

# National redemption must surely follow exile

THE WISDOM of our Sages is characterized by a philosophical depth and a faith marked by an involvement in reality.

The Passover seder is a case in point. The memory of the most fundamental national event in our collective history as a people is celebrated not in mass gatherings or assemblies, but at home, around the family table. The questions asked are not weighty, but the answers, slowly and surely, built up, reach down and spread wide across the expanse of the chronicles of the Jewish people.

One of the central instructions for the seder is "the matza and maror are to be placed before us." Whereas the matza signified the release from slavery, the maror recalled the bitterness of the lives of our ancestors at the hands of the Egyptians. It also reflects the difficulties Moses suffered at the hands of our forefathers at the Well of Marah, the Golden Calf and the incident of the Spies. The latter occurrence was especially bitter with the majority of the "cabinet" – 10 out of 12 – demanding a withdrawal in the face of the Canaanite demographic threat.

## Israel Eldad

Though we celebrate, there can be no matza without maror, no messiah without messianic pangs.

The thread of exile and redemption in our history is exemplified by Egypt and Babylon. Egypt represents the exile of enslavement, physical harm and destruction. The two centuries from the Emancipation until the Holocaust in our day are but a reflection of the era of Joseph until the throwing of the babes into the Nile.

The salvation came in a jump (*passah*, meaning to leap over). It was a revolutionary process. The going out from Egypt was a hurried affair, and the divine intervention – miraculous accompaniment – was necessary not only because of Pharaoh's stubbornness in refusing their release but also because the Israelites might not have gone forth if not forced. The second leap, that of Nahshon into the Red Sea, is an additional example that our Sages refused to idealize our people. Rather, they preferred deep under-

standing and creative perception of the historical undercurrent.

THE SECOND paradigm of exile and redemption is that of Babylon. If the Egyptian pattern was marked by a complete emptying out, a "transfer" if you wish, the Babylonian case was different in two ways. First, it was an exile of convenience, without enslavement. There were no dizzying reaches for the heights of power as with Joseph, Disraeli or Trotsky, no emancipation and assimilation and no reactionary backlash. The only exception is the singular, even puzzling, episode of Mordechai and Haman's threat of extinction that was followed not by redemption but by a local rescue.

The Babylonian exile, all the length of its days, was one of comfort. There was a Golden Age and much silver of monetary worth. There was the Babylonian Talmud and the Gaonim scholars. While there was no "going out from Babylon," there was the Return to Zion.

It was a process of stages. As a result of Cyrus's "Balfour Declaration," only 42,000 Jews went to Je-

rusalem. Those in Babylon prayed for the welfare of their brethren in Judea, collected funds and expressed their love of Zion. But the talmudic sage Reish Lakish, who lived in Eretz Yisrael, denigrated the Babylonian wise men. "If you had risen up as one in the time of Ezra" – and in our day, that would include the Bostoner Rebbe who resides in Brookline, Massachusetts, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Brooklyn, "then the Second Temple would not have been destroyed."

Two exiles, two redemptions, matza and maror, Egypt and Babylon. One represents the lure of wealth and the other the shadow of death. But without the totality of leaving behind the exile, the redemption itself is incomplete.

EVEN TODAY, in the State of Israel, we sat at the seder table with the matza and maror before us. As a Jew, one must alter reality, and view himself as if he was redeemed from the Egyptian slavery. And he must view himself as if he had remained in Babylon, or Brooklyn, for that matter.

Nevertheless, in some ways, our

times are different. For one thing, dispersions are mixed. The Jews in Russia live in a kind of Egypt, whereas our co-religionists in America live in a Babylon. And in Israel, we can observe Edomites and Philistines, Ammonites and Sanbalats. Here we have a Vanunu, but in the U.S. we have a Pollard.

The analogies are admittedly imperfect, but the similarities are present. Foremost, there exists an exilic condition and the solution lies in the mode of redemption. Zionism is inherently the instrument to change the reality, even if it is as difficult as splitting the Reed Sea.

Our reality of matza and maror are the rocks and firebombs. But as the legend has it, the act of splitting the waters was the result of the initiative of a mortal: the above-mentioned Nahshon who took the plunge into the sea. What is needed at present is not only the help of heaven but the pioneering achievement of man. As sure as there is an exile, even an "exile" of the attitude of minds, so too will there be a redemption.

*The writer is one of the leading polemicists of the Israeli right.*