

SECOND DAY PESACH 1988
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

During the seder we eat the Afikomen. The Afikomen is supposed to be the last morsel of food we eat for the evening. Today our Afikomen is matzah. During Temple times the Afikomen was the little piece of the paschal lamb that was eaten at the seder. People do not understand that the seder in Temple times was the same as the seder we hold today. People did not gorge themselves on the paschal sacrifice. They ate many other dishes. In fact, there were many festival sacrifices that they ate first. At the end of the meal everyone ate a little piece of the paschal lamb.

The rabbis ask the following question: What happens if today you only have enough shmura matzah to be used either for the first eating of matzah, which we do at the beginning of the meal, or for the Afikomen? What are we to do? We know that according to Jewish law you do not have to eat matzah during all of Pesach. You just cannot eat chometz. If you want to get along without matzah during all of Pesach, good. Do it. Eat fruits, vegetables, fish, meat, etc. Only on the first two seder nights are we obligated to eat matzah. Because we are obligated to eat matzah on the first two seder nights, the rabbis advise us to eat special matzah, matzah that has been watched since the time of the harvest that no water has gotten on it. If water touches flour or grain for more than 18 minutes, the flour becomes chometz. Since usually this law only applies from the time of grinding, during Pesach we are not particular about the matzah we use, but for the first two seders we should use shmura matzah. But what if you only had enough matzah for the first eating of the matzah or the Afikomen?

The rabbis are divided on this subject. Tosofos and the Rosh say that we should use this shmura matzah for the first eating of matzah while the Rambam and the Rif say we should use this shmura matzah for the Afikomen. We all know that the Pesach symbols have double meanings. The matzah stands both

for slavery and freedom. Matzah was what the slaves ate in Egypt but also symbolized the privation they were willing to suffer for freedom. The maror stands for the bitterness of Egypt but also for the h'ordeuvers that people eat at fancy parties where we are expected to dip all sorts of strange things into fancy dips and say that it is delicious. The Korban Pesach, too, stood for the slavery and idolatry that the Jewish people were immersed in and also for freedom and giving thanks to G-d.

It seems to me that the matzah that begins the meal and the matzah that ends the meal, the Afikomen, stand for two different concepts. The matzah that begins the meal stands for survival and the matzah after the meal stands for the spiritual experience of giving thanks to G-d and wanting a relationship with Him. Many times in Jewish history the emphasis has to be on survival because, after all, if there are no Jews there could be no Judaism, but at other times the emphasis has to be on spiritual values because without spiritual values there would also be no Judaism. There is a constant tension between survival and spiritual values. Sometimes we have to fudge spiritual values in order to survive, and sometimes we have to risk many elements of security in order to preserve spiritual values.

In the United States, unfortunately, many Jews are only interested in physical security. They are willing to jettison all sorts of Jewish traditions in order to survive. We know that this does not work. If the descendants of every Jew who lived in America were still Jewish we would have over 50 million Jews in America, according to some reports. You can go through many, many small southern towns and find the Cohen department store, the Goldberg pharmacy, the Levy clothing store, and none of the people in these stores is Jewish. The head of the Episcopal church in America a few years ago was named Cohen. My brother lives in Charleston, South Carolina. A few years ago they celebrated

the 350th anniversary of one of the congregations there. The rabbis got together, reform, orthodox, and conservative, to trace the ancestry of the founders of the synagogue. They found that almost all of the prominent people in Charleston were descendants of the founders of this synagogue. Only one of them, though, was still Jewish. When they approached the others about participating in this 350th anniversary celebration they slammed their doors in their faces.

It is not enough to survive. We need to have spiritual values that we inculcate into our children. We can only do this by example, not just by telling them to do certain things. It is true that when the first generation came to America they were so immersed in their Jewishness that they thought it was impossible to lose it. They thought all their children had to do was open their mouths and speak Yiddish and know everything they knew. This, of course, was proven false. Jews are assimilating by the droves. We must inculcate in our children the spiritual aspects of Judaism.

Last night we made Havdallah. Havdallah distinguishes between the Shabbos and a holiday. G-d created Shabbos and it is independent of man, but man creates the holidays in partnership with G-d. We have to struggle to maintain our Jewish identity through the holidays so we can reach the level of Shabbos. Unfortunately, in America today most Jews are only interested in survival and not spiritual values. That is why they have turned our synagogues into places really that only children need to go to. Look at our crowd today. It is a Sunday morning. Why isn't the place filled? Yesterday we had a good crowd. Perhaps the people felt they did the rabbi enough of a favor by coming yesterday. They do not have to come today. To them religion is only a tool to be used to induce moral behavior especially in their children, but really it has no worth in itself. That is not the traditional Jewish view. The traditional Jewish view is that we have to be moral so that we

can be spiritual, so that we can have a relationship with G-d. There is a clear cut distinction in America between people who view religion as a tool and people who view religion as absolutely necessary for their life. Unfortunately, many of our youngsters are made to feel that once they reach bar mitzvah that is it. They have been inculcated enough with religion to make them moral.

I am reminded of the story of a six year old girl who went to Miami. She came home all sunburned. When her skin began to peel she looked at her mommy and said, "Look, I'm only six years old and I'm already wearing out." Well, our kids do not wear out at six. It is more like thirteen. It is true that in certain generations we have to stress survival more than others. After all, in the depressed economic conditions of Europe when Jews were subjected to all sort of persecution and confined to ghettos perhaps then mere survival should be stressed but in affluent America today we should stress spiritual values.

Perhaps that is why the rabbis disagree. They really do not disagree. They are talking about different times. The Tosofos and Rosh are talking about the time when the Jewish community is in imminent danger of extinction. Then we must stress survival. The Rambam and the Rif are talking about the time when Jewish physical survival is not in question but their spiritual survival is. In our day I would say if we only have enough matzah to either use as the first eating of matzah or for the Afikomen we better use it for the Afikomen. We need to stress the spiritual aspects of Judaism.