

## SECOND DAY PASSOVER 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today is Pesach. This seems to be an obvious statement, but the rabbis argue as to when Pesach really is. Some rabbis, based on a verse in the Torah portion Massey, say that Pesach starts on the 14th because it says, "And they travelled from Ramses in the first month in the 15th day on the morrow of the Pesach." This would seem to imply that Pesach is the 14th of Nisan. Other rabbis, based on a verse from the Haphtorah we read yesterday from the Book of Joshua, say that it says, "And they camped, the sons of Israel, in Gilgo and they made the Passover on the 14th day of the month in the evening and they ate on the morrow of the Passover matzahs." The rabbis learn from that that they ate from the grain in the land of Israel. They were only allowed to eat from the grain after the first omer of barley was waved on the altar, and that was done on the 16th, so that means that Pesach was the 15th.

The Halacha, of course, comes down and says that Pesach is the 15th. In the Torah the rest of the days of Pesach are called Chag HaMatzos, the holiday of the matzahs. Why, though, was there argument among the rabbis about whether Pesach was the 14th or the 15th? We all know that the Korban Pesach was brought on the 14th. It was brought from noon on. That's why we are not allowed to eat any chometz from noon on. Pesach is the only holiday in which Chol Hamoed actually starts before the holiday. All the restrictions of Chol Hamoed begin on the 14th, the day before we have the seder. Those rabbis who say that Pesach is the 14th are referring to the fact that it was on this day that the Korban Pesach was sacrificed. The other rabbis say that, no, it is the 15th when the Korban Pesach was eaten. Why does the Halacha come down on the side of those rabbis who say it is the 15th, and what could possibly be their reasoning?

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If we look at the symbols of Passover, we will notice that each of them have a positive and a negative meaning. The lamb stood for the pagan gods of the Egyptians. Other religions interpret the lamb differently, but we say that since the sign of the zodiac during this time of year was Aries, the Egyptian believed that the spirit of Aries incarnated into the lamb. The whole concept of incarnation is alien to Jews, but many people today still believe in it. In fact, there was a movie series called "V" a few years ago which talked about the fact that another people came down in spaceships from other planets and looked just like us.

However, every time a bird passed them, it disappeared. At the end of the series, we learned they were really giant lizards who camouflaged themselves and wanted to use us as food on their space voyages. That's how I think we can explain the Holocaust. The Germans looked at Jews and did not see human beings. They saw us as devils incarnate, the same way the Hutus look at the Tutsis. They look like people and speak like people, but they are not people. We killed the lamb to show we did not believe in this spirit of incarnation of Aries. The Egyptians believed if we touched a lamb we would wreak havoc on Egypt. In the Haggadah, though, only the positive message is given, that we Jews slaughtered the lamb and put its blood on the door to show our belief in G-d, to show that we believed G-d would protect us.

The matzah, too, has two meanings. It can mean the bread of affliction. We only mention that in the beginning of the Haggadah in a passage which was added later. The rabbis tell us that every Jewish slave in Egypt got one matzah a day with a little greens, but in the

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Haggadah we learn that the matzah was a positive thing because the Jewish people were willing to go into the desert with almost no provisions, with just a little bit of matzah because they believed in G-d.

The third symbol of Pesach is maror, the bitter herbs. The bitterness in Egypt was terrible. Children were entombed in the walls in place of bricks when not enough bricks were made. Their blood was used by Pharaoh to bathe in to cure him from leprosy. In the Haggadah all we mention is the hard work, and, again, we dip the maror in harosis to teach us that the Jewish people persevered in spite of all the hard work because they believe in G-d.

The rabbis who say that Pesach is the 14th stressed the negative. They stressed the horrors of Egypt, the terrible idol worship, the terrible suffering and the terrible amount of innocent blood shed. They stressed that it is these negative experiences that we should discuss and dwell upon, but the Halacha disagrees with them. It says that we should stress the positive, about how the Jewish people never gave up their belief in G-d and believed that things could get better. In Judaism we believe, "Turn from evil and do good." The trouble with concentrating on evil is it becomes very tantalizing, like the police vice officers who succumb, or the evangelistic ministers, like Elmer Gantry, who concentrate so much on sin that they eventually succumb to it themselves. The important thing is to always maintain a positive attitude. It is to the eternal credit of the Jewish people, especially the Holocaust survivors, that after the Holocaust we never turned into a vengeful, backward looking, hateful

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people, but, instead, we looked forward to creating a better world. The Holocaust could not make us lose our faith in G-d or man or the ultimate triumph of good. Those who survived the Holocaust started their lives anew and started families and proudly displayed their Jewishness, even though they suffered for it.

That is the chok, the special law, of the Pesach, that in spite of the suffering, we can continue and endure. That's why it says in the Haggadah that in every generation they try to wipe us out, but "she" stood up for our forefathers. What stood up/ What is this "she"? Some rabbis explain that "she" is G-d. Others say it is G-d's promise. Others say that the word V'Chee stands for the Torah. Others say that the letter Vahv stands for the six books of the Mishnah, the Hay for the five books of the Torah, the Yud for the Ten Commandments, and the Aleph for the belief in one G-d. In other words, when Jews are positive about their tradition, we will be able to overcome everything.

The rabbis wanted Pesach to be on the 15th, the day on which we demonstrated our belief in G-d, the day in which we were positive. They did not want us to dwell on the negative things. That's why we do not start off with a brocha when we say the Haggadah. After all, we say a brocha for the Megillah, which is only rabbinic, but the Haggadah starts out with slavery and we are not interested in stressing slavery and making a blessing over slavery. We will not stay Jews by stressing our suffering. We will remain Jews because we say that in spite of our suffering, we are still positive, that in spite of everything we still believe, that

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in spite of everything we know that eventually things will be good. It is incumbent upon all of us to have a positive attitude. That's one of the reasons, the rabbis say, that Pesach happened in the spring when things are starting to bloom again. Let us always be positive in our appreciation. We do not concentrate on evil. We do good. We do mitzvahs. That, of course, is another reading of the word matzah.

I am reminded of the story they tell about twins who were soon going to celebrate their 10th birthday. One was a terrible pessimist and the other was an optimist. The parents were worried, though, because the pessimist would not cross the street. He was afraid a car would hit him. The optimist, on the other hand, ran across the street without even looking. They took them to a psychiatrist and the psychiatrist advised the parents that since their birthdays were coming up, why not give the pessimist a wonderful present and the optimist a terrible present. Maybe that would somehow change their outlooks. When they woke up on their birthday, the pessimist found a beautiful new bike, and immediately he started to cry. His parents asked, "Why are you crying?" He said, "Maybe the bike will get a flat tire or I'll crash it." The optimist came out singing and dancing. His parents said, "Why are you singing and dancing? We gave you a pile of manure." He replied, "I know, I know, but where there is manure, there has to be a pony." We all have to be optimistic. The rabbis say Pesach is the 15th because they want us to always look to the future and to believe that with G-d's help things are going to get better. May things get better soon so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.