

פרק זה הוקדש לז"ג
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אהרן בן יצחק ז"ל נלב"ע כ"א אדר א'
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וחנה בת חיים יששכר דוב ז"ל נלב"ע י"א חשוון
by the Feigenbaum family

– Chapter One – Pesach and Spring

As Alfred Lord Tennyson should have written, “In the Spring a young man’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of Pesach.”¹ And not only young men, but all Jews look to Pesach and Nisan –the month of redemption – with intense anticipation and keen excitement. Winters, especially in the American northeast where I lived most of my life, always seem long, cold, and snowy. Even in Israel there is a palpable sense of relief when the rains of winter are behind us. Spring means Pesach.

And spring means Pesach in a way that we do not often consider, for it is a point that the Torah emphasizes so frequently that it has to represent more than just a point in time or a season. Even before we left Egypt, we were instructed to preserve and memorialize our spring departure:

זכור את היום הזה אשר יצאתם ממצרים מבית עבדים... היום אתם יוצאים
בחדש האביב.

Remember this day in which you left Egypt, from the house of bondage... On this day you go out in the month of Aviv, spring (Shemot 13:3–4).

1. From Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s poem, “Locksley Hall.” To the extent that Pesach deepens our love for God, perhaps even his version has merit in this context.

Rashi asked:

וכי לא היו יודעין באיזה חודש, אלא כך אמר להם, ראו חסד שגמלכם שהוציא אתכם בחדש שהוא כשר לצאת, לא חמה ולא צנה ולא גשמים. וכן הוא אומר מוציא אסירים בכושרות, חודש שהוא כשר לצאת.

But would we not know in which month they went out? Rather, this is what Moshe said to them: Behold the kindness that God has bestowed on you that He brought you out in a month that is appropriate for going out – a month that is not hot, cold, nor rainy. As it says, “He brings forth the prisoners *be-kosharot*” (Tehillim 68:7), that is, in a month that is appropriate (כשר) for going out (Rashi, Shemot 13:4).

Thus the Torah underscored that God bestowed kindness upon us not just by liberating us from Egypt, but by doing so in a temperate month. It was a month in which the weather was perfect for travel.

Of course we could well ask: does it really matter to the prisoner when he is freed? Was it more painful for the survivors of Auschwitz to be liberated in January 1945 than it was for those in Dachau, Buchenwald, or Mauthausen who were liberated in April 1945? Would Jews suffering in Bergen-Belsen not have preferred the earlier winter liberation than to wait for spring? What is the great virtue in a springtime Exodus? Why is that important?

Rav Mordechai Yaffe (1530–1612) explained (*Levush Orah*, Shemot 13:4) that the Torah had to inform us that *היום אתם יוצאים בחדש האביב*, you are leaving in the spring, because otherwise we would not have known in what month Pesach falls. All we were told is *החדש הזה לכם ראש* *החדש*, “this month will be for you the first of the months” (Shemot 12:2). Accordingly the Torah teaches us for posterity that Pesach is celebrated and the redemption occurred in the beginning of the spring.

One verse should suffice, but the Torah keeps repeating the same point. In *Parshat Mishpatim* we read: *את חג המצות תשמר שבעת ימים*: “You shall observe the Festival of Matzot, for seven days you shall eat matzah as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month of spring for then you left Egypt” (Shemot 23:15).

This admonition is repeated almost verbatim in *Parshat Ki Tissa*: *את חג המצות תשמר שבעת ימים תאכל מצות אשר צויתך למועד חודש האביב* כי

בחדש האביב יצאת ממצרים “You shall observe the Festival of Matzot, for seven days you shall eat matzah as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month of spring for in the month of spring you left Egypt” (Shemot 34:18). Oddly, this verse immediately follows a seemingly unrelated prohibition: לא תעשה לך אלהי מסכה, “Do not make molten gods for yourselves” (Shemot 34:17).

Why are we reminded of spring so frequently, and what is the connection between Pesach and the prohibition of making molten idols?

And the Torah emphasizes this again in *Parshat Re'eh*, but this time with a slight twist: שמור את חדרש האביב ועשית פסח לה' אלקיך כי בחדש האביב הוציאך ה' אלקיך ממצרים לילה, “Observe the month of spring and bring the Pesach [offering] to the Lord, your God, for in the month of spring the Lord, your God, took you out of Egypt *at night*” (Devarim 16:1).

It is the fourth time the Torah notes the season of departure but now adds that God liberated us from Egypt at night. Why the redundancy – and why does it matter in this context that the Exodus occurred at night? It seems clear that having Pesach in spring is not just convenient but also contains a profound and fundamental principle that is critical to our understanding of the redemption from Egypt.

In fact, one fundamental principle that is derived from שמור את חדרש האביב, celebrating Pesach in the spring, is the very basis of the Jewish calendar. We define our months through the new moon, using the lunar cycle, but we intercalate our years with an eye on one directive: that Pesach must fall out in the spring. That is, the first day of Pesach must always come out on or after the vernal equinox. And if it would not, given that the lunar year is roughly eleven days shorter than the solar year, we add a leap month to make sure that Pesach is always observed in the spring.

People often speak colloquially that “Rosh Hashanah is late” one year or that “Tish'a B'Av is early,” but in fact, it is only accurate to speak in that context regarding Pesach. Pesach can arrive “early,” on, or right after the vernal equinox, or arrive “late,” such as happens during a leap year. For approximately half our history, the Sanhedrin would adjust the calendar in real time in Adar, the month that precedes Pesach. For the last half of our history – nearly seventeen centuries since our calendar was fixed in 359 CE by the soon-to-be-disbanded Sanhedrin – we have

added a leap month seven times every nineteen years, and that intercalation maintains Pesach in the spring. Based on the current system, we lengthen the third, sixth, eighth, eleventh, fourteenth, and seventeenth years of every nineteen-year cycle.

This lunisolar calendar is unique to us. Islam uses a purely lunar calendar, so their holidays fluctuate among the seasons. There are winter and summer Ramadans, and spring and autumn Eids. In Christianity, the Feast of Saturnalia (December 25), a pagan feast already mentioned in the Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 8a) but adopted for Christian purposes, always fell on that fixed date. By contrast, Easter always was and still is movable. In fact, until the year 325 CE it was literally based on Pesach, and the Church elders consulted the Sanhedrin as to the date of observance of Pesach. This was the norm until Church officials protested that ignominy, and the First Council of Nicaea ordained that Easter should be observed on the first Sunday after the full moon after the vernal equinox.²

For sure, our system is more complicated. The Talmud (*Shabbat* 75a) even deemed our calculation of the astronomical seasons “our wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations” (*Devarim* 4:6). The Jewish calendar was indeed a genius enterprise that accounts for many different calendrical needs,³ but it was all based on one foundation: שמור את חדרש האביב, ensuring that Pesach is always celebrated in the spring.

Indeed, the Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 21a) states:

שלח ליה רב הונא בר אבין לרבא: כד חזית דמשכה תקופת טבת עד שיתסר בניסן - עברה לההיא שתא, ולא תחוש לה. דכתיב שמור את חדרש האביב - שמור אביב של תקופה שיהא בחדש ניסן.

Rav Huna son of Avin instructed Rava: if you see that the season of Tevet (winter) will extend to the sixteenth of Nisan, intercalate the year, and do not worry [about any other reason], as it is written, “observe the month of spring” – ensure that the spring (the vernal equinox) comes in the [first part of the month of] Nisan.

2. James Carroll, in his book *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (Houghton Mifflin, 2001) noted that this embarrassment spurred Christians to study science and astronomy, and greatly contributed to the development of the civilized world.
3. See, for example, שו"ע או"ח תכה:א-ד, for some of these needs.

Similarly, Rambam records (*Hilchot Kiddush ha-Chodesh* 4:2):

על שלשה סימנין מעברין את השנה, על התקופה ועל האביב ועל פירות האילן, כיצד בית דין מחשבין ויודעין אם תהיה תקופת ניסן בששה עשר בניסן או אחר זמן זה מעברין אותה השנה, ויעשו אותו ניסן אדר שני כדי שיהיה הפסח בזמן האביב, ועל סימן זה סומכין ומעברין ואין חוששין לסימן אחר.

The year is intercalated based on three indicators: for the season, for the spring, and for the fruit of the trees. How is it done? The Court calculates and determines if the season of Nisan (i.e., spring) will arrive on or after the sixteenth of Nisan, then a leap month is added and they make the next month a second Adar. This is done so that Pesach falls in the spring, and we rely on this marker and intercalate the year and do not need any other marker.

Pesach in the spring is not only pleasant; it is also the *halachah*. But why? Why does the Torah emphasize this repeatedly? And if it is so important, why don't we refer to this requirement at the *seder* – or do we?

Yet if the Torah goes to such great lengths to insist that Pesach is linked to spring, why does it suffice if it is just the first day of spring? That is not the spring of sunshine and flowers and warmth. In the early part of spring, we can still be shoveling snow and shivering because of the chill in the air.⁴ The joys of the season are usually not realized until the middle and late spring. But the *halachah* states that as long as it is defined as astronomical spring (i.e., after the vernal equinox) that is enough to observe Pesach.

And when the *Sifrei*⁵ (that Rashi cited) affirms that **כי בחדש האביב**, "we left in the month of spring, a month that is appropriate because it is neither hot nor cold," what exactly is the "religious" dimension here? It seems more meteorological than ideological.

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4. I recall a number of times living in New York and New Jersey when we celebrated Pesach with snow on the ground. Of course, Pesach was meant to be celebrated in Israel where snow on Pesach would be a rarity.
 5. ספרי דברים פרשת ראה פיסקא קכה.

Indeed, what kind of obligation is שמור את חדש האביב? It is not one of the 613 *mitzvot*, so how would we characterize this obligation?

There are other indicia of spring as we anticipate Pesach. Most famously, we are mandated to recite the ברכת האילנות when the month of Nisan begins. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 226:1) teaches:

היוצא בימי ניסן וראה אילנות שמוציאין פרח, אומר: בא"י אמ"ה שלא חיסר בעולמו כלום וברא בו בריות טובות ואילנות טובות ליהנות בהם בני אדם; ואינו מברך אלא פעם אחת בכל שנה ושנה, ואם איחר לכרך עד אחר שגדלו הפירות, לא יברך עוד.

One who goes out in the days of Nisan and sees blossoming [fruit] trees recites a blessing, thanking God, "Who did not leave in His world anything lacking but rather created beautiful creations and beautiful trees from which people can benefit." This blessing is recited once annually, and one who delays until after the fruit has grown on the tree cannot recite [the blessing].

This is truly a rite of spring. But is it just a seasonal coincidence that we recite this blessing in Nisan, or is this blessing tied to Pesach as well? According to most opinions, this blessing cannot be recited in Iyar but only in Nisan. Why is that? If the *berachah* is just praise of God at the time of our enjoyment, why can't we recite this blessing also in Iyar if the other conditions are met?

Perhaps more to the point is an aspect of Pesach of which we are only tangentially aware. The Mishnah (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a) declared that the world is judged four times a year, the first of which is בפסח על התבואה "on Pesach, we are judged concerning our grain," i.e., how plentiful and prosperous we will be.⁶ This introduces another aspect of Pesach that is mostly obscured today. The Gemara (*ibid.*) continues:

תניא, אמר רבי יהודה משום רבי עקיבא: מפני מה אמרה תורה הביאו עומר בפסח - מפני שהפסח זמן תבואה הוא; אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: הביאו לפני עומר בפסח, כדי שתתברך לכם תבואה שבשדות.

It was taught in a *baraita* that Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rabbi Akiva: Why did the Torah say, "Bring the *omer* on

6. Famously the entire world is judged on Rosh Hashanah; on Shavuot we are judged concerning the fruit of the tree, and on Sukkot for water.

the second day of Pesach”? It is because Pesach is the time of grain (the beginning of the grain harvest season) and so God said, “Bring the *omer* before Me on Pesach so that the grain in the field will be blessed.”

This ceremony on the 16th of Nisan, the second day of Pesach, was a central part of the Divine service in the Beit HaMikdash. We read about it on the second day of Pesach (Vayikra 23:9–14). While the Temple stood, on the second day of Pesach the *kohen* brought a measure of barley as a *korban minchah*, a meal offering. Once the *omer* is offered, then all the new produce that had taken root before that time is permitted for consumption. We are familiar with the *omer* because it is the night before the *הבאת העומר*, the bringing of the *omer*, that we begin “counting the *omer*.” (Technically, it is the count from the day of the bringing of the *omer*.)

It is difficult, if nearly impossible, to put ourselves in the mindset of the generations that celebrated the holidays in the Temple. Their daily lives were completely different from ours and certainly their observance of the festivals. Pesach stands out in that regard. On the 14th of Nisan, thousands (maybe millions) of Jews came to the Temple with a *korban Pesach*, such that the floor of the *azarah* (the Temple courtyard) was covered in blood. People were singing *Hallel*. It was raucous, wild, and joyous.

Just two days later – less because the *omer* was offered in the early morning – the mood was also festive but a little more sedate. It was the ceremony of *hava’at ha-omer*, the bringing of the *omer*. But what connection does this have with Pesach of the Exodus? Indeed, we wrestle with the anomaly of observing the days of the *omer* as days of mourning, perhaps even on Pesach (which seems strange), but here is an entire service on Pesach that does not even mention Pesach, and on the surface has nothing to do with Pesach. In fact, the Torah dates the event to *ממחרת השבת*, “the day after the Sabbath” (Vayikra 23:15), a formulation that vexed the Sadducees who interpreted this as Sunday, as opposed to our Sages who understood the mention of “Shabbat” not as Saturday but as to the day of *Yom Tov*, i.e., Pesach (*Menachot* 65b). So what is the connection between the *omer* and Pesach?

Of course, we count the *omer* for 49 days until Shavuot – but why?

We do not even have the *omer* anymore, so why are we counting 49 days from the bringing of the *omer* until the offering of the שתי הלחם, the two loaves offering of Shavuot? We count זכר למקדש, to remember what we did in the Temple, but what is the remembrance and how do we bring this aspect of the Temple into our lives?

There is one other springtime quality to Pesach. The *seder* is certainly one of the highlights of the year. It is long and joyous, we are blessed to be surrounded by children and grandchildren, we have the matzah and the wine, and Torah thoughts are shared in abundance, all to transmit to our offspring the foundational story of the Jewish people. One inevitable consequence is that many people come to synagogue on the first morning of Pesach a little strung out, dragging, exhausted, and dazed. People literally stumble into synagogue, and many people even come late. Only *yekkes* (and rabbis) come on time.⁷

In this state of exhaustion, what could we possibly want more than a longer *davening*? Thus on the first day of Pesach, there is a universal custom to recite טל ברכת טל, the blessing for dew, which entails a much longer *Musaf*. And when the intermediate days of Pesach begin, we immediately stop saying ותן טל ומטר לברכה, the request for rain that we recite in the *Amidah* throughout the winter. So how is טל, dew, related to Pesach? And couldn't there be a more convenient time to say it? Does it have to be on the first day of Pesach?

This engenders an interesting question. We say the blessing for גשם, rain, on Shemini Atzeret, but we do not start saying ותן טל ומטר לברכה in Israel until two weeks after Sukkot ends, the seventh day of Marcheshvan.⁸ This is because we want to allow time for the travelers from abroad to return home without the inconvenience of traveling in the rain (*Ta'anit* 10a). We assume our prayers for rain will draw an immediate response from Above and do not want to appear ungrateful when it rains.⁹ So we delay our request for rain for two weeks to enable the last traveler from the Euphrates to return home safe and dry.

7. I would always re-print my first day of Pesach sermon in the *shul* bulletin the following year because no one could possibly process it or remember it, not even me.

8. In the exile, ותן טל ומטר לברכה is not recited until early December.

9. At the season's first rain in Israel, I once blurted out "Oy, it's raining," and

We do not want Jews to be inconvenienced by traveling in the rain. Here is the question: just like we wait to say *לברכה לומר* until two weeks after Sukkot to protect the travelers, should we not stop saying *לברכה לומר* two weeks before Pesach to allow the visitors to travel to Israel without rain? In fact, it would make sense to recite the blessing for dew on Shabbat HaGadol (the Shabbat before Pesach) morning (which always seems like a shorter *davening* anyway)! And we should stop saying *לברכה לומר* on the first day of Nisan. That is what I would recommend in theory. Of course, our commitment to the *Mesorah* is indefatigable, but wouldn't this make more sense? Why do both the blessing for dew and the cessation of *לברכה לומר* all happen on Pesach?

It seems that there is much happening on Pesach that does not have that much to do with Pesach explicitly, even aside from the home renovations and the spring cleaning.

There is one principle that formulated the structure of the *Haggadah* that we will repeatedly encounter. The Gemara stresses that *מתחיל בגנות*, we must start with references to our degradation as a people either politically (*עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים*, we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt) or spiritually (*מתחלה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו*, our ancestors were initially idolaters). The Gemara disputes which is the correct opinion (*Pesachim* 116a), so we do both: "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, *ויוציאנו ה' אלקינו משם*, and God took us out with a strong hand and an outstretched arm." This was Shmuel's opinion. According to Rav, we begin by referring to our forefathers as idolaters, *ועכשו קרבנו המקום*, *לעבודתו*, "and now God has drawn us near to His service."

It is easy to understand the requirement of *שבח*, extolling God, which is a key part of the mitzvah of *ציאת מצרים*, relating the story of the Exodus. But why do we have to be negative at first? Why say anything that smacks of *גנות*? Why can't we just be positive?

Additionally, how is *ויוציאנו ה' אלקינו משם* considered "praise" of God? That is not just *praise* but the very essence of the evening! To be *מסיים שבח* in that context is almost an understatement. So how is that phrase construed as "praise" of God?

was gently admonished by a neighbor who reminded me that we pray for just such rain every day!

Part of our “degradation” is that we left Egypt בחפזון, in haste, in a mad rush. Why was that necessary? Certainly, the Egyptians wanted us out and the sooner the better, for their society was collapsing. As the Torah states, ותחזק מצרים על העם למהר לשלחם מן הארץ כי אמרו כלנו מתים, “Egypt pressured the people to send them out of the land in haste for they said, ‘We will all die’” (Shemot 12:33). As a result, they baked their dough into matzah, not *chametz*, because ולא יכלו להתמהמה וגם, “They could not tarry and even had no prepared food with them” (ibid. 12:39).

The Egyptians wanted us out, but were we in a rush ourselves? Not necessarily. After all, the Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 11b) said בראש השנה, the actual servitude of the Jews in Egypt ended on the previous Rosh Hashanah, about a half year before the redemption. The Egyptians could no longer enslave us while they suffered from the ten plagues.

And yet, the Jews were also in a rush to leave. The Zohar¹⁰ recorded that in Egypt, the Jewish people deteriorated spiritually to the point that we had descended to the מ”ט שערי טומאה, the 49th level of impurity. As the eighteenth-century Rav Chaim ibn Attar articulated, כי אם היו מתעכבים שם עוד היו נכנסים בנ’ שערי טומאה ולא היתה תקומה לזה גאלם מיד, “If they had been delayed in Egypt any longer, they would have descended to the 50th level and from there they would have been no means to revive them for redemption” (*Or ha-Chaim*, Shemot 3:7). Rav Tzadok of Lublin similarly wrote אלמלא מיהר לגאלם היו נכנסים בשער החמישים, “If [God] had not hurried to redeem us, we would have entered the 50th gate of impurity from which it is impossible to be redeemed” (*Likkutei Ma’amarim, Ot Chet*). Thus, we did not even have a few more minutes to bake bread. This statement is so well known that we take it for granted.

But were we really that spiritually degraded and impure? Perhaps during the decades of servitude we might have descended that low, but Rav Shlomo Elyashiv¹¹ asked an insightful question. By the morning of the 15th of Nisan, the Jewish people had already beheld Divine

10. זוהר חדש ריש פרשת יתרו

11. Author of *Uvachlama* and widely known as the *Ba’al ha-Leshem*. He

miracles and wonders, seen the ten plagues ravage Egypt, and enjoyed the revelation of the Divine Presence. Moreover, by that time we had received *mitzvot*! We were commanded regarding Rosh Chodesh, the *korban Pesach*, matzah, *maror*, *chametz*, the blood on the doorpost, etc. If our descent into impurity was inevitable in that Egyptian den of iniquity, would it not be reasonable to expect that by the eve of the redemption or certainly the next morning when we had already showed our faith and our mettle, that we would no longer be spiritually deteriorating but actually improving? We were redeemed because of the merit of two *mitzvot* – the *korban Pesach* and circumcision.¹² So how can we still have been so spiritually degraded that we were in danger of passing the point of no return? How can we have continued to decline even after the slavery stopped and after witnessing God's mighty hand and outstretched arm? What are the fifty gates of impurity and why were these gates of impurity so irresistible that we had to rush out of Egypt even before we could bake bread?

Finally there is a fundamental dispute in the Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 10b–11a) as to the relative virtues of the months of Nisan and Tishrei and what specific and formative events occurred in those months. For example, Rabbi Eliezer's opinion is that the world was created in Tishrei, that Avraham and Yaakov were born in Tishrei, that Yitzchak was born in Nisan, that the redemption took place in Nisan, but that the future redemption will occur in Tishrei (בתשרי עתידין, בניסן נגאלו, ליגאל). By contrast, Rabbi Yehoshua held that the world was created in Nisan, all the *Avot* were born (and died) in Nisan, and the past redemption took place in Nisan and the future redemption will also take place in Nisan (בניסן נגאלו, בניסן עתידין ליגאל).

Each sage supports his opinions with proof texts – but what is the difference really? What is the difference whether the world was created in Tishrei or Nisan? Everyone agrees that Yitzchak was born on Pesach, but what is the difference whether we say that the *Avot* were born in Tishrei or Nisan? Everyone agrees that we were redeemed from Egypt

was the maternal grandfather of the recent *posek* in Yerushalayim, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, *zt"l*.

12. מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל פרשת בא, מסכתא דפסחא פרשה יב:ו. רש"י שמות יב:ו. ה'.

in Nisan, but how do we understand the dispute whether the future redemption will take place in Nisan or Tishrei? What are they arguing about?

Here is a summary of the questions that have been raised:

1. What is the connection between Pesach and spring and why does the Torah emphasize it several times?
2. Why does the Torah add, in the last such reference to spring in *Parshat Re'eh*, that the Jewish people left Egypt “at night”?
3. What is the connection between the prohibition of making “molten gods,” Pesach, and spring in an earlier reference in *Parshat Ki Tissa*?
4. If the Exodus in springtime is so important, how do we incorporate it in the *seder*?
5. Why does it suffice for Pesach to fall on the very first day of spring?
6. What is the spiritual significance of leaving Egypt in a month that was כֶּשֶׁר, not too hot and not too cold?
7. Why do we recite the blessing on trees only in the month of Nisan?
8. Why are we judged on Pesach concerning our produce?
9. Why do we bring the *omer* on the second day of Pesach?
10. Why do we still count the *omer* to remember the Mikdash? What are we remembering?
11. Why do we recite the blessing for dew on the first day of Pesach?
12. Why don't we cease our recitation of *ve-tein tal u-matar* two weeks before Pesach in order to accommodate the travelers, just like we wait two weeks after Sukkot to begin reciting *ve-tein tal u-matar*?
13. Why does the *Haggadah* take the form of מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח, starting with our shame and concluding with praise of God?
14. How is ויציאנו ה' אלקינו משם considered the “praise” of God when it is actually the essence of the *seder's* narrative?
15. How could the Jews in Egypt have possibly sunk to the 50th level of impurity when we were already involved in *mitzvot* and Divine service by the time the redemption took place?
16. What is the difference whether the world was created, our forefathers born, or the future redemption will occur in Nisan or Tishrei?

There are two other references to *aviv*, “spring,” in the Torah. In *Parshat Tzav* (Vayikra 2:14), the Torah speaks of the *korban minchah* of the first grain, which must be אֵשׁ קְלוּי בָאֵשׁ, from “ripe” ears, parched

over fire and ground from kernels. In this context, *aviv* means “ripe.” An earlier reference was at the end of *Parshat Va’era* (Shemot 9:31, the first time the word is used in the Torah) and described the effects of the plague of hail which destroyed part of the Egyptian crop. It was not the wheat or spelt that were ruined because they were not yet ripe but rather:

הַפֶּשֶׁתָּה וְהַשְּׁעֵרָה נִכְתָּה כִּי הַשְּׁעֵרָה אָבִיב וְהַפֶּשֶׁתָּה גְבַעַל.

The flax and the barley were smitten because the barley was *aviv* (ripe) and the flax was still in its stalk.

As Rashi notes there, עֲמֵדָה בְּאִבִּיהָ . . . עֵמֶד בִּיכְרָה . . . עֲמֵדָה בְּאִבִּיהָ, it was already ripe, upright in its freshness, as in *בְּאִבֵי הַנְּחָל* (Shir Ha-Shirim 6:11), like the green, moisture-laden plants of the vale. That is *aviv*.

Pesach is a time of ripeness, and the experience of Pesach must re-visit and duplicate that of spring on individual and national levels, and both physically and spiritually. Our Jewish calendar is based on the principle that Pesach must fall in the spring, and all our holidays are arranged such that Pesach is observed *חֹדֶשׁ הָאֲבִיב*, “at the appointed time in the month of spring.” Then, the *חַג הַקִּצִּיר* (Shavuot) coincides with the harvest of the first fruit and *בִּצְאוֹת הַשָּׁנָה*, the festival of ingathering (Sukkot) at the end of the year, the final harvest.¹³

The foundation of our calendar is *שְׁמוֹר אֶת חֹדֶשׁ הָאֲבִיב*, preserve the spring month and ensure that Pesach is observed in that season. Rav Shamshon Rafael Hirsch commented (Devarim 16:1) that even though our months are based on the moon, our holidays are based on the sun. The *מוֹעֲדִים*, the meeting times between the Jewish people and God, are based on the solar cycle. It is a remarkable relationship.

After the dormancy of winter, God’s presence is proclaimed every spring through nature – in every flower, every blade of grass, and every fruit tree. Indeed, *שְׁלֵא חִסַּר בְּעוֹלָמוֹ כְּלוּם*, there is nothing lacking in His world, but His presence and providence is proclaimed even more so in the life of man, in history, as the Torah taught us. We identify

13. See *שְׁמוֹת כָּג:טז*. It seems obvious that those who do not live in agrarian societies – most of us – forfeit an entire dimension of the three pilgrimage holidays.

with God in both nature and history – as יוצר המאורות (Creator of the luminaries) and הבורח בעמו ישראל באהבה (who chose His nation of Israel with love).¹⁴

Thus, the festival of our historical revival must simultaneously be the festival of the revival of nature. To quote Rav Hirsch at his poetic best: the same God “whose breath of spring awakes nature out of the stark, death-like rigidity of winter is the same God who called us to life and freedom from death and enchantment, and the same God who . . . broke open the Egyptian grave of our political existence, the same God whose free-making life-giving rule is so proclaimed by every shoot bursting through the soil, every bud breaking into bloom, every creature shaking itself up to fresh life out of the bleak stark winter in the fresh joy of spring” (on Devarim 16:1).

Just like we have no intermediaries with nature but experience it directly, so too we have no intermediaries with God but experience His redemption directly as well. As the *Haggadah* proclaimed,¹⁵ אני אה' "I am God [the Redeemer], I am He, and there is no other."

Every Pesach we re-experience spring not just as a season but in the very observance of Pesach. Winter constrains and confines; spring liberates and frees. And when spring crowds man's thoughts with his mighty urges and physical temptations – with the illusions of our mastery and control over the world – Pesach comes to remind us of our limitations, of our dependence on God, of His dominion over all the world of nature and of mankind. In that sense, the admonition is vital: שמור את חרש האביב ועשית פסח לה' אלקיך כי בחרש האביב הוציאך ה' אלקיך ממצרים לילה.¹⁶

Thus, at the very beginning of the *seder* after *kiddush*, the first Pesach related act we do¹⁷ is eat *karpas*, כרפי שישאלו התינוקות, so that the children will ask about it.¹⁸ What should the child ask? Why are we eating hors

14. From the blessings before שחרית של שחרית.

15. See רמב"ם פסיקתא זוטרתא (לקח טוב) שמות פרשת שמות - וארא פרק ו' 12:12.

16. This answers question 1.

17. After all, *kiddush* is recited on every Shabbat and holiday. This will answer question 4.

18. רש"י מסכת פסחים קיד. ד"ה עד שמגיע

d'oeuvres? The very nature of hors d'oeuvres is food that precedes the main meal! Rather, the answer is that we are eating *karpas* (traditionally, greens)¹⁹ כרפס, in the manner of liberated people, a sign of freedom. And green, of course, is the color of spring. Later in the *seder* we will have yet another reminder of spring – in full blossom – but for now we have the taste of spring at the beginning of the *seder*.

We must analyze this process a little deeper. Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook wrote²⁰ that spring is a time of *התחדשות*, of renewal, in several critical ways. During winter, nature appears to us to be dead, but it contains the catalyst for its own rebirth. Every seed contains an embryo and the nutrients for the embryo. The embryo is just an immature plant from which a new plant will grow under the proper conditions.

For a time, the seeds are dormant, and germination is prevented until the optimal conditions for its development emerges. At that point, the seed coat breaks off and the seed germinates, and then develops into a seedling. It is as if the seed decays, dies, and disappears, only to be reborn and regenerated. It springs into life. Winter and spring echo a process of death and resurrection, of loss and renewal.

The Gemara²¹ ruled that *אין מעברין אלא אדר*, we only add Adar as a leap month, in order to underscore the connection between Pesach and spring and to ensure that Pesach falls in the early spring – if only by a day.²² That is why it suffices for the equinox to coincide even with the 15th of Nisan – and that is why the blessing over the trees is recited only in Nisan. We celebrate the beginning of spring – not the approaching temperate weather but its sense of renewal.²³

We were not redeemed in the fullness of spring but at its very beginning – the moment of the first bud. On Pesach, we replicate that process of decay and revival, even the bare beginnings of revival. Just like the lunar month begins after the disappearance of the moon, and then its reappearance, so too the redemption came after our near disappearance as well. In Egypt we were almost finished as a nation.

19. Yes, some people use potatoes.

20. עולת ראיה ח"א עמ' לו

21. מסכת ראש השנה ז

22. This will answer question 5.

23. This also answers questions 6 and 7.

It took quite a toll on us – the slavery, the brutality, the killing of the male babies, the paganism, the idolatry, the decadence, the absence of the Divine Presence, the הסתר פנים, and the severance of a spiritual connection with God.

As a result, Rav Chaim Yosef David Azulai (Chid"א) wrote,²⁴ כי הן בעון חוללנו טבועים בטיט הסט"א ירדו לשערים עם ה' מ"ט שערי טומאה ואם ח"ו היו שוהים עוד נכנסים בשער הן' של טומאה והיתה נפילה עולמית מוחלטים 'ח"ו. לטומאה כי טמ"א גימט' ה'. We were mired in the mud of the forty-nine gates of impurity and if we had stayed any longer in Egypt, we would have descended to the 50th level, a permanent plunge into absolute impurity (the word טמא, "impure," equals 50 in Gematria).

Nevertheless, how could the Jews have been so spiritually tainted moments before they left Egypt? After all, as the *Ba'al ha-Leshem* asked, we now had *mitzvot*! After witnessing all the plagues and miracles in Egypt, was there still no change or improvement in the people? By then, the forces of impurity had certainly weakened.

The *Ba'al ha-Leshem* explained²⁵ that the descent to the forty-nine gates of impurity happened earlier, and that is why the redemption was advanced. We left after 210 years, not the originally promised term of four hundred years, because we would not have survived any longer.²⁶ Once we merited the אור ה', the Divine light, we no longer were in decline. But if our descent had turned around, then why were we rushed out of Egypt?

The *Ba'al ha-Leshem* suggested that on the night of redemption, we experienced the exact opposite: God's revelation that night was so impressive that the *yetzer hara* was in danger of complete nullification and we would have lost our free will. Thus, ולא יכלו להתמהמה, God did not delay our departure even a minute in order to preserve our free will. The reality of God's existence was so overwhelming that we would have lost an essential part of our humanity – the capacity to serve God from our own free choice.²⁷

24. פני דוד שמות פרשת שמות סימן יא.

25. ספר הדע"ה (דרושי עולם התווה) ח"ב דף קכב טור ג' Rav Shlomo Elyashiv in his cited in קצו עמ' קצו by Rav Yaakov Moshe Weingarten. This will answer question 15.

26. Chid"א suggests a similar idea.

27. Something similar happened at the Sinai revelation when after the second

Rav Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, the *Sefat Emet*, offered a different explanation.²⁸ We were in danger of further sinking into the gates of impurity despite being on the verge of redemption, because these gates of impurity are the *הנהגה שהווא ניכר פנימיות הנהגה שהווא* 'ית', the darkness and obscurity of nature that render the inner essence of God's management of world affairs unrecognizable. There are too many layers that separate man from God. And the world itself conceals God's presence, as we are taught,²⁹ *זה שמי לעלם*, "this is My name forever" (Shemot 3:15), which can also be read "this is My name that will be hidden."

Egypt was the land of limits, reflected in its name *מצרים*, which also means "limitations." Each limitation, each pagan thought and debauched action, created a barrier between man and God. There are fifty such barriers.³⁰ By the time the month of redemption came, there was another spiritual danger that appeared – another level of impurity even more dastardly than the deification: it was the deification of the human being. It was the fear that the people would believe that the Exodus was all Moshe's doing, his diplomatic and political skills, his magic, and his miracles.³¹

The man who thinks that he has mastered nature and fancies himself a deity has reached the fiftieth and lowest gate of impurity from which no escape is possible. We could not tarry in Egypt even a moment longer.

In Egypt, we had to disintegrate as a people. We had to lose our land, independence, and pride. We had to be slaves in a *בית עבדים*, a society of slaves, where even the rulers were slaves. We had to fall apart – just like the seed in winter – in order to germinate again and be reborn.

utterance, the people asked Moshe – rather than God – to declare the other eight. Here, our free will was preserved intact by being rushed from Egypt. The proof is that just seven days later, the Jewish people were complaining – at the Red Sea, then at Marah. When Jews complain, it is a sign that our *yetzer hara* is functioning perfectly.

28. שנת תרמ"ז שפת אמת דברים פרשת ואתחנן

29. תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת יומא פ"ג ה"ז

30. The *א"ר* perceived a reference to this in the name *מצרים*, "limits of ים," the numerical equivalent of fifty.

31. Eventually the people did stumble in this regard, building a golden calf to replace Moshe who had gone missing. This is one reason Moshe's name is essentially omitted from the *Haggadah*.

Thus, the *Haggadah's* format is מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח. We start with our degradation, our spiritual emptiness, and the disappearance of our national lives. We were עבדים, slaves to the depraved Pharaoh in his degenerate land, and we were the descendants of idolaters. מתחיל בשבח means that we first refer to the winter of our national existence and only then celebrate its spring.³²

When the Torah reminded us again in *Sefer Devarim* – שמור את – חרש האביב, to ensure that Pesach is always observed in the spring – the Torah added לילה ה' אלקיך ממצרים לילה, “for in the month of spring God brought you out of Egypt at night.” How is “night” connected to the spring? What does the time of day have to do with the redemption? The answer is that night is when man feels most vulnerable. We do not know and often cannot see the hazards that are lurking in the darkness. God redeemed us at night – even though we physically left Egypt at high noon. It was at night that we witnessed His power, dominion and control over nature and mankind, symbolized by nature’s spring and springtime for the Jewish people.³³

Furthermore, in *Parshat Ki Tissa*, the admonition לא תעשה אלהי מסכה, not to make any molten gods, immediately precedes את חג המצות תשמר שבעת ימים תאכל מצות אשר צויתך למועד חרש האביב כי בחרש האביב יצאת ממצרים, to “observe the seven days of Pesach by eating matzah at the appointed time in the month of spring for in the month of spring you left Egypt.” What else is a מסכה? A mask. Do not make a mask for yourself – nature, the environment, mankind, beauty, etc. – and call it a god. Do not create layers of separation between man and God. Do not endow with sanctity anything that God did not so endow – not things, objects, scrolls, places, people, or texts.³⁴ Rather, את חג המצות תשמר, observe Pesach as God commanded us, למועד חרש האביב, for it was in the spring, and intentionally and deliberately so, that God liberated us from Egypt. It was spring when God demonstrated His mastery over the earth and all its inhabitants.³⁵

32. This answers question 13.

33. This answers question 2.

34. It is ironic that as these words are being written, many have made a fetish out of the anti-Corona mask, insisting on wearing it long after its effectiveness has waned and even forcing toddlers and young children to wear it when the harm it causes to their development has been established and documented.

35. This answers question 3.

Now we can understand why the placement of Pesach in the spring is not coincidental, and why our entire calendar revolves around Pesach in springtime. The core of our existence lies in the notion of rebirth, and it is at the very beginning of that process – in the formative budding stage – when the rebirth is most apparent.³⁶

That is why the *ברכת האילנות* intrinsically must be recited in the month of Nisan and not just any time we see trees beginning to bloom. The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 11a) states *האי מאן דנפק ביומי ניסן וחזי אילני*, דמלכלבי, “one who goes out in Nisan and sees the blossoming trees” recites the blessing. It has to be in Nisan, the month of our *התחדשות*, the month that proclaims our renaissance as a nation and compares that to nature itself. It is why we recite the blessing for dew, the harbinger of the fertility of spring, purposely on the first day of Pesach.³⁷ It is why deliberately on Pesach we are judged *על התבואה*, on our grains and produce.³⁸ And it is why we dedicate the second day of Pesach to *הבאת העומר*, bringing the *omer*-offering in the Beit HaMikdash, for we thereby acknowledge God’s dominion over nature and our physical bounty by offering fresh grain and permitting to us consumption of *חדש*, the new produce of that year.³⁹ It is all part of the experience of Pesach.

Many of our actions on Pesach are *זכר למקדש*, in remembrance of the Temple. We count the *omer למקדש*,⁴⁰ we eat Hillel’s *כורך* sandwich also *זכר למקדש*, we eat a hard-boiled egg at the beginning of the meal *זכר למקדש*,⁴¹ we pray that soon we will fully celebrate Pesach, *ונאכל* *שם מן הזבחים ומן הפסחים*, and eat there all the appropriate *korbanot* of the night (*Pesachim* 116b) and we conclude the *seder* with *לשנה הבאה* *בירושלים*, next year in Jerusalem.

These remembrances of the Beit HaMikdash and Yerushalayim in their political dimensions certainly raise unpleasant issues for many Jews. Yerushalayim is *the* battlefield today and has been for centuries. It is perhaps *the* intractable dilemma in Mideast diplomacy and not just

36. This is a concise answer to question 1.

37. This answers question 11.

38. This answers question 8.

39. This answers question 9.

40. This answers question 10.

41. Technically it is *זכר להורבן*, in remembrance of the destruction of the Temple, as the night of Tish’a B’Av always coincides with the night of the *seder*. See רמ"א שו"ע או"ח תעו"ב.

because the maximum Israel can concede is less than the minimum the Arabs would accept. It is because the dispute is not about territory but about ideology. Yerushalayim at the core of Jewish national identity is part of the revival of Jewish life that we commemorate on Pesach.

There is another aspect of spring that both explains our growth as a nation and as individuals and explains as well מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח. It is true that the earth is dormant in the winter but it does more than simply store its resources for the spring. It is the dormancy of winter that allows for greater growth in spring rather than simply depleting whatever resources are there. Winter gives us a chance to replenish our strength and start anew, even more invigorated. It enables us to reflect on our latent potential and then actualize it when the opportunity presents. Thus we were taught, היום אתם יוצאים בחדש האביב, “Today you are departing, in the month of spring” (Rashi, Shemot 13:4). God said to the Jewish people, ראו חסד שגמלכם שהוציא אתכם בחדש שהוא כשר, לצאת, לא חמה ולא צנה ולא גשמים, “Look at the kindness I have bestowed upon you that you are departing in a month in which it is appropriate to leave – not too hot, not too cold, and not too rainy.”

What was the great kindness in that? After all, any time a prisoner is liberated from incarceration is a good time!⁴² Rav Chaim Goldvicht commented⁴³ that such is true from the perspective of the prisoner. From the perspective of the בעל חסד, the benefactor, if something is lacking that could have been done, then the kindness is incomplete. Leaving Egypt in the spring – in a perfect travel month – was the ultimate kindness, even if we would have been grateful regardless of when we were freed.

We all have the potential to be great בעלי חסד, and lovers of Israel, and lovers of humanity, but it often takes a tragedy, a catastrophe, a disaster like a fire, earthquake, sudden death or illness, to actualize that capacity for kindness. It is the winter of our discontent that gives us a fresh perspective when spring comes.

But for the גנות, the deprivation, and what it forged in us, we would not necessarily have the capacity to appreciate the שבח, the praise. But

42. This is another answer to question 6.

43. Rav Goldvicht was the legendary founder of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh. This idea is cited in his הגדה של פסח אסופת מערכות commentary on the פסח.

for Moshe's upbringing in Pharaoh's palace, he might not have had the facility to help his brethren or even the concern for their welfare that brought him out to inquire about them (Shemot 2:11). But for the כור הברזל, the iron furnace of Egypt (Devarim 4:20), we would not have been, in Rav Hirsch's words (on Devarim 4:20), "purified and united" to become God's unique heritage.

But for the Babylonian exile, we would not have experienced the end of the allures of idolatry or the dynamic development of the Oral Torah. But for the long exile that still lingers and is still tangible, we would not have retained a connection to the land of Israel. In exile, we acquired the resources to deal with nationhood, even if we have applied them imperfectly.

Rav Shlomo Aviner⁴⁴ clarified that, to the thinking Jew, retreat, and withdrawal – the essence of winter – are not necessarily negatives. There is a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to embrace and a time to withdraw: לכל זמן ועת לכל חפץ תחת השמים, "to everything there is a season, and there is a time for every experience under the heaven" (Kohelet 3:1).⁴⁵

Every dynamic force partakes of this process. We do not grow in a linear fashion, but with stops and starts, advances and retreats. We are walking on a spiral staircase that gradually elevates our spiritual lives. Spring is more vibrant precisely because of the quiescence of winter.

Maharal⁴⁶ noted that the only dispute is on which גנות was worse, the spiritual or the physical degradation, but everyone agreed that גנות must be mentioned first as a necessary prerequisite for the שבה, the praise to be fully appreciated. If not for our spiritual lowliness and our physical helplessness, we might have attributed our freedom to happenstance. Instead, it proved that God was a פועל בעצם, the active force. Moreover, idolatry reflects a תשוקה פנימית, an inner desire for דבקות בה', a cleaving to God, even though the vulgarity of idolatry can strangle its pure nature.⁴⁷ There are many such phenomena in Jewish

44. בספרו "פסח" (ספריית חוה, תש"ע) עמ' 12-15, 20-21.

45. The same is true of Torah study as the Gemara (*Gittin* 43a) underscores אין אדם עומד על דברי תורה אלא אם כן נכשל בהן, a person does not truly understand the Torah unless he [first] stumbles in them.

46. הגדה של פסח, עמ' נז-נח.

47. Rav Aviner's (15-14 עמ') ישראל והזמנים - פסח - Rav Kook made a similar point

life today that are often the result of wholesome desires gone astray or at least a tad askew. Sin is a prelude to repentance and even greater closeness to God, much like death is a prelude to eternal life. But that is a divine calculation; we operate with our human calculations that compel us to seek only life and goodness.

The Brisker Rav⁴⁸ commented that עבדים היינו מסיים בשבח is not משם אלקינו ה' ויוציאנו; indeed, that is not mere praise but the essence of the *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim*. The praise for both Rav and Shmuel is ועכשיו קרבנו המקום לעבודתו, “Now God has drawn us near to His service.” That would have been impossible had we remained slaves to Pharaoh. And it was the culmination of the journey from the idolatry of our ancestors to the Revelation at Sinai. That God draw us near to His service is the antidote to both spiritual and physical enslavement.⁴⁹

This is illustrated by a famous story in Chabad lore.⁵⁰ The sixth Rebbe, Rav Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, was arrested and imprisoned by the Communists in 1927 for teaching Torah, a capital offense in the Soviet Union. He was pressured to reveal the religious network he had established and refused to talk until the Communist interrogator threatened the Rebbe with his pistol and boasted: “This little toy has made stronger men than you talk.”

The Rebbe calmly answered: “That toy is effective only when a person has one world (this physical world) and many gods (many physical desires). I have two worlds (the physical and the spiritual) and one God. Therefore that toy does not frighten me.” That is the definition of spiritual and physical freedom.⁵¹

This is why it matters whether the world was created in Nisan or Tishrei, and in which of those months the *Avot* were born and the future

in several places, including אגרות הראי"ה א:קלח and his discourse on the youth of his era, entitled אדר היקר.

48. הגרי"ז, סטנסיל על התורה. This will answer question 14.

49. This is another answer to question 15.

50. [https://](https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/2315099/jewish/Chukas.htm)

www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/2315099/jewish/Chukas.htm. The Rebbe was first sentenced to death, and then after intense international pressure, the sentence was commuted to three years, and then he was freed altogether on the 12th of Tammuz after 27 days in prison.

51. He was shortly thereafter released from prison, on 12 Tammuz, 1927.

Why is there eternal hope for us? It is because we are the nation of spring. Spring defines us. We can nearly disappear in the dead of winter, in the camps and the gulags. We can be given up for dead, as hopeless, as dry bones, lifeless and desiccated, and engendering the question asked of the prophet Yechezkel (37:3): התחיינה העצמות האלה, “Can these bones be revived?” Can lifeless soil still produce its bounty?

Our national existence parallels that of spring. The nations of the world – all the great empires that come and go – are like summer and autumn, and then they disappear, never to re-emerge on the stage of history. They have their moments in the sun and then they are gone. We are an eternally young people, a point made most famously by the American humorist Mark Twain:⁵⁴

If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of.

He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk.

His contributions to the world’s list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and obtuse learning are also way out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers.

He has made a marvelous fight in this world in all the ages and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself and be excused for it.

The Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Persians rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, and faded to dream stuff and passed away. The Greeks and the Romans followed and made a vast noise and they are gone. Other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time. But it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished.

The Jew saw them all. Beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind.

54. *Harper’s Bazaar*, September 1899.

All things are mortal but the Jew. All other forces pass, but he remains.

What is the secret of his immortality?

Mark, here is the secret: **שמור את חדרש, היום אתם יוצאים בחדש האביב** כי בחדש האביב הוציאך ה' אלקיך ממצרים לילה, האביב how to preserve the month of spring, our freshness as a people. It is because God intentionally took us out of Egypt in the spring to ingrain the lessons of springtime in our national character. And He imparted that lesson at *night*, when all was dark and foreboding, when we had seemingly evaporated into the gutters of impurity. There and then, He gave us light, purpose, eternity, optimism, and youth.

We are intrinsically tied to God through the spring of the solar year and through the proclamation of the new month that begins with the first appearance of the moon that had temporarily vanished from sight. As Rav Hirsch expressed this idea: “Each time the moon finds the sun again, each time it receives its rays of light, God wants His people to find Him again, and to be illuminated with fresh rays of His light, wherever and however, in running their course, they have had to pass through periods of darkness and obscurity.”⁵⁵ **החדש הזה לכם**, this month shall be for you, **כזה ראה וקדש**, when you see this [shape], sanctify it (*Rosh Hashanah* 20a).

It is not enough to see it; we have to sanctify it. That is the **כה** **ההתחדשות**, the power of renewal that we possess. When we stumble and fall, we get right back up. The stumbles are only temporary. From where do we derive this strength, this regenerative capacity, this gift of spring?

Rav Shaul Yisraeli⁵⁶ cites the verse **אני חומה ושדי כמגדלות**, “I am a wall and my breasts are like towers” (*Shir Ha-Shirim* 8:10) and the interpretation of the Gemara (*Pesachim* 87a), “I am a wall” – this is the Torah, “and my breasts are like towers” – these are the synagogues and houses of study. Even in the winter of exile, we preserved our *shuls* and *batei midrash*, our traditions and our Divine service, and our Torah and *Mesorah*. There, Rav Yisraeli continued, “we dreamt of the return to Zion, we dreamt of the restoration of the royal house of Israel, we

55. Commentary of Rav Hirsch, *Shemot* 12:2, par. מועד

56. Contemporary Rav in Israel, in his שיח שאול.

preserved in our collective memory the hope of redemption.” That is because we preserved the **חַרְשׁ הָאֲבִיב**, the month of spring.

Why don't we stop saying **וְתֵן טַל וּמָטָר** two weeks before Pesach, just like we wait until two weeks after Sukkot to begin its recitation?⁵⁷ Rav Yosef Elyashiv answered that rain is a Divine blessing and it is improper to ask for a blessing to stop. But Rav Chaim Kanievsky had a different answer.⁵⁸ It is because travelers *from* the Beit HaMikdash are demoralized enough for having to leave. We do not have to add inclement weather to their miseries. But *to* the Beit HaMikdash we come in all types of weather. As our Sages expounded, **בְּבֵית אֱלֹקִים נֵהְלֵךְ בְּרֵגֶשׁ**, “to the house of God we will go with the multitudes” (Tehillim 55:15), **בְּרֵגֶשׁ** is an acronym for **בְּרוּחַ, גֶּשֶׁם, וְשֶׁלֶג**, hail, wind, rain, and snow.⁵⁹

Even in the bleakest and harshest moments of winter, in the snow and wind and biting cold, we still remember and dream that we are the nation of spring.

Similarly, in the darkness of Egypt, we overcame the most antagonistic forces to growth and survival. Rav Kook wrote⁶⁰ that the **לֶחֶם עֹוִי**, the bread of affliction, is re-experienced at the *seder* because the force that limits, inhibits and pressures – the winter that stifles and suppresses growth and creativity – is the same winter that is the springboard to even greater growth.

The *karpas* of spring heralds our striving for the pinnacle of verdancy – the forty-nine days to **מֵתֵן תּוֹרָה**, the Revelation of the Torah, on whose day of commemoration we also display the fruits of spring. According to our custom,⁶¹ we spread greenery in our *shuls* and homes reflecting the greenery that surrounded Mount Sinai and the judgment on Shavuot of the **פִּירוֹת הָאֵילָן**, the later-ripening trees. In seven weeks, we progress from the *omer*-offering of raw grain to the maturation of the two loaves on Shavuot.

The first buds of Nisan, the early spring month of redemption,

57. This will answer question 12.

58. Both are recorded in **קִיב-קִיג (תשס"ה)**.

59. I heard this acronym – and its message – many times from my grandfather, Rav Froim Pruzansky, *zt"l*. The acronym works in Yiddish as well.

60. **עוֹלֵת רֵאִי"ה ח"ב רסב**.

61. **רמ"א שו"ע או"ח תצדג**. This is another answer to question 4.

culminate in the splendor of *Matan Torah*, when the natural world has fully matured and is resplendent in its glory. Similarly, from the nadir of the forty-nine gates of impurity we ascend the שַׁעֲרֵי בִינָה, the forty-nine gates of understanding, one gate each day, that are the ticket of entry to Sinai. And so Nisan must have Pesach, and the blessing on fruit trees, the blessing of dew and the bringing of the *omer* – all to reinforce our sense of timelessness, and our capacity for renewal and rejuvenation.

And the Exodus came about not only for us but also for the nations of the world. Rav Kook continued: יציאת מצרים תשאר לעד האביב של כל העולם כולו, the Exodus will always be the world's spring as well. We were responsible for the blossoming of the national idea and the very purpose of nationhood. It was not to enrich the few or to indulge the powerful; it was to give every person a sense of belonging to something greater than himself or herself. Through us, the nations will realize the ultimate vision of nationalism, חֲזוֹן הַצְּדָק וְאֵמֶת, the vision of justice and truth.

That can only occur if we exalt our sense of nationhood and regain our national purpose. We have to overcome the obstacles we have placed on ourselves and those that others – resentful of and/or irreconcilable to Jewish nationalism – have imposed upon us. We must look again to the spring. It should be no surprise that even in our day, Jewish sovereignty was re-established in the land of Israel in spring, in the month of Iyar, not Nisan, because we are no longer buds. We have a long history. We have experienced many winters. We should have a clearer sense of our national objectives – reclaiming the entirety of the land promised to us by God and establishing His ideal Torah community on that land. We should, but we do not or at least do not yet have the inner strength to implement these goals, to act upon them and to bring them to fruition.

Like the seed of winter that disintegrates before it gains new life, we must always be on the brink before we sense that our destiny is in God's hands. We have to be at the Red Sea, stranded בחֲגִי הַסַּלֵּעַ, in the clefts of the rock (Shir Ha-Shirim 2:14), with nowhere to turn; we have to be in Shushan, with no easy avenue of escape from the predations of a murderous despot; we have to be under the thumb of Yavan, with our countrymen ready to betray us and our heritage, outnumbered and overwhelmed and yet victorious. We have to be the victims of genocidal evildoers like Nazi Germany and would-be genocidal evildoers like Iran.

We have to be past the point of no return, surrounded on all sides by enemies, even to the point that nature concludes that these bones cannot be resurrected. We reach the point of hopelessness – and then the hand of God re-enters history in a remarkable and astounding way.

It does not *have* to be like that; it just always is. We just have to prepare ourselves, listen for the sounds, and look for the sights of spring. Every nation suffers at times, and it is unseemly to compete for the title of the world's greatest victim. The Irish have their story, the Ukrainians, the Rwandans, the Cambodians, the Kurds, and many others. But is there a nation like ours, שבכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותנו, where in every generation without exception they rise up against us to destroy us? What Herzl anticipated – that Zionism would normalize the Jews who would cordially be welcomed into the world of nations – was a nice try, but completely wrong. In that sense, Zionism was a colossal failure.⁶² We were not normalized. We are just as despised today across the world as we were 130 years ago, and even by countries that have benefited from their relations with Israel.⁶³ We are still recovering from the putative “peace process” that has delegitimized Israel's possession over much of the land of Israel. But we have been through worse and even not too long ago. Our national fortunes can turn on a dime when we realize who we are and where we are in history. As King Shlomo sang (Shir Ha-Shirim 2:11–12):

הנצנים נראו בארץ עת הזמיר הגיע וקול התור נשמע בארצנו כי הנה הסתו
עבר הגשם חלף הלך לו.

“Behold, the winter of our rains have passed (the era of slavery), the deluge (of suffering) is over and gone. The blossoms are seen in the land, the time of song has arrived (הגיע זמנן של ישראל) (להגאל)⁶⁴ and the voice of the dove can be heard in our land.”

62. Of course, it was an astonishing success as a catalyst for the large scale return of Jews to the land of Israel and the establishment of a state there in the face of implacable hostility.

63. It is true that Israel's standing has improved in recent years. We should be grateful for that and to those who brought it about and pray that it continue. But are there countries in the world that would mourn Israel's disappearance, God forbid?

64. שיר השירים רבה ב:יב

There is no clearer sign that the redemption is upon us than when the קול התור, the קול התורה, the sound of Torah is heard in the land.⁶⁵ We need to intensify our preparations in Torah and *mitzvot*, in faith and gratitude.

And we prepare for the future by first recalling the foundation of the Exodus: שמור את חדש האביב. We are a nation that is always in the springtime of its history – fresh, vibrant, alive, and forward-looking. We are ever responsive to the voice of our Beloved who calls to us saying (Shir Ha-Shirim 2:10) לך רעייתי יפתי ולכי לך, “Arise and go, My beloved, My beautiful one,” and seize your destiny, so that with Pesach and *aviv* our annual springboard, בקרוב נהל נטעי כנה, You will soon lead the offshoots You have planted, פדויים לציון ברנה, redeemed to Zion in song,⁶⁶ speedily and in our days.

65. זוהר כרך ג פרשת ויקרא דף ד עמוד של"ה מסכת שבועות הגה פרק תורה אור ב.

66. From the *Haggadah*, פסח, חסל סידור פסח.