

SEVENTH DAY PESACH 1987
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On the 7th day of Pesach we Jewish people received our freedom from Egypt. It was on this day that the Egyptian army was destroyed. Egypt could no longer send its army after us and bring us back to Egypt. At that time the Jewish people sang a great song of triumph because G-d had saved them truly from slavery. The reason we make such a big celebration on the first and second days of Pesach rather than on the seventh day of Pesach is because on the first night of Pesach we ate the paschal lamb. We had slaughtered the lamb the day before and, by so doing, we had displayed courage and showed we were not afraid. The essence of our freedom came because we were willing to demonstrate that we were not afraid. Our freedom we won at the Red Sea. All the Jewish people felt that they had been delivered from slavery. They were all convinced they had seen the hand of G-d working in history. Not only were we convinced, but also our enemies were convinced. This event had such a miraculous hue to it that we remembered it throughout the generations. This forms the basis of many of our prayers. "Who is like unto You G-d our G-d?" forms a prayer that we say both morning and evening. We experienced G-d at the Red Sea.

The rabbis tell us there are three ways people can get to attain faith, get to G-d. These are, of course, personified by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham came to G-d through intellect. He reasoned. Could a building be built without an architect? Could man worship the work of his own hands? Why was he one day making an object and the next day be worshipping it? Abraham then came to the worship of G-d through the study of nature, through study of the world. That was one way to approach G-d. The second way to approach G-d was the way Isaac did, through a mystical experience. The rabbis say that when he was offered up at the Akedah the tears of the angels touched his eyelids. In other words, he had a dramatic experience which convinced him of the reality of G-d. One of the ways to approach G-d is through a personal experience. In modern Judaism we have diminished and

almost forgotten this way of approaching G-d so that many times young people come to me and say, "Rabbi, I'm going to have to change my religion." I ask them why and they reply, "Because I had a personal experience of G-d and I thought Judaism did not believe in that." I then tell them, "Well, what were the prophets? Didn't they experience G-d through a personal experience?" Of course that is a Jewish way of approaching G-d. A third way of approaching G-d is through history, and that, of course, is what Jacob did. Jacob reached G-d through the study of history, inter-personal relationships, through his relationship with his parents, brother, uncle. He came to an appreciation of G-d. He had a tradition from Abraham and his father, Isaac. He came to G-d through history, through seeing how G-d works in the events in his own life. These are the three ways to approach G-d.

At the Red Sea the Jewish people had a personal experience of G-d which was fortified also by the tradition they had from Abraham and Jacob. They knew they were going to be redeemed because that had been promised to Abraham. They realized through the plagues that G-d was the architect of nature and of history. The question, though, can be asked, if we are celebrating on this 7th day of Pesach this great vision of G-d, the great faith the Jewish people had in G-d (In fact, we even state they had this great faith when we say, "And the people saw the big hand which G-d had done against the Egyptians, and the people feared G-d and believed in G-d and in Moshe, His servant.), if this is so, why don't we stop the Torah reading at the end of this song of triumph, this song of great exhilaration when the Jewish people felt G-d's presence in the world, felt it so deeply that this experience has been forever passed down from father to son, mother to daughter? Why does the Torah reading go on and tell us how the Jewish people travelled for 3 days without water and they finally came to Mara, and they could not drink the water there because it was bitter. The people complained against Moshe saying, "What should we drink?" Moshe cried to G-d and G-d instructed him about a tree, and he threw it into the water and the waters became sweetened there, and he gave them there law and judgement and there he tested them.

Why do we have to read this? We do not have to read this at a commemoration and celebration of the people's faith. This is the complete opposite. The people demonstrated very little faith in G-d here. They were complaining not really just against Moshe, the rabbis say, but against G-d. Why do we read this?

I believe the answer to this questions is that the rabbis here are teaching us a very important thing, and that is that if a faith experience is to continue, it must be framed. It must be preserved through different rituals and acts if it is to be a vital force in a person's life. This is the same with love. We all know when we love individuals. We all know when we fall in love. The love is real. The love is great. Many times young people come into my office very much in love waiting to get married, and then 6 months later they come to my office wanting a divorce. Why do these love experiences disintegrate and dissolve in such a short time? The reason for it is that these peak experiences, unless they are framed by experiences, formed by set means, they will disintegrate and disappear. The Jewish people had to live in the real world. You cannot live on peak experiences unless you renew them and refresh them, unless you make them ever new. That is what the experience of Mara was to teach the Jewish people. It is fine to have these great peak experiences. Even the greatest peak experiences that the Jewish people had had (The rabbis say that even a maidservant on the Red Sea had a greater experience of G-d, a greater sense of prophecy than the greatest prophets later on), but you cannot compare Re'eea, seeing, to Shmeeaa, understanding or listening. They had this experience and felt this experience. When you come to G-d through the study of nature of history, you have a Shmeeaa experience, a hearing experience, a second hand experience, so to speak, but when you feel G-d, feel His presence, you have the seeing experience. Here they had the seeing experience, but it did not last very long. Even this peak experience did not last very long unless it institutionalized and formed and shaped so it could be preserved throughout that person's life and passed on to the next generation.

That is why it says here that G-d instructed Moshe. He showed him a tree, and a tree here means Torah, the Eitz Chayim, the tree of life. This sweetened this waters. Life many times is bitter. There are many bad experiences in life which cause us to throw away love, our peak experiences, faith and hope. And there he gave him a law and a judgement. What does this mean? The rabbis say that He gave them there the Shabbos. He gave them the commandment to honor ones parents. He gave them the commandment to establish courts of law, and some say He also gave them the commandment about the Porah Adumah. This was necessary in order to preserve this peak experience. In order to preserve this peak experience he had to institutionalize it, ritualize it, to allow it to be transmitted from generation to generation and also to be refreshed and renewed in each individual's life. That is what Shabbos does. It gives us the opportunity to once again experience closeness to G-d, to be free from the mundane cares of the world. That is, of course, what has to happen in a marriage, too. Time has to be set aside by the couple to renew their relationship, to continue with the banter, to enjoy each other's company, to relive once again the experiences which allowed them to fall in love. Love, too, will die unless it is nourished. I can break any marriage in 20 minutes. All I have to do is harp on the bad things that we of us have. In any relationship the other spouse has certain complaints and grievances. All we have to do is harp on these grievances and pretty soon anger rises and hard words are exchanged, and pretty soon people are very angry and do not want to see each other, and you can keep it going on and on and on. Some people enjoy provoking these types of fights, which, of course, is a disgrace when they do it. A couple, in order to preserve their marriage, have to set aside certain times for each other. They, too, have to renew the conditions which allowed them to feel each other's love. That is why G-d gave us at this particular time the Shabbos so we could once again refresh this experience.

The second thing He gave us was to honor our parents. Many times things become very difficult and overwhelming in life, but we have to remember our

parents came through these types of experiences. Our parents had difficulties in life, but they overcame them. Also, parents mean, too, that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are referred to. There are many ways you can review the love experience. You can supplement it by reviewing history, by reviewing nature. The same thing is true in a relationship. You can stress the good points. Look where you were before you were married and compare how you felt before you were married to when you are married. Of course, nothing is perfect, but remember the loneliness you had before. Remember what it was like when you were not married. This is like when we remember our parents and remember how good it was when they were here. We remember how nice it was to be in their presence. We remember the good things, the positive things.

The third thing He gave them was laws. There are limits. If you want to maintain a relationship you have to maintain limits. In a marriage relationship you have to forget about drugs and alcohol and infidelity. These things break a marriage. There are limits. If you want to maintain a relationship with G-d you have to forget about injustice and harming people and cheating people. You cannot maintain a relationship with G-d and have this peak experience if this is the way you are going to act in real life.

Finally, we have the Porah Adumah. There has to be a mystery. You have to realize that it is a mysterious thing. It is a gift and you have to treasure and want it. There is so much mystery in life. We cannot understand everything, but we have to appreciate what we have. It is a mystery why we fall in love with this person and not another person. It is a mystery, too, how G-d took us out of Egypt. We have to contemplate that mystery, too. We cannot look at things as cut and dried and chance. We have to realize there is a mystery in life, that life does not run by itself, just like love does not happen by itself. There are certain things that must go into it in order to make it happen, but ultimately it is a mystery. You cannot dictate it like you can a cookbook. This feeling G-d has for people and people need for

G-d is an ultimate mystery of life.

That's why it says, "There he tested him." "Nonyees" can also mean "he raised it as a banner". He is telling us here, "You want to maintain this peak experience, you want to maintain this exultation that you felt at the Red Sea? It is possible. You can do it, but what you must do, though, is set aside time for it. You must observe the Shabbos. You must remember your parents. Remember what it is before you had this experience. Remember what it is when things are low and you may threaten to lose the experience. Remember the mystery of life, and remember that there are certain things you cannot do or you will endanger the experience. Look always for the positive and the hopeful. Look at the mystery as a wonderful thing."

I am reminded of the story they tell about a middle aged father who took his teenage daughter roller skating. He used to be a roller skating champion, and he enjoyed it so very much. When they came home from roller skating, the mother asked how it was and the daughter replied, "Oh, it was wonderful. I love it. Those T-stops are hard and the scissors are hard, but I want to do more." The mother then asked the father what he found that was hard, and he replied, "The floor, the floor." He found the mystery was gone, the enjoyment was gone, the love and affection was gone. This is, of course, what we must guard against in all our experiences. This we can do if we keep them fresh by making time for them, by avoiding things that will destroy the experience, by appreciating the experience, and by realizing that ultimately it is a mystery.