Orthodox tradition, on this occasion women are required to drink four cups as well because “for the sake of

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 storytelling 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-

pend 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-

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

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?

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 Nisan. 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 *mitzrm*, 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 futuristic 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.