

## Four Names for Passover

### Zman Herutaynu (Season of our Freedom)

The narrative about Israel's yetziat mitzrayim (leaving Egypt/the narrow space) is the cornerstone of Judaism. Yetziat mitzrayim is at the core of Jewish ritual, observance, ethics, and spirituality. Jews who pray 2-3 times a day and observe other Jewish traditions mention the going out from Egypt every few hours. Why such a big deal about the Exodus? This is a vast topic (and we aren't even touching the question of whether it "really happened").

A few selected words from Irving Greenberg's

The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays, (in the Havurah Library):

"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...On one level, this (Exodus) is a very specific incident in the particular history of a small Middle Eastern tribe...On another level, however, the entire experience is highly paradigmatic. Slavery is merely an exaggerated version of the reality endured by most human beings...The downtrodden and the poor accept their fate as destined; the powerful and the successful accept good fortune as their due...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...his moral and psychological reality...It is this reality that is overthrown in the Exodus."

### Hag Hapesach (Festival of the Pesach Sacrifice)

The biblical instructions regarding the holiday focus upon the pesach as sacrifice (of a lamb or goat). There are detailed instructions for that last night in Egypt, on which each and every Israelite is instructed to join with their family groups in order to make the sacrifice and then put the blood from the sacrifice on the doorposts, so that their houses will not be visited with the plague of the death of the firstborn. There are instructions for making this sacrifice when the Israelites are wandering in the desert and in their own land. This ritual was at the core of the ancient biblical holiday of Pesach. The rabbis worked hard 2,000 years ago to transform the sacrifice into a home-centered re-enactment of the Exodus, what we know as the seder.

### Hag Hamatzot (Festival of Matzah)

This is a biblical name. Some thoughts from Greenberg: "Just as shunning chametz (leavened substance) is the symbolic statement of leaving slavery behind, so is eating matzah the classic expression of entering freedom...(However) Matzah is, therefore, both the bread of freedom and the erstwhile bread of slavery. It is not unusual for 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....Halacha (Jewish law) 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."

### **Hag Haaviv (Festival of Spring)**

The Torah links Pesach with the season of spring. Scholars of ancient Jewish history propose that there were originally two spring festivals (the Feast of Unleavened Bread from pastoral roots and the Paschal lamb from shepard traditions) that were assimilated and transformed into the holiday we know as Passover. Greenberg: "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...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."

Wishes for a liberating, renewing Pesach for all of us!