

SEVENTH DAY PASSOVER 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today we read about how the Jewish people got their freedom. We learn how the Egyptian army was destroyed when the waters of the Red Sea came cascading down upon them. Up until this time, Pharaoh could have sent his army any time and brought the Jewish people back into slavery. It is interesting to note, though, that this is not the date upon which we make the seder, the big celebration of our freedom. Why should we make the big celebration of our freedom on the first and second night of Pesach and not on the day on which we actually got our freedom?

Also, why is it that Pharaoh thought that he could recapture the Jewish people? After all, didn't he suffer the plagues? Wasn't he now convinced that G-d was going to make sure that the Jewish people were going to be free? The rabbis say that Pharaoh thought that he could recapture the Jewish people because it says, "And it was told to the king of Egypt that the people fled." It does not say that they were going to meet G-d, or they were going to achieve their goal. It said that the people fled. They did not seem to have a purpose. It did not look like they were seizing an opportunity, but, rather, they were just fleeing their misery.

Also, why is it that we remove chometz on Pesach, and why is it that matzah is stressed so much? After all, all we should have to do is really just put a piece of matzah on the table, which symbolizes the fact that the Jewish people left in such a hurry that they did not have time for their bread to rise, just as we have a piece of bitter herbs on the table to symbolize the bitterness of slavery, and just as we have a shankbone on the table to symbolize the

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Korban Pesach. Why do we have to eat matzah, and why are we so careful to remove all the leaven?

If we look at the difference between bread and matzah, we will notice that the difference is only 18 minutes. If water touches flour for more than 18 minutes, it becomes chometz. After 18 minutes the natural fermentation process takes place and matzah becomes bread. One of the meanings of the word "chometz" is "to miss an opportunity". L'Chachamee~~ez~~ means to miss an opportunity. Sometimes if we let nature take its course, we will miss the great opportunities in life. Sometimes we have to seize the moment. We have to seize the opportunity. What does it mean that the Jewish people left in such great haste? They knew that they now had an opportunity to obtain freedom. They were not completely ready for it. Their bread had not risen, but, yet, they had this possibility, a good possibility. They could subsist on matzah. They had to seize the day. Too often in life we fail to take advantage of the opportunities we have. We are waiting for things to be perfect before we act. So many people have not gotten married because they have not found the perfect mate. So many people have not entered different professions because they were not sure they were perfect for them. So many people fail to take advantage of business opportunities because they did not feel everything was perfect. We are called upon to seize the opportunity. It is true that we cannot act foolhardy, and, therefore, the rabbis teach us we break the afikomen in half. If there is at least a fifty percent chance of success, we should seize it. If it is less than that, then we should let it go unless there are dire circumstances which demand that we take the

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risk.

We all know that matzah has to be made out of wheat or a grain that can become chometz.

It cannot be made out of rice or corn or millet because these grains cannot become chometz.

We know that during Pesach we cannot use products made out of wheat or barley or oats or rye or spelt, but our matzah is made out of wheat, but it is made before Pesach and it is made under special conditions. We can only make matzah out of these five grains because we must always realize that life is filled with risk and we have to take the risk, even though it is possible that our matzah could become chometz.

That's why during the seder we have to finish by midnight, by half the night, why we divide the Hallel in two, why we cut the afikomen in half. If we have half a chance, we should seize it. We should not wait until everything is perfect because everything will not be perfect. If we let nature take its course, if we let our matzah become bread we will miss our opportunity. It is interesting to note that eighteen in Hebrew is chai. In life we must take risks and seize the opportunity. They say that Yigal Yadin, the head of the Haganah, told Ben Gurion before Israel's War of Independence, that there was only a forty percent chance that Israel would win. Ben Gurion said, "That's the best chance we have had for over 2000 years. We have to take it." Usually, though, the odds should be at least fifty percent. There are so many challenges in our community today and challenges in our personal lives. We should always seize these opportunities and make sure that our life is full and

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meaningful. We should not wait for nature to take its course.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a fellow who in 1950 left his shoes at the shoe repair shop and then left town. Forty years later, while rummaging through his drawers, he found the ticket from the shoe repair shop. He thought it was a great coincidence since he was returning to this town for the first time in forty years. He decided to see if the shoe repair shop was still there. He went to the shop and, sure enough, it was still there. He went in and told the owner he had a ticket forty years old. The owner said he would look in the back. He looked in the back and came out to the fellow and said, "Your shoes are here. They'll be ready on Tuesday."

Letting nature take its course does not produce results. We celebrate the seder on the first night of Pesach because it was then that the Jewish people seized the opportunity. True, some of them only left because they were driven out, and, true, not all the people shouted as they shouted after the Egyptian army was destroyed that they believed in G-d and in Moshe, His servant, but most of the Jewish people seized the opportunity to be free on the first night of Pesach. They left without everything being perfectly planned. We, too, must seize our opportunities to do good for ourselves and our community and our people. If we will, rest assured, G-d will do His part and help us until the days of the Mashiach. May He come soon. Amen.