

7TH DAY PESACH - 1986
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

On the seventh day of Pesach we always read the Shira, the song which the Jewish people sang after they witnessed the great deliverance which G-d had wrought for them. The Egyptian army was completely destroyed by the raging waters of the Red Sea as it returned to its natural course. They were now free. This event made such an impression upon the Jewish people that every day in the morning and the evening services we mention this song. We say, "Praises belong to the Supreme G-d ever blessed ^{be He} by ~~He~~ Moses and the Children of Israel sang to You a song with great joy and they said, all of them together, 'Who is like You, G-d, among the mighty? Who is like You, glorious and holiness inspiring praises and working wonders?'" The rabbis tell us that the handmaidens of the Red Sea felt and saw more of G-d's presence than did all the later prophets. Every single person in Israel felt G-d's presence.

A few weeks ago one of our Hebrew school students came up to me and said, "You know, Rabbi, I really want to believe in G-d, but I do not think I will be able to because I cannot see or hear or feel Him. I don't know where He is, and since I can't feel or touch Him with my senses, He must not be here." I looked at him and I said, "Is there such a thing as love?" He answered, "Yes." I said, "How do you know that? How do you know your parents love you? Can you feel it or touch it?" He said, "No, you can only tell they love you because they do nice things for you," but even that is not true because sometimes people are very nice to children, but then it turns out that they are child molesters. They were only nice to entice the children and do bad things to them. You know you feel that your parents love you. The same goes, of course, for many things in life.

You cannot see hatred, but you can feel it. When a man and woman fall in love they can feel it even though ^{they} you cannot touch it or see it. Just the past few days we have seen a demonstration of this in the so-called real world. An atomic plant malfunctioned in Russia. It was probably a meltdown and a lot of radioactivity spewed forth into the atmosphere, but we cannot feel or see or touch it. How do we know when there is radioactivity in the atmosphere? Our senses are not sensitive enough to detect radioactivity. Eventually we know something will be wrong when people die in great numbers from cancer and radioactivity disease, but except for extreme cases, this will take a long time. Most people will not even connect one with the other. We know that there is radioactivity in the air because we have geiger counters, sensitive instruments which can measure it.

That's one of the major differences between the modern world and ancient world. In the ancient world they knew about steam engines and electricity, but they never applied them to life. One of the reasons they did not apply it to life was they did not trust their instruments enough. They trusted only their senses. They built magnificent irrigation works based on gravity. That they could see: the water running down the hill. They built amphitheaters by the oceans so the breeze would amplify the voices. They did very clever things but only based on their senses. We today in modern science believe in our instruments. It is not really dark at night. Animals know that. They can see at night. That's why most of them hunt at night. We now have infrared cameras that can see at night, too. Many of the most dangerous things in the world we cannot perceive with our senses. Even carbon monoxide is odorless and tasteless.

It could kill us even before we knew it. Many people, when they get behind a diesel bus, yell about pollution because it smells. Actually, there is no danger from the exhaust while other times you will go outside to smell the fresh air, which will not stink, but it may be deadly. We know that there are many things in the universe which we cannot grasp without senses. We need our instruments.

The same thing applies to spiritual phenomena as well. The rabbis tell us that G-d's presence can only be felt where there is joy. There was a great joy ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ deliverance which allowed the people to feel G-d. ^{on the Red Sea} In the ancient temple the Jewish people were not allowed to enter into the temple if they came into contact with a dead body. Death depresses us and makes us moody and, in that frame of mind we cannot feel G-d's presence. We are different than certain churches which thrive on doom and gloom. There are many churches in this country which actually have a graveyard as their lawn. In order to enter the church you have to go, in effect, through a cemetery. That church emphasizes death. Its atmosphere is one of a funeral. It is doom and gloom. A preacher would never feel that he could tell a joke or that laughter should emanate from the pulpit.

This is not Judaism's way. We believe in joy and laughter. The Jewish people sang their song "B'Simcha Rabba - with great joy". It is only when a Jew feels this inner joy that he is sensitive to feel G-d's presence. That is the instrument of the soul in order to sense G-d. In the Talmud we learn that Rabbi Akiva opens his lectures many times with stories or jokes. We learn that Rava, too, always opened his lectures with stories or jokes, and in rabbinical school you are taught that every 18 minutes you should tell a story

not only to keep the audience's attention but also to create the proper atmosphere.

The trouble with American Jewry is that the only time that Jews come to the synagogue in large numbers is on Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur or Yizkor or ^{when} they come to say Kaddish. Religion has become a doom and gloom thing. Therefore, they do not come the rest of the year because they do not know that the Jewish religion is a happy religion, ^{that} ~~as~~ rabbis were taught to stress the joy of our religion. My rabbinical organization even sends me every few months stories or humorous anecdotes to tell from the pulpit. We are Jews. We are not part of a Puritan Christian sect which frowns on laughter and joy. We believe that we can only apprehend G-d when we are filled with joy. Just as in the physical world we need sensitive instruments in order to sense the presence of many things, so in the spiritual world if we have this element of inner joy we will have the correct instrument to feel G-d. The answer to my ^{Hebrew school} student's ^{was} ~~is~~: Just because your senses cannot sense G-d directly does not mean He does not exist. He does exist. You just have to sense Him with an instrument, and the instrument of the soul is inner joy.

I am reminded of the story they tell, one of the stories sent to me by my rabbinical organization, about a man in a kibbutz who never bought a watch. He used to pester everyone for the time. Finally, at his 10th anniversary with the kibbutz, they all got together and bought him a watch. He refused to accept the watch. He said, "I can always ask you what time it is." They said, "But at night how will you be able to tell the time?" He said, "Easy, I'll use my shofar." They said, "How can you tell time with a shofar?" He answered,

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Easy, in the middle of the night I'll open my window and blow my shofar. Immediately someone will say, 'Mishugenah, it's 3:00 a.m. What are you doing blowing your shofar?' and I'll know what time it is." We all must look at our instruments from time to time to tell how things are. Our instrument to feel G-d is joy.