

And you shall say, "It is a Pesach-offering to Hashem, Who passed over the houses of the Bnei Yisrael in Egypt." (12:27)

The festival commemorating our exodus from Egypt, our liberation from the most cruel bondage, is called *Chag Ha'Pesach*, the Festival of Passover. This name recalls how Hashem "passed over" the Jewish homes during *makas bechoros*, when the Egyptian first-born were killed. Considering the nature of the festival and the focus of its commemorating, the name seems like a misnomer. Would it not have been more appropriate to call the festival, *Chag Ha'cheirus*, the Festival of Freedom? This was no ordinary redemption. It was a liberation from a cruel and intense slavery. The Jews were ensnared by the guile of the Egyptians. First, Pharaoh promised a reward for each brick that they made. The Jews set about, resourcefully, to make as many bricks as they could, only to find out that this had become their daily quota! Then Pharaoh stopped giving them straw with which to make the bricks. Every move that Pharaoh made was intended to destroy Jewish pride and dignity, to transform a holy people into dispirited and crass beggars, who had no purpose and no future. Why then, do we not call the festival dedicated to commemorating the Jews' release from the abyss of Egypt the Festival of Freedom?

Nesivos Ha'mussar derives a profound lesson from the alternate choice of name--*Chag Ha'Pesach*. There is no greater *chesed*, kindness, than sparing an individual from death! Once the destroyer had been granted permission to strike, no distinction existed between Egyptian and Jew. When the *middas ha'din*, attribute of judgment, reigns, no human can stand before it and live. This is consistent with the words of David *Ha'melech* in *Sefer Tehillim* 130, "*If you preserve iniquities, oh G-d, Hashem, who could survive?*"

The kindness of sparing an individual from death is so great, that it overshadows all of the miracles, wonders and salvation that occurred in Egypt. Even the actual liberation pales in comparison. Being given access to life, being spared from a premature demise, incorporates within it all of the preceding benefactions. What value is freedom when one has no future?

Those who do not appreciate the true meaning of life may grasp its peripheral aspects but remain totally oblivious to its essence. We view life as a medium--as a vehicle for attaining joy and pleasure. We talk about various goals for which life is worth living, while we fail to recognize that the greatest joy is inherent in life itself. This idea is best reflected in the words of David *Ha'melech* in *Tehillim* 118, "*Hashem has caused me to suffer terribly, but He has not given me over to death.*" In this psalm, David *Ha'melech* looks back on a life filled with pain and suffering. Yet, he is able to thank Hashem for the greatest gift--the gift of life.

Horav Chaim Shmulevitz, z"l, points out two aspects of life that constitute its essence. First, only by living and performing mitzvos does one have the opportunity to receive reward in *Olam Ha'bah*. The greatest pleasure that one can attain is closeness to Hashem. Only through our humble existence on this world can this potential be realized. A second aspect of life which is invaluable is

the opportunity to interface with one's fellowman, to share in his joy, to help shoulder his sorrow. The opportunity to give of oneself to others is man's greatest gift. Indeed, it gives the greatest meaning to life.