

## WE WILL NEVER DIE

*By RABBI BENJAMIN BAK, Baltimore, Maryland*

The festival of Passover which we are celebrating today, commemorates the oldest event in the Jewish religious calendar. It is almost 33 hundred years since our people departed from Egypt and miraculously crossed the Red Sea on their way to the Promised Land. Ever since that time countless upheavals befell our people. Yet despite the antiquity of **יציאת מצרים** and the many cataclysmic events that followed this great drama, the holiday of Passover is still the most cherished and most popular of all the historic holidays in the Jewish religion. This is so because the message of Passover is timeless. It is eternal. It is as meaningful and true today as it was all through the centuries.

Passover has a two-fold message for the modern Jew of today. It speaks to him in terms of reason as well as emotion, in terms of sadness as well as joy. Above all it emphasizes these two thoughts: the Jew's insecure position in Galuth and his ultimate triumph over all his enemies who seek to destroy him.

Our people settled in Egypt under the most favorable conditions. For decades they lived in peace, security and honor.

They became prosperous and mighty. One of their devoted sons Joseph, became the most celebrated citizen of all Egypt. By his prudence and vision he saved the country from utter ruin. And the Egyptians were grateful and appreciative of his services, and rewarded the Jews in proportionate measure.

But suddenly, almost overnight, a great transformation took place. The very same Egyptians who were so kind and so grateful, suddenly turned into cruel taskmasters and pitiless oppressors of their former benefactors, the people they so highly esteemed only yesterday.

How can we explain this sudden change? What forces brought it about? Were the Jews of Goshen found to be guilty of disloyalty to the State?

The Bible in its own characteristic style supplies the answer to all these questions. In but a few introductory remarks the Torah solves the mystery surrounding the origin and cause of our enslavement in Egypt. "And there arose a new king who knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people let us deal wisely with them." There were no great upheavals in the life of Egypt. The Jewish people were more loyal to the state than ever. But there occurred a change in the government of Egypt, perhaps a change of dynasty, and this quite predictable occurrence exposed our people to the very threat of national extinction.

This brief account of the Bible emphasizes in most elo-

quent terms the insecure position of the Jew in the lands of Galuth. A mere change in the political structure of a country may find him confronted with the greatest problems. And since this experience in Egypt is not an isolated episode in our history but rather part of a recurring pattern, we must remember it at all times and plan our future accordingly.

But while the beginning of the story of our sojourn in Egypt tends to introduce a note of sadness and discouragement, the triumphant conclusion of this great drama should breathe life into our spirits and fill our hearts with hope and unbroken faith in Israel's eternity. Pharaoh of old failed to destroy the Jew and so will all modern Pharaohs always meet with doom in their open or hidden assault upon the Jewish people.

שלא אחד בלבד עמד עלינו לכלותינו אלא שבכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותינו  
והקב"ה מצילנו מידם.

"For not one tyrant alone has risen up against us to destroy us, but in every generation tyrants have sought to destroy us, and the Holy One Blessed be He has delivered us from their hands," we recite each year at the Seder. From our very birth as a people we were hunted and persecuted. Egypt enslaved us. Babylon crushed us. Rome led us captive. Spain burned us at the stake. Russia pogromed us. Germany gassed us. And yet, miracle of miracles, Israel today is alive, exhibiting courage and determination, energy and vitality. Do we need greater proof that Israel as a people is eternal and indestructible?

**This faith in the eternity and deathlessness of the Jew is**

very much emphasized by our sages in the Midrash. (Exodus Rabbah II, 10)

ולמה הראה הקב"ה למשה בענין הזה. לפי שהיה מחשב בלבו ואומר שמא יהיו המצרים מכלין את ישראל. לפיכך הראהו הקב"ה אש בוערת ואיננו אוכל. א"ל כשם שהסנה בוער באש ואיננו אוכל. כך המצריים אינן יכולין לכלות את ישראל

When G-d appeared to Moses in Midyan, commanding him to return to Egypt to liberate his people, He revealed Himself to him in the strange sight of a burning bush, a thorn-bush engulfed in flames and yet not being consumed. This sight was chosen by G-d deliberately in order to impress upon Moses the indestructibility of Israel. For just like the bush, Israel in Egypt was engulfed by fires of hate and persecution. At times even Moses lost faith and was despondent and pessimistic about their future. But the marvelous spectacle of the burning bush reassured him. He was made to understand that Israel though despised and tormented will never perish, because G-d had chosen him for a glorious future.

The eternity of Jewish life and the futility of tyrants' efforts to destroy us is further illustrated by our wise men in a beautiful legend. A heron once built its nest along the shore of the sea. One day, when the heron returned from her daily flight she found no trace of her nest or of her little ones, for the billows of the sea had swept away her nest together with her young. The heron grew angry at the sea, and in her great wrath exclaimed: "O you mischievous sea! I am going to take revenge of you! I will dry up your proud billows." And she immediately started out upon her great task. She took a mouthful of water and spilled it on the sand, and she then took a

mouthful of sand and spilled it in the water. Thus she continued, repeating the process steadily without allowing time to either eat or drink. Another bird noticed the heron at her labor and inquired: "Pray tell me what you are trying to do." "This proud haughty sea has destroyed my children," answered the heron, "and I will not rest until I dry up its waters." The bird smiled sadly and said to the heron, "Even if the creatures of the whole world should come to your aid, you would be unable to accomplish your task."

The moral of the legend is obvious. Even as it is impossible to dry up the ocean so will it be impossible to destroy Israel, because G-d's design calls for our perpetual existence.

"The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and spread out," has in the course of history become a proven phenomenon. In every age the restrictive measure of the tyrants served only to reinvigorate the spirits of our people and to spur them on to higher aims and nobler achievements. In our own day, the bestiality of Hitler, far from crushing our people's will to live and create, produced that unconquerable determination to end Jewish homelessness which has defied empires and beaten the combined strength of several armies.

Proven by trial and tribulation and hardened by the Pharaohs, Torquemadas and Hitlers, our people have learned to disdain tyranny and to gaze into the future with hope and confidence.

## "COUNTING OUR DAYS"

*By RABBI JOSEPH ROTHSTEIN Charleston, S. C.*

The Festival of Passover which we are completing today is referred to not only as "Chag Hamatzos," but is also known as "Chag Ho-aviv" — the Festival of Spring. For at Pesach time, everything blossoms forth again — הנצנים נראו בארץ — "The flowers are seen in the land," and all the world of nature begins a new life-cycle.

It was at this season that Jews in ancient Judea would begin counting the days from Passover to Shevuos in accordance with the Biblical injunction:

וספרתם לכם... שבע שבתות תמימות (ויקרא כ"ג: ט"ו)

"And you shall count seven complete weeks", and each day they would bring an Omer of the barley crop to the Temple as offering of thanksgiving. With the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion of the Jews, all that remained of this ancient custom was the "Sefirah" — the counting itself. Now, on the surface of it, a custom of counting days doesn't seem to have very much significance. And yet, according to the Psalmist there must be a special technique that is required:

למנות ימינו כן הודע, ונביא לבב חכמה (תהלים צ: י"ב)

"Teach us to count our days, that we may get us an understanding heart."