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A Pesach Message

by Rabbi Shalom Shapira

It is with pleasure that I write this Pesach message in this newly-born publication, The Edinburgh Star. I wish to express my personal congratulations to the editor, Dr. Eitan Abraham, without whose quality of tenacity of purpose and sincere dedication, the launching of this journal may have remained only a dream. I also wish to extend my sincere thanks and best wishes to all those who pledged support and played their part in seeing to



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the journal's success. I am sure it will serve as a means of communication and will stimulate greater involvement in all traditional and social activities which take place in our community.

The Pesach Festival is also known as the Festival of Freedom. Some 3,300 years ago when our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, they established themselves as a nation. They started their long journey to their promised land--the only place where they could live as a sovereign people free of oppression and persecution.

When we read in our Torah those verses that refer to Pesach, it becomes clear why this Festival acquires so much

significance for our religion, for us as a nation and for our way of life:

".... On the fourteenth day of the first month towards evening is the Festival of Passover.... On the fifteenth day is the feast of unleavened bread which you must eat for seven days.... Take your lambs according to your families and if the household is too small for a lamb, let him and his neighbours next to his house take it according to the number of souls. And this day shall be to you for a memorial, and you shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations" (Leviticus XXIII, 5, 6, Exodus XII, 4, 14).

".... And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'what is this', that you shall say to him 'by strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt'...."(Exodus XIII, 14).

Through this first precept we note that the sacrifice of a lamb is not just intended for God but also for the family, to be eaten by the family or even shared among many families. It is not a one-off sacrifice but one to be carried out the same time of the year every year and in the same way.

This is the background to our traditional Seder evening, the Jewish family evening observed by the highest percentage of the Jewish population all over the world. The aim of it is to transmit our Jewish heritage to our children and grandchildren. Towards the last part of the Seder, after filling a special cup with wine for Elijah the prophet, we open the door widely to demonstrate that we are not afraid of anyone. However, we tell children a different interpretation: we open the door to enable Elijah to come in and join us as if we expected some spiritual help to gain the real freedom we still lack.

Since those days of complete slavery in ancient Egypt to our present period, the

striving for freedom for all Jewish people wherever they live has never really stopped. About a third of our people both in the Soviet Union and some Muslim countries have their freedom severely curtailed. It is interesting to note a prayer in the Hagadda: "Not one persecutor only has risen against us to destroy us, but in every generation there are those who rise against us to destroy us". This is also true in our own generation when we see the only Jewish State--the only place where Jewish people can enjoy substantial freedom and real sovereignty - being constantly threatened by surrounding hostile countries. Yet the Hagadda gives us a gleam of hope: "....but the Holy One always saves us from their hands".

I would like to conclude by wishing you a kosher and joyful Passover and I am looking forward to seeing you on the Shabat and the Festival Services and at the Communal Seder evening on the 19th of April.

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