discussed in this week's parashah come from cattle and sheep, there is also one bird which is permitted as an offering upon the altar—a dove. Why a dove? Talmud Tractate Bava Kamma teaches, "Rabbi Abbahu said: Let a person always be one that is pursued rather than a pursuer, for there is no bird that is pursued more than a dove and it is this bird which the Torah permits as an offering upon the altar. Rabbi Shmuel Avigdor HaCohen continues, "Scripture states that 'God desires the one who is pursued' (Ecclesiastes 3:15). Birds of prey cannot achieve the level of holiness required for a sacrificial offering. Only the bird that is pursued, the dove, is desired as an offering. God despises the pursuer and desires the pursued. It is therefore forbidden to bring a sacrifice—to come close to God—by means of an animal of prey, i.e. one that pursues that which is weaker than it." The message rooted in the experience of the Exodus is clear—do not prey on those weaker than you. As Israelites, we are to act with a keen sense of justice—only this will bring us closer to God.

Renowned artist David Moss, in his extraordinary haggadah, depicts a chilling image toward the beginning of his haggadah. Taking his cue from illustrations of a rabbit hunt at the beginning of medieval European haggadot, Moss illustrates the emblems of nations that have persecuted Jews throughout the ages and notes that many of them took the eagle as their symbol. Moss illustrates the seemingly invincible eagle in each national emblem with a rabbit (the symbol of the pursued) in the beak or talons of the preying eagle. Both Parashat Tzav and David Moss give us pause to think about our role as the pursued as well as the pursuer. Having lived for some two thousand years in a state of powerlessness, the Jewish people are blessed with a country of our own and today, we are indeed in a state of power. This Passover, may we, seated around our precious Passover tables, challenge ourselves to think about the responsibility of power—and how our experience of powerlessness informs this special task. And may our sincere inquiry bring us closer to each other, and as a dove, bring us closer to God.

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A Holiday of Contradictory Emotions

Dr. Shuly Rubin Schwartz, Chancellor and Irving Lehrman Research Professor of American Jewish History, JTS

Preparing to celebrate our second Pesah under the grip of a global pandemic, our hearts are filled with both sadness and hope. No one has been untouched by COVID-19. We're grieving a loved one, friend, or neighbor whose life was cut short. We're experiencing its social and economic toll—overtaxed first responders, teachers, and food providers; overwhelming social isolation; devastating financial insecurity—all exacerbated by underlying inequities. Thankfully, millions have received the vaccine, though many have yet to receive it, and new variants temper our expectations.

As we approach Pesah 2021, these contradictory emotions leave us teetering on a precipice, not sure whether to grieve or celebrate, fear or hope. Such contradictions are central to our celebration of the holiday itself. On the same seder plate, even in the same bite, we juxtapose the bitter and the sweet, the *maror* and the *haroset*.

The four different names of Pesah highlight these complicated feelings. ***Hag Hapesah*** and ***Hag Hamatzot*** both connect to the Israelites' life in Egypt. ***Hag Hapesah*** reminds us of the miracle of the tenth plague, when God passed over the houses of the Israelites who had marked their doorposts with the blood of the Paschal sacrifice. This name vividly depicts how precariously the Israelites found themselves, poised between destruction and liberation—only a blood smear standing between death and deliverance.

Hag Hamatzot focuses on the matzah, described in the Haggadah as *"lehem oni,"* the bread of affliction. Matzah captures the burdens of slavery since on the night of their deliverance—but surely every other day before that—

Israelites subsisted on matzah, for they were deprived of the time needed to wait for dough to rise. ***Hag Hapesah*** and ***Hag Hamatzot*** evoke terror and deprivation but within each concept, the final plague and the simple bread that nourished the Israelites, is the promise of liberation.

The other two names of the holiday ***Hag He'aviv*** (the Festival of Spring) and ***Zeman Herutenu*** (the Time of Our Liberation) leave the bitter, harsh conditions behind, instead focusing on hope and salvation.

As the Midrash emphasizes, the springtime Exodus was a deliberate choice on God's part.

> Rabbi Akiva said: [God] only took [the Israelites] out [of Egypt] in a month fit for going out. Not in Tammuz because of the heat. And not in Tevet because of the cold. Rather, in Nissan for it is fit to go out on the road in it: there's no heavy heat, nor heavy cold. And if you say Tishrei—behold there are seasons of rain in it. [*Numbers Rabbah* (3:6)]

A logical choice to be sure; the Israelites would have been hampered by heavy rains, mud, or undue heat had God liberated them in any other season. But the symbolism of springtime is unmistakable. We feel the shackles loosening as we begin to see signs all around us—new buds on the trees, warmer weather, longer days. Renewal and rebirth are in the air. Rav Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook captures this well by noting that "Israel's exodus from Egypt will forever remain the spring of the entire world" [*Meged Yerahim*, Nissan 5674 (1914)].

The final name of the holiday, ***Zeman Herutenu,*** captures the holiday's essence—and the founding story of our people, birthed through the experience of liberation from bondage. It is this focus that has provided hope and inspiration not only for Jews but for oppressed peoples everywhere over the centuries.

The contradictions evoked by these four discrete names of Pesah are essential to our understanding of Pesah and of Jewish life. The sweetness of our liberation is tied to the bitterness of our slavery. As we learn in the Talmud, Moshe broke the first set of tablets in fury upon witnessing the Golden Calf that the Israelites had built, but according to the Rabbis the Israelites later carried *both* the new set of tablets and the broken ones with them in the portable tabernacle (BT Berakhot 8a–b).

So, as we prepare to recite the Pesah story at the seder, let's hold tight to the dual messages of the holiday. We retell the story not only to viscerally relive the experience of slavery and liberation annually, but also because *we* are different each year and can thus draw new insight and meaning each and every time. Some years, affliction and despair might feel remote to many reciting the Haggadah. This year—though the impact is uneven—we've all been broken. But we've also learned so much that can help us heal, improve, and adapt—both personally and as a society.

As the world begins to slowly acclimate to whatever our new normal will be, let's always carry these hard-learned lessons with us. May it instill in us renewed gratitude for all we have, and may it remind us of how much more needs to be done and the role we might play in bringing us closer to redemption.

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A Taste of Torah

Dove and Rabbit

Rabbi Matthew Berkowitz, Director of Israel Programs, JTS

The experience of the exodus from Egypt, *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, which we commemorate on Passover, is indelibly marked in the collective consciousness of the Jewish nation. It is this notion — of having been slaves to the Egyptians—that plays such a profound role in defining the moral and ethical demands that the Torah places on us. Having known the experience of oppression, we are commanded to take that to heart, lest we turn to oppress our fellow human beings. Thus, Passover is a time in which we dwell on the essence of what it is that defines us as a people: how does our experience of slavery shape the way we behave today? What does it mean to be a chosen people? And how is that we as a people deal alternately with powerlessness and power?

This latter question comes to the fore in our examination of Parashat Tzav. Rabbi Shmuel Avigdor HaCohen comments that while most of the sacrifices