

SEVENTH DAY PESACH 1998

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

We all know that today we did not say the full Hallel. The reason we do not say the full Hallel today, according to the Talmud, which quotes Rabbi Yochanan, is because the day when the Egyptian army was drowned in the Red Sea, the angels of G-d started to sing, and G-d said, "How can you sing when My creatures have been destroyed?" We Jews have never gloated over our enemy's defeat. We do not want to destroy our enemies. We want our enemy to bless us.

That is, of course, what we learn from Yaacov. When Yaacov wrestled with the angel of Esau, he did not want to defeat him but wanted him to bless him. That's why, too, when we recite the ten plagues at the seder, we place our finger in the cup and remove a drop of wine every time we mention a plague because our cup of joy cannot be full because of the suffering of the Egyptians. It is true that generally we do not celebrate the days of our victory. We celebrate the day after our victory when we can practice our religion fully. We defeated Haman and his cohorts on the 13th of Adar, but we celebrate on the 14th because the important thing is that now we can practice our religion. Our goal is to practice our religion and be free, not to defeat our enemy. If we could do it without defeating our enemy, we would just as well do that.

As we all know, today we read the Shira. We may not say the full Hallel, but we definitely sing a song to G-d thanking Him for destroying the Egyptian army. Moshe and the sons of Israel sang this song to G-d, " I will sing to G-d for He is exalted above the arrogant, having hurled horse with its rider into the sea." We do sing, but we sing in praise of G-d. This

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song does not dwell upon the cruelty of the Egyptians." It dwells upon the fact that G-d saves us and that G-d used nature to save us, and that not only did He destroy the Egyptian army, but He caused terror to grip the dwellers of Philistia and trembling to grip the powers of Moab. We talk about the fact that G-d is going to be with His people. He is going to bring them to the land of Israel and have them build a sanctuary. This song is a song of hope, a song not of gloating over an enemy's defeat, but a song which teaches every Jew that G-d is there to help them, that in spite of all problems, G-d will help us to help Him redeem the world. Judaism requires a song. It is only a song which will allow us to overcome the problems of inevitable shadows which will come into all our lives.

In the Haggadah, we learn in the poem, "And it was in the middle of the night," about how Abraham defeated the kings who had kidnapped his nephew, Lot. We learn also about how the Assyrian armies who were besieging Jerusalem were stricken down on the seder night. Sanhereb had surrounded Jerusalem and the situation had looked hopeless. Hezekiah had just about given up, but Isaiah told him to hold on, and then a great miracle happened. Nobody knows exactly what it was, but the whole Assyrian army panicked and fled. In the Egyptian chronicles it is called the night of the mouse. Maybe the Assyrian camp was attacked by rodents, or maybe a meteor in the shape of a mouse landed close by, but, in any event, the Assyrian army fled. Hezekiah, the rabbis say, was supposed to be the Mashiach. He was such a righteous man. However, he was not appointed the Mashiach because he failed to sing a song to G-d about this great deliverance. The rabbis say about Hezekiah that he

enacted many religious reforms. He brought the people back to Judaism from their idolatry. He instituted a wonderful educational system. In fact, according to the Talmud Sanhedrin, he placed a sword at the entrance to every school and said, "Those boys and girls who do not study will be hit by the sword." The rabbis say that he was so successful in educating the boys and girls, there were no children from Dan to Beersheba who did not know the most intricate laws of ritual purity and impurity, yet, nothing stuck. This education did not turn these youngsters into pious people. After Hezekiah died, they reverted to idol worship. Even his own son, Menashe, became an idol worshipper. In fact, they tell the story that before his son was born, Hezekiah had a vision that his son would not turn out right. Therefore, he did not want to get married. G-d was displeased with this, and Hezekiah was struck by a disease and was on his death bed when Isaiah came and said he was afflicted because he did not get married. Hezekiah said, "How can I get married if I am going to have a son who is wicked?" Isaiah said, "That's not your job. Your job is to have children. Leave the rest to G-d." Isaiah even gave him his daughter. The rabbis say that after Menashe gained the throne after his father's death, he killed his grandfather, Isaiah. The rabbis ask, why is it that Hezekiah failed to raise up another generation who was devoted to Judaism? After all, they had the knowledge.

The answer is, he did not give them a song. He did not show them the beauty and how Judaism was relevant to their lives. Without this song, Judaism cannot live. We are not Prussians. We cannot exist by the motto of just obey. We have to feel our religion helps us

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overcome life's problems, how it gives us a song. At the Red Sea it says that the Jewish people sang the song, "And they believed in G-d and in Moshe, His servant," but three days later we learn how they came to Maror and they were not able to drink the water because it was bitter, and they complained against Moshe. G-d showed them a tree, which He told them to throw into the water and it sweetened the water. He also gave them three specific commandments: Shabbat; honoring their parents; and civil laws, some say also the law of the red heifer. He told them that, "If you will listen to these mitzvahs then all these diseases which I put in Egypt I will not put upon you." What does this mean? This means that G-d gave them vehicles for renewing the Jewish song. When bitterness would come upon them, they would in the midst of the bitterness celebrate a Shabbat. The Shabbat would allow them to renew the song. In the midst of their bitterness, they would gather with their family and their song would be renewed. In the mist of their bitterness, they would take pride in their civic institutions and their song would be renewed. We renew our song when we gather together on Shabbat, when we gather together with our family, when we gather together with our people. It is not enough to have a song. This song can peter out unless you have a mechanism for renewing it. The Chassidic commentaries say that the disease of Egypt was that people believed that there was no G-d and there was no way for things to get better. That's why it says that, "If you will keep these things, I will remove the disease of Egypt from you because I am G-d, Who cures you." It is so easy for dreams to peter out. We need to have mechanisms to renew them.

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In fact, we see today that Israel is celebrating its 50th anniversary. There are many to whom this celebration does not mean anything because they no longer dream Jewish dreams. They would like Israel to be like Norway or Sweden or the United States, and since it is not, they are disappointed and do not feel like celebrating, but others who still see the song, in spite of the difficulties, feel compelled to celebrate. Others look only at the difficulties and do not want to sing. If they do not sing, they are in danger of losing everything, like the students in the schools of Hezekiah. For Judaism to survive, we need to have a song. Things are never going to be perfect. It is almost always in the middle of the night. Abraham had to act in the middle of the night to save Lot. The Jewish people gathered together for their seder in the middle of the night, but if we have a song we can overcome everything. Night can be overcome, but we need more than a song. We also need the mechanism to renew our song. Shabbat, family, and identifying with the Jewish people will allow us to renew our song.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a kindergarten teacher who was out of class for six weeks having a baby. When she returned, she asked her class, "How did you like my substitute?" One little girl said, "She was okay, but she wasn't as smart as you." The teacher asked, "Why do you say she wasn't as smart as me?" The little girl replied, "Because she needed two hands to play the piano." We all need two hands to secure the future of the Jewish people. We need a song and we need a mechanism to renew the song. Let's all hope and pray that all of us will realize the importance of Shabbat, family, and the Jewish community so that our song will never die but will always be renewed so the

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Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.