As we prepare for Chag HaPesach, the time of our freedom, we recall the Korban Pesach offered when the Beit HaMikdash stood. In our times, in its stead, we place the zeroa – the roasted shank bone – on our Seder table; a paltry reminder of the glorious Temple service.

What is the significance of this korban, which represents our freedom as a nation reborn, and through which we were redeemed from slavery?

Rav Soloveitchik writes: “...אָבֹת–שֶׂה לְבֵית שֶׂה לַבָּיִת – a lamb for each home, a lamb for each household – interestingly, the symbol of redemption in the Torah is the Korban Pesach, which is a very strange sacrifice. The concept of chaburah, community, is completely nonexistent in regard to other offerings... Pesach has been linked by the Torah with chaburah to such an extent that one Sage is of the opinion that an individual cannot offer the Korban Pesach; only a group may do so.¹ The Pesach sacrifice differs from all other sacrifices because it is a symbol of cherut, freedom. The Torah refers to the Korban Pesach as ‘a lamb for each household’ because freedom expresses itself in the realm of bayit, of community, of being together. Bayit is a new category revealed to the Jews as they gained their freedom.”²

Rav Hirsch³ writes that there would come a time when the nation, oppressed and tortured by Pharaoh, would lie on the ground, seemingly easy prey for the vultures of history. But then, at G-d’s call, the nation would rise up again to eternal life. At that time, G-d would begin the up-building of his people not from the ‘rooftops’ – not from the leadership or the highest echelon – but from the rocklike foundation of the home – הש לבי, אבות, הש לבי – namely, from family ties, the mutual bonds that unite parents and children... This is the heart and soul of the family: each son builds his own home as a branch of his parents’ home, and every father lives on through his children and grandchildren. Parents with their children, and children with their parents, knit together and united forever – this is the root of Israel’s eternal flowering. Herein lies the secret of the eternity of the Jewish people.

As we sit around the Seder table, we place the roasted bone on our Seder plate. While it is a paltry and sad reminder of all we lost when the Temples were destroyed, it is nevertheless a glorious reminder of the people we are, the ideals we live by, the community we have built and share, and the essence of our existence.

A family was making a bar mitzvah and needed homes to put up their guests. Their neighbors would be away that Shabbat, and they offered the family the use of their home.

The alarm in the home went off on Shabbat. The police showed up. They asked the guests if this was their house.

“No officer,” they replied.

“Do you know the code for the alarm?”

“No officer.”

“No, officer.”

“Then what are you doing here?!”

As we were poised to march from slavery to freedom, the command to offer the Korban Pesach taught us what it means to be a free Jew. We live not only for ourselves but for our homes, our father’s house, for our neighbors and friends, for those who live near and those who live far. The truest mark of our freedom is the ability to reach outward, to knock on the door of another, to invite him to our table. Finally free, we are able to say: we have too much for ourselves, please join us. Let’s share.

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¹ Pesachim 91a.
² Chumash Masoret HaRav, Shemot, p.86-87.
³ Shemot 1:1.

Mrs. Michal Horowitz teaches Judaic Studies classes to adults of all ages