

Pesach 5785 / 2025

PESACH MESSAGE 5785

Pesach has always been a festival of paradoxes.

At one and the same time, the festival calls upon us to remember the suffering of our ancestors while slaves in Egypt, but also the joy of their liberation.

The Seder meal, which forms the centrepiece of the Yomtov, illustrates the inherent contradiction perfectly. We eat unleavened matza and bitter herbs, which symbolise our slavery, but we also sing jolly melodies, recline in regal fashion, drink wine or grape juice and dip foods, all of which represent our freedom.

Nothing encapsulates this apparent contradiction better than the hors d'oeuvres served at our tables – a hard-boiled egg in salt water.

The salt water represents our tears, while the egg sends out a profound message. Nearly all other foods, when boiled, get softer. The egg, however, becomes harder. It reminds us that, when the heat is on in life, we can summon our inner resolve and stand firm. Therefore, in the very same dish, we combine pain and fortitude; desolation and hope.

I can hardly recall a Pesach when such mixed feelings are so prevalent. As I sit down to write this message, we are witnessing the extraordinary highs of hostages being returned to the loving embrace of their families and the agonising lows of discovering the depths of their suffering and the fate of those who tragically did not return alive.

Yet, in Jewish tradition, we never hesitate to highlight optimism and joy, even in the midst of our pain and sadness, nor do we shy away from recalling the deep traumas of our past at moments of great celebration.

For this reason, the saddest day on our calendar, Tisha Be'Av, is called Mo'ed – festival, by our Prophets, in anticipation of the day being transformed in the future to become the happiest of all days. Together with that, the Torah instructs us to celebrate all major Jewish festivals in memory of our exodus from Egypt and, at Jewish weddings, a glass is broken to remember the destruction of our Temples and all subsequent Jewish suffering.

We do this because it is from within the tragedies of our past that our resolve to build a better future is forged. The depths of our pain and the heights of our joy are therefore inextricably and permanently linked.

This is why, even with our ongoing deep anxiety about the welfare of the State of Israel and, indeed, for world Jewry, we will enthusiastically celebrate Pesach with the prayer that joy will prevail over pain and the ultimate redemption will draw near.

Valerie joins me in extending our very warm and best wishes to you all for a Chag Kasher Vesameach.

Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE

