



Rabbi Weiner's April 2008 Bulletin Article

Passover will soon be upon us. It is a busy time of the year for all. There is cleaning, shopping, planning, and all types of extra work on top of our already hectic schedules to prepare for this holiday. And if we weren't busy enough, this year the first Seder will be held on a Saturday night (April 19th—please see the special insert in the Passover Guide included in this month's bulletin which gives instructions as to how best to prepare for a Saturday night Seder). Each year I am always concerned that with all of the work that goes into the holiday, we don't lose sight of what Passover is, and what its celebration is supposed to offer us. Let us consider the three names by which Passover is known in the Torah.

1. *Z'man Cherutainu* – the season of our freedom. This is the name by which Passover is often known in our liturgy. Passover is known as *Z'man Cherutainu* because it was at this season of the year that the Jewish people were liberated from slavery in Egypt. We celebrate the deliverance from Pharaoh's hand and the newfound responsibilities that became ours as a result of our liberation. So powerful was this experience that it has animated Jewish thought and practice for the last 3300 years. Judaism as a religion and a way of life is built on two seminal events. The exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. That is why the two are always connected in Jewish thought. The freedom that we received as a result of our liberation was for a purpose: to live as Jews, freely and proudly, with a Torah as our guide.
2. *Pesach* – the Hebrew word *Pesach* means to pass over, or to jump. This reminds us that during the plagues, which were visited upon the Egyptians, the Jewish people were spared. This name teaches us that our deliverance was not a random act, but the will of G-d, confirming the promise that he made with Abraham that the Jewish people would be enslaved, but also redeemed by G-d's own hand. *Pesach* also refers to the special *Korban* – sacrifice that was offered in celebration of Passover in ancient times. Indeed, among the first Mitzvot ever commanded to the Jewish people had to do with the preparation of the *Korban Pesach* for the first Passover.
3. *Chag HaMatzot* – The festival of unleavened bread. Of all the symbols and rituals of Passover perhaps the Matzah is best known. Indeed you may recall the section of the Hagaddah which teaches that anyone who does not fully explain at their Seder the Passover offering, the Matzah,

and the bitter herbs has not fulfilled their obligation to recount on Passover night the story of the coming out of Egypt. The Matzah reminds us of the great haste with which the Jewish people left Egypt. So quickly did they leave at G-d's command that there was not time for the bread they had prepared to rise? Matzah is also referred to as *Lechem Oni*, the bread of our affliction reminding us that though we emerged from Egypt in poverty, with our newfound freedoms we had the opportunity to achieve greatness.

Passover is filled with important ideas and values. That is why Passover remains so beloved and so widely observed. Freedom, liberation, responsibility, sacrifice, struggle—these and so many others are at the heart of the experience, and must be a part of our observance as well. Let these ideas inform and renew your understanding of this special season of the year. We will look forward to sharing it with you.



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