

7th DAY PESACH 1989  
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today is the seventh day of Pesach. On this day the Jewish people really became free because it was on this day that the waters of the Red Sea came cascading down upon the Egyptian army and the Egyptian army was wiped out. This meant that from then on Egypt was in no position to bring the Jewish slaves back to Egypt. Up to this time the Jewish people knew that physically they really were not free because any time the Egyptian army wanted to it could come after them and bring them back to Egypt. The question could be asked, though, can be asked, if really the seventh day of Pesach is the day on which we became free, why is it that we make a seder the first night? Why don't we make a seder the seventh night? Why isn't our big celebration on the seventh day? The answer, of course, is that in Judaism we never celebrate the defeat of our enemies. What we celebrate is the opportunity to practice our religion. We do not celebrate Purim on the 13th day of Adar, the day in which the enemies of the Jewish people were defeated, but the 14th of Adar, the next day when we had an opportunity to freely practice our religion. The same thing is true on Chanukah. We do not celebrate the victories of the Maccabees. We know exactly when some of these victories occurred. In fact, one of them occurred on the cantor's day, which is the day right before Purim every year, but now we celebrate Tanes Esther on that day. We do celebrate the day they rededicated the Temple. To us Jews it is not important the defeat of our enemies. What is important is that we have the opportunity to practice our religion. That is the most important thing. When we are once again able to freely practice our religion without fear, without hindrance, without persecution then we celebrate, then we are happy. We wish that none of our enemies should be killed or hurt. We just want to live. We do not want to see our enemies killed. In fact, there is a famous Medrash which says that when the Egyptian army was overturned in the sea, the angels started to

sing the Hallel. G-d looked at them and said, "Why are you singing Hallel when My creatures are being killed?" Therefore, on the 7th and 8th days of Pesach we do not say the full Hallel in our prayers. In fact, during Chol Hamoed we also do not say the full Hallel because if we cannot say it the 7th and 8th days we cannot say it on Chol Hamoed. So we do not celebrate the defeat of our enemies. We celebrate the positive aspect that we can now celebrate our religion freely and without hindrance. If we could do so without defeating our enemies we would be happy to do so. That's why on the first night of Pesach we make the seder because then we were free to celebrate our religion unhindered. Then we were allowed to practice our religion without fear of persecution. We even slaughtered the lamb and the Egyptians did not harm us even though according to the Egyptian religion this would have been an abomination since the lamb was the incarnation of the spirit of Aries. When we are free to practice our religion then we celebrate.

During the seder, itself, we have a question that is asked by many rabbis, and that is, what happens if we only have enough matzah for either the blessing over the matzah or for the afikomen at the end of the meal? We do know that we make the blessing over the matzah at the beginning of the meal over the middle matzah, the broken matzah, and we make the blessing over the afikomen at the very end of the meal in place of the Korban Pesach. We no longer sacrifice the paschal lamb. We know that in the time of the Temple they used to eat the paschal lamb at the very end of the meal after they were satisfied. The rabbis say, what happens if you only had enough matzah to make the blessing at the beginning of the meal or to use it as a replacement for the Korban Pesach at the end of the meal? What is it that you should do? The Tosfos and the Rash say that the most important mitzvah would be the mitzvah of eating the

matzah at the beginning of the meal. That matzah, of course, stands for slavery. That is why we make it over the broken piece of matzah. The Rambam and the Rif, on the other hand, say that the most important eating of the matzah is the eating at the end of the meal when we eat it for the afikomen. At first glance, this seems a very strange question because, after all, the matzah that we eat at the end of the meal we only eat as a substitute for the Korban Pesach, and the matzah we eat at the beginning of the meal is really the mitzvah of eating the matzah. Why should this question even arise?

If we look deeper we see that the rabbis here are debating whether or not the Jew should eat matzah, which is a symbol of the test of poverty on his faith, whether that is the hardest test, or whether a person should eat the matzah when he is satisfied at the end of the meal when the test of faith is wealth. We know that in the Book of Proverbs we are told that there are two tests of faith. There was the test of faith which has to do with poverty, with the grinding poverty and persecution of a people, and then there is a test of faith which has to do when a person becomes wealthy. "And be sure and wax fat and kick." Sometimes it is harder to be religious when you are wealthy than when you are poor. Of course, the reason for it is obvious. Poor people are generally more religious than rich people. The reason for it is that poor people do not want to take credit for their poverty, for their persecution. There must be a reason for it, while rich people are willing to take credit for their success. They are willing to claim that it is because they are so bright and so smart that they became rich, that G-d had nothing at all to do with it. We know that this is false. If a person opened a business in Houston in 1979 he could not help but become rich, but if he opened a business in 1986 it is very doubtful whether he could survive.

Not everything is in our hands. When the Jewish people were in Egypt they had to endure the test of poverty, and the Tosfos and the Rosh say that this is the greatest of all tests of faith, where they were forced because of circumstances to give up their religious practices just to exist, and where they were tempted so much to assume the religious practices of their neighbor, that poverty and persecution are a terrible test of faith. The Rambam and the Rif say no, that the worst test of faith is the test of riches because in that type of a situation a person is tempted to feel that he is the measure of all things, and that, therefore, he can do anything he wants, that there are no limits to what he can do, that it was his own smartness and his own strength that brought him to this wonderful occasion.

That is why matzah, itself, is known as Lachma De'emnusa, as the bread of faith, and what is the greater test of faith: poverty or riches? When the Jewish people left Egypt, the rabbis say, they had become rich because they Egyptian neighbors had given them many of their precious items as compensation for their 200 years of hard work in Egypt, and they became even richer after the Egyptian army was destroyed and the booty of the army went and lifted itself up onto the shores. G-d did not want to take them through the shortest way to the land of Israel, because He was afraid that when they would see war that they would turn back, that they would be afraid that they would lose their riches. At the end of the Torah portion we read on this seventh day we learn how when they came to Maror after being without water for 3 days, they complained bitterly against G-d, because all their riches did not amount to a whole hill of beans then if they did not have water, if they did not have spiritual strength. Therefore, at Maror, the rabbis teach us, G-d gave them the commandments of honoring their parents, of Shabbos, and the commandments

concerning civil law. Riches, themselves, are a terrible test of faith because unless you have spirituality along with it it will lead you to into doing all sorts of terrible things.

When it comes to the matzah and only having enough to eat at the beginning of the meal or the end of the meal, the rabbis are in a quandry. Is the greatest test of faith the grinding poverty which forces people to do all sorts of immoral things sometimes in order just to survive, or is it riches? Jewish history would seem to indicate that the Rambam and the Rif are right, that riches are a greater test of faith than is poverty. When the Jewish people endured grinding poverty and persecution and even semi-slavery in Europe where they had to live in certain places and could not belong to certain occupations, yet, their religious life flourished. It is not that individuals did not slip, but, by and large, religious life flourished. In America today where we are in the lap of luxury where we hardly suffer any discrimination at all we have a hard time preserving our religion. Just look around you. It is the seventh day of Pesach and the shul is far from full. People today have personal days and sick leave and vacation. They could arrange to be here in shul on the seventh day of Pesach, but it is not important enough for them. It is more important that they save their vacation and personal days to go to Las Vegas and the Bahamas, so the test of riches is a very severe test. It is a test which the Rambam and the Rif said is even stronger and harder than the test of poverty. That's why the afikomen has to be eaten on a full stomach. To be religious after you have eaten and after you are satisfied is harder than when you are hungry. Therefore, the rabbis tell us that benching is a bigger mitzvah (It is a mitzvah from the Torah), while making the Hamotzi before the meal is only a mitzvah from the rabbis. The test of riches is a very difficult one. Let us hope and pray that American Jewry

can pass this test, too, so that we can really celebrate our freedom because we Jews celebrate our freedom when we are able to observe our religion. Let us hope that all the Jewish people in America will want to celebrate our religion because that will show that we are truly free.

I am reminded of the story of a fellow who went to California 50 years and he became a millionaire. On the 50th anniversary of his coming to California all his friends made him a party, and they asked him, "What is the secret of success?" He answered, "Hard work. I do not understand how anybody can't make it in California. When I came to California I only had 25¢ in my pocket." His friends asked how he started. He replied, "Well, I called my father in the east and told him to send me a million dollars." Most people do not realize that the test of riches is the hardest test, and that the money that we get is not really dependent usually upon us but is dependent either on inherited money or on luck and not just upon our being smart. Let us hope and pray that we can withstand the test of riches. Amen.