

## SEVENTH DAY PASSOVER 1996

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

There is a strange Medrash which says that when the Jews were entering the Red Sea and crossing it and the Egyptians were pursuing them and the guardian angel of Esau learned that G-d was going to let the Jews escape but cause the waters to cascade upon the Egyptians and literally drown all the Egyptian army, he protested saying, "G-d, why are you allowing the Jewish people to escape and destroying the Egyptians? After all, they are both idol worshippers." G-d remonstrated with him and said, "How can you say such a thing? The Jewish people were forced to accept the culture of their oppressors while the Egyptians willingly chose the type of lifestyle they wanted. They willingly chose to be idolators." The question, though, can be asked, why is it that the guardian angel of Esau protested only at the Red Sea? Why didn't he protest before during the plagues? After all, the Jewish people were spared the plagues. The plagues only affected the Egyptians.

What's more, we all know that in the Haggadah it does not mention Moshe's name at all, but, of course, we know that that is not really so at all. We know that Moshe's name is mentioned once when Rabbi Yosi Hagudi talks about the fact that the Jewish people crossed the Red Sea and that the Egyptians were punished five times as much as in Egypt. It says, "The finger of G-d," which stands for the ten plagues, "and the hand of G-d," which stands for the Red Sea, which means that the Egyptians had 50 plagues on the Red Sea, "and the people were afraid of G-d and they believed in G-d and in Moshe, His servant." Why is it that we mention Moshe's name here?

Also we will note that after the incident at the Red Sea where the Egyptians were wiped out

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we learn how they travelled for three days and they did not have water and they complained bitterly to Moshe Rabbeinu and Moshe Rabbeinu was instructed by G-d to throw in a special tree into the waters and the waters sweetened and then it says, "And there G-d forgave them a long judgment." It also continues by saying, "If we will observe G-d's laws then all the sicknesses which G-d brought upon Egypt He will not bring upon us." It seems very strange that we read this today. After all, the rabbis could have had us stop the Torah reading right after the song of praise to G-d where we learn how Miriam praised G-d and the women after Moshe had led them in in the praise of G-d. We did not have to learn anything at all about this three day journey into the desert without water. Then after the Jewish people were shown a tree which made the water potable we learn that G-d gave them certain laws. What do these laws have to do with making water potable?

I think the answer to these questions is actually found in the Haggadah, itself. In the very last of these sentences that we read from the declaration of first fruits, which is the basis of the Haggadah, where we read, "And G-d brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and with great terrible signs and with wonders," we interpret this in the Haggadah to mean that a strong hand meant that G-d made a plague against the cattle of the Egyptians, that He destroyed their property. His outstretched sword refers to the Red Sea where G-d destroyed the Egyptian army, but the last three, the great terror and the signs and wonders, actually refer to the Jewish people. When it says great terror it says, "This is the revelation of the Scheenach," and when it says signs this refers to the staff with which Moshe

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did all the plagues, and the wonders refers not to the blood of the first plague but the blood of the dedication of the Jewish people to G-d when they put the blood of the lamb and the blood of circumcision on the door. If we look carefully we will notice that the last three refer to the Jewish people and not to the Egyptians. Why should the Jewish people be afflicted with great terror? When G-d reveals His Scheenach it can end up to be a great terror. What could that possible mean?

We all know that the rabbis are very much afraid of religion because religion can be misused in so many different ways. We know in the ancient world how the people actually literally sacrificed their children all in the name of religion. We all know that religion can be a corrupting force in life, especially when it is divorced at all from morality. When the Jewish people saw that they were being redeemed from Egypt they had a spiritual awakening. Up to this time the slavery had ground them down so much that they could not think of anything spiritual. Now they were being redeemed and they saw how G-d had all these plagues and had forced the Egyptians to let them go. That is what it says in this sentence here. "Has G-d ever come to take one nation from the midst of another?" So they had a great spiritual awakening and this was what is mentioned here. That is why the angel of Esau could not complain against the Jewish people during the plagues because they were not acting in a spiritual way at all, but here after they had a spiritual awakening, some of them were still worshipping idols. The danger of religion is that it can be perverted so easily. We see that in our country with the cults and we see that in Israel today where there is a spiritual

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awakening, where when people leave the army they used to travel to western Europe and the United States but now the countries will not let them in because they are afraid that some of them will stay so, therefore, they are going to the Far East, to India and Nepal, and when they get there many times they are trying to indulge their new spiritual awareness by getting involved in all sorts of eastern mysticism and the drug culture and many of them are having horrendous events happen to them which are mind altering. In fact, Israeli newspapers are filled with some of these mass events in which they take certain kinds of drugs and really mess up their minds. We know in the Talmud because we are so afraid of religion that we learn that G-d says, "It is better that you forget Me and keep My Torah than that you forget My Torah and revere Me."

That, of course, is why we also learn about Ahab and Jezebel. They were, of course, the epitome of idol worship. He allowed his wife to worship Balka and all the kingdom but he was a very successful king. He won all his battles. He had the love of the people and everything was going well until he stole the fuel in Avot and had him killed on trumped up charges. Then everything fell apart because once he started to act in an immoral fashion, once he started to act in such a way then he had neither Torah or G-d. We know that spirituality can lead to disastrous consequences.

Today we know that there are many Jews who have gone over to other religions out of conviction this time, not out of convenience so they can get a better job. There are 150

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Jewish Messianic congregations, so-called. Of course, many of the people there are not Jews and many of their ministers have changed their names to Jewish names. We know that 20% of all the cults generally have Jewish members in them because there is a Jewish spirituality. We cannot deny the spirituality of the people, but it has to be directed in the right way. At the Red Sea the Jewish people had a heightened spiritual awareness. They were aware of what was happening in Egypt but at the Red Sea the rabbis say even the lowliest maidservant had a greater vision than the later prophets. So we know that there was a great spiritual awakening. When it says that they went for three days in the desert without water, water can also refer to Torah. They had no way to channel their spirituality. That's why G-d had to give them laws. He gave them the Shabbos, the laws of civil and criminal justice, the law of honoring one's father and mother, according to most opinions. Why did He give them these particular laws, especially before Sinai where in a few weeks they were going to get the Torah anyway?

The reason is, the rabbis tell us, that there are three things that mark a slave. The first thing that marks a slave is that he has no time. The second thing is he cannot form a family. The third is he cannot tell the truth. That is what these three laws stand for. Shabbos means that you can control your own time. Honoring your father and mother means you can form a family, you can have relationships. The civil and criminal laws are based upon truth. You have to have truthful testimony. A slave will be beaten if he gives truthful testimony. In order for a religion to be true it has to meet these three criteria and that is why cults do not

meet this criteria because we know that there is brainwashing going on. People are not taught to think for themselves. We know that they tell you to break ties with all your family. We also know that they monopolize your time and do not let you pursue other interests besides the interests of the cult. We all know that spirituality is a worthwhile thing but it can be perverted. In fact, originally when Chassidism came in, which was a great spiritual awakening among the Jewish people, the Vilner Gaon fought it because he felt it was going to take wrong lines. It was going to go in the wrong direction and become a cult. In fact, you can find some extreme people who always quote what the rebbe says, right or wrong or anything else. They have given up their whole capacity to think. We have never gone to the extreme of breaking the family or monopolizing a person's time completely where he has no time at all for any other type of pursuits. This, of course, would be wrong, and that is the test of whether a religion is really fulfilling spirituality or not. That is what G-d gave to Moshe Rabbeinu. The angel of Esau complained against the Jewish people and said, "You have made a spiritual experience and they are still worshipping idols." G-d said, "Don't worry. It is only because of the Egyptian slavery, but I am going to give them a container, a vessel, which is going to hold the spirituality, which will allow them to continue to believe in a correct way." That's why it says they believed in G-d and in Moshe, His servant. They believed in G-d. They had a spiritual awakening, but they knew, too, that Moshe had to give them the vessels with which to contain the spirituality. G-d was going to give Moshe the vessels so that they would have a true religious experience. Even today we have to be very careful with different types of groups because if any group says that you must believe

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irregardless of the truth that you must sever ties with your family, as actually it says in the New Testament, and that you also must not have any time for anything else in all your life then something is wrong. Let us all hope and pray that we will have a great spiritual awakening in the Jewish people and that that Jewish awakening will be channeled in a Jewish way. Unfortunately, in Israel today we see because of the political situation in the newspapers and because of the propaganda of the literature which has always says that to be modern you cannot be Jewish, we find that this spirituality is being channeled in a wrong direction. We hope and pray that it will be put in the right direction.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who came before G-d and said, "G-d, isn't a penny in your eyes like a billion dollars?" G-d said, "Yes, my son." He then asked, "Isn't a second in your eyes like a billion years?" G-d said, "It is, my son." The man then said, "G-d, couldn't you give me a penny." G-d replied, "All right. In a second, my son."

When it comes to material things we know we have to work hard and there are no shortcuts. The same thing is true in the spiritual realm. We have to have containers to hold spirituality. We cannot look for shortcuts and we certainly cannot look for them outside our religion. If we do we are going to destroy ourselves; we are not going to enhance ourselves. Let us all hope and pray that we will learn these lessons so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.