

7TH DAY PESACH 1991
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

On the seventh day of Pesach we read about how the Egyptian army was swept away when the ^{Red came} sea cascading down upon ~~them~~ ^{IT}. Pharaoh thought the Jewish people had lost their way. G-d, in effect, tricked him because he thought that now he had acted foolishly in the past by letting the Jewish people go but now he could get them back. They were trapped. His army would be able to overcome them and bring them back to slavery. After his defeat the Jewish people sang a wonderful song. That, of course, is part of the reading that we read on the seventh day, too.

The problem, though, that I see with this reading is that we do not stop there. We add something else. We say after the songs and after Miriam led the women in the songs that then we say Moshe led Israel onward from the Red Sea and they went out into the wilderness as sure. When they had gone 3 days in the wilderness and they had found no water they came to Maariv, but they could not drink the waters of Maror because they were bitter. Therefore, the name of the place was called Maror. Then the people murmured against Moshe saying, "What shall we drink?" So he cried unto the Lord and the Lord showed him a tree and he cast of it into the waters and the waters were made sweet. There he made for them a rule and an ordinance and there He tested them. It seems strange that we should read this on the seventh day of Pesach. It is right and proper that we should read how Pharaoh chased after the Jewish people, and how actually on the seventh day after their exodus his army was swept away and, therefore, the Jewish people were truly free because Pharaoh could no longer enslave them. He could no longer bring them back to Egypt. But why after the song do we read all about Maror? What does Maror, the bitter waters, have to do with this great triumph? The rabbis could have arranged it for us to stop the reading after the song. Why did they arrange the reading so we should go on to read about Maror?

What's more, there were two main symbols that led the Jewish people throughout their journey. One was a pillar of cloud and the other was a pillar of fire. Why should these two pillars have led them in their wandering in the desert, a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night? It is interesting to note, too, that the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire together came between the Egyptian army and the Jewish people, and this covered the Egyptian army until the Jewish people could pass over.. Also at Maror it says that the Jewish people were given a law and an ordinance. The rabbis explain that after G-d had sweetened the waters by showing Moshe the correct tree to throw into the waters, and I only wish we could find that same tree today so that the briny waters of Israel could be sweetened since there is a lake with trillions of cubic feet of water under the Negev and, unfortunately it is briny. Israeli scientists have learned to develop certain crops which will grow in briny water, but this water could be a great help to Israel if we could learn how to sweeten it. Some rabbis say that the tree that Moshe threw in refers to the Torah, which is considered an Eitz Chayim Chee, that when our lives get bitter if we throw in Torah, if we immerse ourselves in Torah our lives take on a sweeter hue, but what is this law and judgment that the Jewish people received? The rabbis say that at Maror the Jewish people were given the Shabbos. They were given the commandment to honor their mother and father, and they were also given the commandment to establish courts of justice. Some rabbis say no although they have very little support in the Talmud for this. Some people say no, that the laws that were given to the Jewish people were Shabbos, with the Porah Aduma, the laws about the red heifer and sprinkling those who were ritually unclean with the ashes and water of the red heifer. and, finally, about establishing courts of law. Why should it be just these things that were given to the Jewish people at Maror?

It seems to me that if we look carefully at this reading we will see that the Torah is teaching us here something very important. If we look especially at the symbols that were used to guide the Jewish people in the desert, the cloud by day and the fire by night. We all know that the sun stands for success and we know that the night stands for darkness. Even in the darkest night there is still some light, there is still some fire, there is still some enthusiasm which we all must have in order to get over the humps in order to continue on our journey of life. Also in the time of greatest success there is still some shadows, some clouds. We recognize that even in our religious observances. The wedding is the highlight of the Jewish simcha, but when you have a wedding the wedding is the height of simcha because in it both spouses are taking upon themselves the responsibility of the other spouse. They have the opportunity to do Chesed, and that, of course, is the purpose of the human being: to do Chesed in this world. One spouse can do Chesed for the other spouse and the other spouse can reciprocate and do Chesed for the other spouse. It is the doing of Chesed which really causes the world to endure. It is the assumption of responsibility which causes people to grow and causes people to find their completion and their fulfillment. However, we all know that at a wedding we break a glass and at an engagement we break a dish. The reason for that is to teach us that in every happy occasion and happy event there is still some tinges of sadness. We all know that even in the happiest marriages there are arguments and aggravation and all sorts of problems that have to be resolved and compromises that have to be made.

The same thing is true in the worst times of depression, which, of course, is symbolized by funerals. There is still some tinges of happiness there. We do not say Tachnun and sometimes we are even supposed to say Shecheyanu. We even eat an egg because an egg is a symbol of rebirth, etc. Life is not always of one hue. In fact, it never is. When we look at life we have to realize

that the unexpected should be expected.

The Jewish people had a wonderful triumph at the Red Sea, but, yet, just a few days later they were in the depths of despair, and it was the same water that caused it, the same briny, salty water. It was the salty water of the Red Sea that swept over the Egyptian army and destroyed it. Now they had the same water only this water this time was a curse because they could not drink it. In fact, if you even look at the word Maror, you have Mayom, what about the sea? The sea could be both a blessing and a curse. Sometimes in the height of our greatest triumph we are confounded by problems that we did not foresee. Look at what is happening in Iraq. The American army defeated easily the Iraqi army, but now we have the problems of the Kurds and Shiites. How we can just sit aside and let these people be massacred is beside me. I do not understand it. Thank G-d we have an Israel today because this seems like a replay of what happened to our people during the second world war, not as bad but almost as bad. Israel had better be careful because we see that millions of refugees and people thrown out of their homes does not really excite the conscience of America too much. It is a difficult situation. It will be a stain on the conscience of America for a long time to come.

There are always unexpected results. You can never predict with certainty what is going to happen. In life there is the unexpected financial reverse, unexpected health problems, unexpected divorce, problems with children, problems with in-laws, things which you do not expect all of a sudden pounce upon you. Life is never clear. Life is never easy and, therefore, we are taught this. The slave people just left Egypt. They were on a huge high, but you have to realize that life contains many problems, and they are going to have to face all their problems with courage and with fortitude, that freedom means that you can face the expected but you must face the unexpected with your own inner resources

and that sometimes is hard and difficult to do.

The pillar by night was to show them that the fire, that even in the depths of an invigorating and depressing experience, that you still have to muster the fire to overcome it, and in the highest success be careful because there are always clouds that are lurking that you are going to have to deal with.

That is why G-d gave them these three different laws at Maror because life is going to have unexpected problems and they are going to have to try to overcome them. He gave them Shabbos because Shabbos gives us equilibrium. It allows us to face our problems with perspective. Shabbos detaches us from our problems for a little while so we are able to see them clearly. Of course, in honoring our parents we have the family, the moral support of a family which is what allows us to persevere. Finally, we have courts of law when we are surprised by different sort of problems which, again, turn us to violence and hatred we are able to resort to the courts of law. I remember a few years ago someone came to me completely dumbfounded and very angry because he found out his own nephew had swindled him. He was ready to do great violence, but there are lawyers and courts of law. Things can be taken care of in a different way. Some rabbis say that honoring father and mother is already part of the laws of Noah basically and, therefore, we need to stress the laws of the Parah Aduma, the red heifer, because there is a paradox in the laws of the red heifer. Anyone who had a hand in preparing them became ritually unclean and, yet, everyone who was sprinkled with them became clean. Life is filled with unexpected paradoxes and we have to be ready for them. We should not be surprised and overcome and defeated by them but instead should face them with courage and strength so the Mashiach will come quickly and in our day.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a car salesman who was out of work.

He was despondent and all of a sudden he found a bottle. He rubbed it and out came a genie. The genie said he could have any wish he wanted but only one wish. The car salesman thought and then said, "Well, I always wanted to have my own foreign car dealership." The genie said his wish was granted. Immediately he was transported to a beautiful showroom surrounded by Plymouths and Dodges right in the middle of Tokyo. Life is filled with unexpected surprises. Let none of these surprises faze us. Instead, let us persevere and let us not be thrown off our equilibrium but let us realize that we have the family to comfort us, we have our friends to help us, we have courts of law to support us, and we have the Shabbos to give us perspective. May we all have this type of perspective so that we will lead good and wonderful lives. Amen.