

SECOND DAY PESACH 1985

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

On the first day of Pesach I talked about commitment, about how Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur talk about choosing and Pesach is about commitment. Where, though, do we get our commitment? How is it that we are able to make our commitment? Pesach is a unique holiday because of all the Biblical holiday, it is the only one of which the main observance is at night. There are really only two other holidays on which the main observance is at night. There is Chanukah when we light the candles at night, and there is Purim when we read the Megillah at night, although we also read it again during the day. We could also count Tisha B'Av. Although it is true that on the night of Tisha B'Av we read Eicha, the Book of Lamentations, but during the day we also read Kinnes, or dirges. All these holidays on which the main observance is at night have to do with persecution. Chanukah, of course, is a holiday which celebrates the successful revolt of the Maccabees against the religious persecution and oppression of the Salucid Greeks. Pesach celebrates the successful Exodus from the persecution of Egypt. Purim is different. It celebrates a deliverance from a persecution which never actually happened. That's why although it has a main observance at night, it also has one during the day. We actually were not persecuted on Purim. We were just threatened. Tisha B'Av commemorates an exile which still exists. It is a special one by itself. We have not yet overcome it. Pesach and Chanukah teach us how to get through the night. It teaches us how we can overcome adversity. Pesach and Chanukah we do not celebrate in the synagogue. We celebrate at home with our families. The Chanukah candles we light in Shul during Chanukah do not count. Although some synagogue have community seders, it is preferable to be at home with your families and friends. In order to learn how to overcome the night we must learn how to be part of a family. In fact, if we look at the seder we will see that the number four predominates: the four questions, the four sons, the four cups of wine. Why should the number four predominate? Because, according to Halacha, a family consists of a father, mother, son, and daughter. That is the minimum for a family. It is in the family that we learn how to make the necessary commitment to allow us to get through the night. Hitler knew this; therefore, the first thing he did when people came to concentration camps was to separate the families. It is the families which give us the courage to

make the commitment to overcome the night. How do we learn to make a commitment in the family? We learn to make a commitment by learning how to fail. Not everybody in a family can always be right. We have to learn how to compromise. You cannot always have your way. We learn how to deal with failure. We learn that failure need not crush us. It will not crush us if we realize that we are still accepted even when we are wrong and even when we are right. We learn the patience that is necessary in order to convince others that we are right. That, too, is the symbol of much of the Haggadah. We have the three matzahs on the table. The middle one we break. Why should we break the middle one? Why not the top or bottom ones? Because we learn that in order to go into the top, many times we have to be broken. We have to defer our ambitions. We have to think of others. The bottom one is not broken because we all must always maintain our integrity. We do not start out as broken submissive people. In the Jewish family no one is submissive. No Jewish woman would say what I heard a fundamentalist woman say: "Women should be submissive to their husbands." In Judaism there is always discussion, some of it at high decibels, but ultimately compromise is reached. Also, when we look at the four sons, why is the evil son number two? Why isn't the order: the good son, the simple son, the one who does not know how to ask, and then the evil son? We do not exclude the evil son from the family. We try to bring him closer. We try to show him that he has a place in it. Commitment is learned in the family. The children take a prominent place in the seder. It is not children who just need parents; parents also need children. In order to get through the night it is not enough to have just synagogue. They are good for joyous holidays. Holidays which allow us to overcome the night and the inevitable problems of life require a family. It is only in the give and take of a family that we learn to make a commitment so Judaism and ourselves can survive as decent, moral human beings. I am reminded of the story they tell of a man who went up to heaven. He noticed there were two paths: one for henpecked men who always consulted their wives, and one for machismo men. He took the path for henpecked men. He came to a very crowded, hot room so he went back and went on the machismo men path. There was a huge room with one man sitting in the corner. He went up to the man and said, "What are you doing here?"

SECOND DAY PESACH 1985

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

PAGE THREE

The man answered, "I don't know. My wife told me to come here." In heaven there are no machismo people. We all have to recognize that we are dependent and we all need each other in order to get through the night.