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SHABBOS HAGODOL DROSHA 1981

The comparison between the recital when you brought Bi Kureem and the Haggadah. If you did not bring Bi Kureem you could still eat your crop but you would miss something. If a Jew does not celebrate Pesach he can still exist as a human being but he will miss something. Why don't we say a Brocha before we say the Haggadah? The two obligations a Jew has to the community and to personal Mitzvahs. The structure of the Haggadah. Zos Chukas HaPesach and Zos Chukas HaTorah. We are not sure he will stay a Jew until he makes a commitment.

SHABBOS HAGODOL 1983
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Pesach is a holiday which teaches us how to save the Jewish people from death. We do not say a brocha when we begin the Hagaddah because we are not sure that we will be able to secure the future of the Jewish people, but we do say it after we complete the reading before dinner. The central reading of the Hagaddah is the prayer for first fruits which is found in Deuteronomy. It speaks about how an Aramian tried to wipe out our father. This was more throught assimilation than physical death. We Jews must be willing to have a sign outside our doors, to be willing to stand up as Jews, not to feel inferior. We read the Zos Chucasa Torah. We also read the Zos Chucasa Pesach. The Chok of the Torah allows us to overcome the depression, etc. of death, and Zos Chucasa Pesach allows us to overcome the death of the Jewish people. A Chok is something which is immutable. You must just get in harmony with it. The Hagaddah teaches us how the Jewish people shall remain eternal.

SSA
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Pesach and Yomeem Naroem have a big hold on Jewish people. Yomeem Naroem concerned with individual. Zos Chukas Hatorah. An individual in order to overcome death needs others. That's why we gather together in big multitudes on Yomeem Naroem. Pesach concerned with our commitment to make sure that Israel doesn't die. We're not grouped together in large groups but as family. Every family has the obligation to make sure Jewish people lives. We can't put it on anyone else. The telling of the Hagadol based on Arami Oveed with the bikireen. Why? Because the peril of slavery even from a labor from assimilation. We must have hagoles Keikin before Pesach. Each of us must assume commitment to Mitzvas Zos Chakeen HaTorah and to Jewish people - Zos Chukas HaPesach. We also concerned about Eretz Israel. Argument about five cups. Didn't have fifth cup because we still don't have Israel. Hagaddah begins now here, next year is Israel. Why do we say Hallel on Pesach night? Because we're elevated. We've committed ourselves to Torah, to the Jewish people, and to the land of Israel.

In the Torah we have written out the commandment for saying the Haggadah. We learn it says "and you should tell your son on that day saying." This teaches us that we are to recite the Haggadah on Pesach. There is another sentence which says, "Remember this day that you went out from Egypt." Maimonides says that we need both these sentences to teach us the commandment of reciting the Haggadah. The sentence "and you should tell your son" you might think only applied if you have children. What happens if you have no children? What happens if you are alone? The other sentence tells us that even if we are alone you have to remember the Exodus from Egypt. In fact, the question can be asked, what is so special about remembering the Exodus from Egypt on the first night of Passover? We do it all the time. We do it in the Shma, when we put on Tephillin, in the Kiddush, etc. The Minchas Achinuk says that the difference is that on Pesach we have to do it in dialogue fashion. We have to ask questions. We have to delve deeply into it and even if there is nobody at the Seder you have to ask yourself the questions. The Rambam says that the word "Zochor" which is used for "remember this day" is the same word used for remembering the Sabbath. The Sabbath is different than the holidays because we have the authority to set the holidays. We can play with the calendar so that Yom Kippur never comes out on a Friday or a Sunday. Sometimes the new moon will actually be on a Sunday and we will not declare the new moon to be until Tuesday. The Torah gives us this right. However, Shabbos is different. Shabbos always has to come on the 7th day. Shabbos is an immutable law. Shabbos is a Chuk. Even if the United Nations would declare that two days of the year have no weekday so that Sunday will always come on the first and Saturday on the 7th, we could not accept it. Pesach, too, has some of the element of Chuk. That's why the Torah refers to Pesach as Zos Chukas HaPesach. This is the Chuk of the Pesach. We also learn the same expression, Zos Chukas HaTorah, with the red heifer. In Judaism death is the highest form of ritual defilement. Ritual purity has nothing to do with moral culpability, with doing wrong. Ritual impurity is really a psychological state. When a person feels helpless, that he cannot act

in the world, when he feels depressed, when he feels nothing is worth the effort, then he becomes ritually impure. This is what happens when you touch a dead body. It is a very great Mitzvah to touch a dead body, but it cannot help but leave you depressed. Our job in this world is to act, to be G-d's partner in creation. That's why we wake up after we sleep we have to wash our hands, not just for cleanliness, but because we become in a certain sense impure. We are passive. We cannot act. We are supposed to continue to act. The Chukas of the Torah allows us to act. They allow us to feel that we can accomplish things. This, too, is the meaning of the Korban Pesach. It tells us we are not slaves to some malevolent forces. Aries does not control us. The lamb does not control us. We can act. We can accomplish things. The Haggadah starts with Genus and ends with Sheva. The question is asked, why don't we say a Brocha before we begin the Haggadah? After all, we just cannot say that it is just because we are saying words. A lot of time when we say words we say a Brocha, like when we read the Megillah. We do not make a Brocha before the reading of the Haggadah because we are in a state of degradation and slavery, and we cannot be a part of G-d in creation. You have to first be filled with hope. We first must feel that we can accomplish things. When we make a blessing and we say, "Blessed are You, G-d, Who has redeemed us and our souls." Pesach talks not only about a physical redemption, but also about a redemption of our souls. Jews now believe that they can make a difference. They can act. Even in Auschwitz they had a Seder. Why should they have had a Seder in Auschwitz? They were not free until 1946, yet they continued to make a Seder because we are free inside. Since the time of the first Pesach we have known that we have been free inside. We can make a difference. The question is also asked, why don't we make a Brocha over Halel? We split Halel in half. The first part we say before the meal. This part deals with slavery, with Egypt. We cannot say a blessing because psychologically we are still slaves. The second part of the Haggadah deals with redemption, with making us know and feel that we do make a difference. We can act. We can be G-d's partner in creation. That's

why Pesach is known as Leil Shimureem, the night of watching. On this night we are not afraid. We do not even say the special prayers of the Shma when we go to bed because we know we have the capacity to act. We know that Judaism's message will eventually get through to the whole world. We know we will finally be a great redemption. That's, too, why we have to Hagoles Hekeleem, we have to clean all our vessels symbolic of cleaning ourselves from depression and passivity and feeling that we are useless and hopeless. That's the chometz we have to clean out of our system so that we can truly work with G-d to bring the great redemption, a day which we speak about in the second part of the Haggadah, a day in which even death will be overcome, when happiness and joy and naches will reign supreme. May this day soon come. Amen.

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This year the first day of Pesach comes out on a Shabbos. The question can be asked, why do we still eat matzah on Pesach since it comes out on Shabbos? After all, when the first day of Rosh Hashonna comes out on Shabbos we do not blow the shofar. When the first day of Succos comes out on Shabbos we do not take the lulav. Why should we eat matzah on the first day of Pesach since that is the main commandment of the day, as is blowing the shofar for Rosh Hashonna and taking the lulav on Succos? The Torah commands us to blow the shofar on Rosh Hashonna and to take the lulav on the first day of Succos just as it commands us to eat matzah. The rabbis have the power to negate a positive commandment if they think it will lead to violations. The rabbis cannot negate a commandment which has both a positive and a negative side, but they can a positive commandment. The rabbis tell us that we do not blow the shofar when it comes on Shabbos because a person will take the shofar to an expert to learn how to blow. The same applies to a lulav. Why shouldn't the same apply to matzah? There are special brochas to learn, etc. Why shouldn't we say a person cannot eat matzah on the first day because he will take it outside the prescribed limits because he will take it to an expert to learn how to say it properly? There is a difference between Rosh Hashonna, Succos, and Pesach because on Pesach we make the seder at night. On Rosh Hashonna we blow the shofar during the day, and on Succos we take the lulav during the day. This means that there would be no opportunity to violate Yontif by taking the matzah elsewhere since the very beginning of the holiday we eat the matzah. However, the question still is, is there, though, a deeper reason why we eat the matzah on Shabbos? Shabbos is different than the other holidays because Shabbos was set by G-d. We can never change it. There was a proposal years ago to make a uniform calendar, where the first day of the year would always be a Sunday and January 7th would always be a Saturday. This means there would always be two days a year that would not be counted and would always be holidays. This proposal was anathema to us because the 7th day would appear at different times in different years, sometimes Wednesdays and sometimes Thursdays. It would cause businesses to have a rough time and would be impossible for school, etc. The holidays are different. We declare the holidays. The rabbis have been given the authority to

declare the holidays. We can manipulate with the months' start so that Yom Kippur never comes on a Friday or Sunday. Sometimes the Molad will be declared on Tuesday and Rosh Chodesh will not come until Thursday. The holidays were given to teach us specific messages: Rosh Hashonna to improve ourselves, Succos to always feel joy in life, Shavuos the importance of the Torah. Pesach was given to teach us that we must be G-d's partner in perfecting this world. In fact, that is the message of Shabbos, too. We say we are given Shabbos for two reasons: to remember the creation of the world, and also to remember the Exodus from Egypt. Shabbos, the rabbis say, is a foretaste of the world to come. Shabbos not only commemorates G-d's creation, but the way the world can be if we will but do our job. This is the message of Pesach, too, to take the world from darkness to light. That's why the seder is held at night. The matzah is the symbol of our desire to go from darkness to light. We eat the matzah on Shabbos because Shabbos is also to remember the Exodus from Egypt. On Pesach on the night of the seder we again experience the symbolic slavery and its evils and reaffirm our desire to make this a better world. That's why, too, Pesach is different from Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur we invite all sinners to come and daven with us, even apostates, those who have given up the Jewish religion, but on Pesach we will not allow an apostate or an uncircumcized Jew to eat of the Korban Pesach, to participate fully in the seder. Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur talk about a people changing, improving, making themselves ready to serve G-d's purposes. We encourage everyone to come. Perhaps it will awaken in them the desire to change, to be more what G-d wants them to be. The message of Pesach, though, is different. On Pesach we actually commit ourselves as a people to help G-d bring about the redemption of the world. This requires commitment. We are committed to help G-d bring light to the night. Pesach is a symbol that G-d will never forsake us, and that if we do our share as a people we will eventually bring the time when everyday will be like a Shabbos. Therefore, we eat matzah on Shabbos because that is also part of the message of Shabbos. We commit ourselves to help G-d bring light to the night.

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In the Mishnah in Pesachim we learn that we are not supposed to eat matzah on erev Pesach, on the day before Pesach. We all know that from approximately 3:30 p.m. on on all holidays and the Sabbath we do not eat a meal so that our Sabbath and holiday meal will be eaten with good appetite. We know that for Pesach the rabbis add approximately another half hour, to 3:00 p.m., in which they say that you should not eat a meal after that time so that you can eat the Pesach seder with an appetite. However, there is a special law on erev Pesach which says that you should not eat matzah erev Pesach. The Rambam says that anybody who violates this law should receive stripes. If you normally eat before a holiday or Shabbos after 3:30 p.m. it is not considered nice, but there is no punishment. The Rambam, though, gives this very severe punishment to one who eats matzah the whole day before Pesach. Why should this be so? What's more, we learn in the Talmud Yerushalmi and in the Tosvos to the Talmud Bavli that one who eats matzah on erev Pesach is like one who had intercourse with his fiance while she still was in her father's house. Why do they use this strong expression and this type of imagery to describe one who eats matzah on erev Pesach?

In ancient days the Jewish wedding ceremony was split in two. An engaged person in ancient times is not like an engaged person today. Today we combine both parts of the wedding ceremony; that's why we have two cups of wine at our wedding ceremony. The first part of the wedding ceremony is called Arusin or Kedushim. During this first part of the wedding ceremony the groom gives a ring to the bride and says, "Behold, you are sanctified to me with this ring according to the law of Moses and Israel." At this point the groom becomes

an Arus, and the bride becomes an Arusa.

In Talmudic times approximately a year separated the first part of the wedding ceremony, called Arusim, from the last part of the wedding ceremony, which was called Nissium. During this time the engaged girl lived at home and the groom spent the year gathering money and obtaining position so he could adequately provide for the bride. At the end of this time at the Nissium, the Sheva Brochas were said and the bride then moved into her husband's home. During the period of Arusim the groom did not have intercourse with the bride and he also did not have to support her. She was banned, however, from any other man. If she would have intercourse with any other man, it would be considered adultery. If, for any reason, they broke up during this time they would need a Jewish divorce, a get. Arusim then prohibits and separates; Nissium permits and joins the husband and the wife.

Erev Pesach, the eve before Pesach, is really a holiday, part of Pesach. The Korban Pesach, or paschal sacrifice, was brought from 12:00 noon on until nightfall. During this time no chometz was allowed. That's why we are not allowed to eat chometz from 12:00 noon. Actually the holiday of Pesach began then. The rabbis have added another two hours to make sure we do not violate the prohibition of eating chometz.

What does the bringing of the Korban Pesach mean? It meant that we were rejecting all forms of idolatry. We know at this time of year the Constellation Aries holds sway. The Egyptian people believed that the spirit of Aries would become incarnate in the lamb at this particular time of year. They, therefore, believed that anybody

who would touch a lamb, the potential dwelling place of the spirit, was endangering the very existence of Egypt and should be dealt with harshly, even killed. We rejected all these type of ideas. We said that only G-d was worthy of worship, not these spirits and superstitions. In effect, we became an Arusa to G-d at this particular time. Most sacrifices, after you brought them, you would eat them immediately, but the Korban Pesach you could not eat until nightfall. Only at the seder do we have the Nissium, do the Jewish people assume the positive uniting aspects of them with G-d. During erev Pesach we still are stressing the negative aspects. We are showing that we reject all others, but we have not formed a positive relationship with G-d yet.

The matzah we eat on Pesach has a double meaning. It means the "bread of affliction". It was the main diet of the slave. They did not have the time, energy, or wherewithal to make real bread. It was the symbol of degradation. Matzah was also the symbol of freedom, of the Jewish people's willingness to leave Egypt quickly even without bread and to trust G-d and follow Him into the wilderness with very little provisions. It was also a symbol of faith and confidence. Two weeks before the Jewish people were to leave Egypt they were commanded about the seder. We learn also that Moshe told them to leave the cities so they should not be polluted with the idol worship of the Egyptian people when they make the seder, and they should eat the Korban Pesach with matzah. Certainly they would have had enough time to have made the matzah before the seder and even bread.

Why then weren't they prepared? The answer is, to my mind, that they did not realize that G-d would take them out so quickly. They

did not realize they would leave in the middle of the night, that the Egyptians would chase them out. They thought the Egyptians would wait a little bit. They would discuss and parlay like they did before, but the very night the Angel of Death passed over they expelled them. Why, though, can't we eat matzah the day before Pesach? It is true that some authorities say that we can eat matzah up until noon when we could bring the Korban Pesach. The HaMaor says this. Maimonides and almost all other authorities say we cannot eat it all day, the reason for it being that the night before we were commanded to destroy all chometz. Since we are now under obligation to destroy all chometz we are now prohibited to eat matzah before the seder, the reason being that matzah and chometz are intimately related.

The definition of matzah is dependent on what is chometz. During the rest of the year there is no such thing as matzah or chometz. Matzah is just a form of bread or chometz. It is only when we define something as chometz and prohibit it that the category of matzah comes into play. Chometz is any of the five species of flour which have touched water for more than 18 minutes. It is for this reason, too, that women are obligated to eat matzah on the seder night. You could claim since this is a time-bound position commandment to eat matzah that women should be free from it, but since they are included in the negative commandment not to eat chometz, they are then obligated to eat matzah at the seder because matzah and chometz are intimately related. Some people do not eat matzah from the beginning of Nisan and some even from Purim. This, of course, is only a custom and not a law. They do this because this is when they become concerned about the whole concept of chometz and matzah. The concept, though, does not come into being until erev Pesach. It is only then that

we are forbidden by law not to eat matzah.

The Zohar says that the matzah is "Nachal Mehem Nuso" which means "the faithful bread". It is the bread which proclaims the Jewish people's faithfulness to G-d and G-d's love of the Jewish people. Why can't we eat matzah erev Pesach? Because on erev Pesach the matzah is still a negative concept. The matzah stands for affliction, for slavery. On erev Pesach we Jewish people are an Arusa. We are prohibited to all other gods. We negate all other people's religious and culture values which are based on violence and cruelty. However, we are still not a Nissua. We still do not have the positive relationship with our lover, so to speak, with G-d. It is only at the night of the seder that we have this relationship. That's why the custom in many communities to sing Shir Hashir, the Song of Songs, which speaks of G-d's love for Israel and Israel's love for G-d on the night of the seder. It is only on the night of the seder that the matzah becomes a positive symbol.

One of the major lessons of the seder is to teach the Jewish people that they were not to just change places with the Egyptians. Usually what happens in successful revolutions is that the oppressors and the oppressed change places. Many times a people concentrate so much on the negative aspects of their suffering that they fail to take advantage of the positive effects of freedom. They no longer believe in freedom. They just believe in revenge. This G-d did not want to happen to the Jewish people. That's why we do not begin the Haggadah with a brocha because we do not want to dwell on the slavery. We want to emphasize our deliverance. It is only before we eat that we say a brocha in the Haggadah, and we thank G-d for

redeeming us and redeeming our souls.

This is true even in the way we describe the symbols. When we describe the Korban Pesach at the seder we discuss its positive aspects, not that it was the symbol of rejection of idolatry, but that because we put its blood on our door G-d saved us. The matzah, too, we stress that it was a bread of affliction when we speak about the bread of faithfulness, that we were willing to go out into the desert with only unleavened bread. Even the bitter herbs we do not stress just the negative. We dip the bitter herbs in Harosis, which is sweet. Slavery was terrible but work, itself, was good. The Jewish people still took pride in their work. Work is good. It is only when you do it as a slave that it is bad.

On erev Pesach we could not eat the matzah or the Korban Pesach because we were only an Arusa. We were only in a negative relationship with G-d. We proclaim by our sacrificing the lamb that we reject all other gods. At the seder, though, we, in effect, became married to G-d or, as the rabbis say, there was "Gelus Schintel". That's why the seder is at home. It is the Nissuin ceremony. We use the chupa as a symbol of the bride coming into the groom's home. There are also seven blessings before we eat the matzah, which remind us of the seven marriage blessing. The matzah is also covered, like the bride is veiled. Until the night of Pesach the Jewish people did not know whether G-d could provide for them, like the Arusa does not know whether her Arus can support her. G-d, though, by taking us out of Egypt, proved He can take care of the Jewish people. He proved that He can always help us. We now are no longer Arusim; we are a Nossua.

The importance of pesach is the positive elements, the positive relationship we now have with G-d, not the negative things. Now we can understand why the Rambam says a person who eats matzah erev Pesach deserves stripes, because he is a person who is not a positive Jew but a negative Jew. He is a person who knows that he has suffered and wants to get revenge, but he does not stand for anything positive. He does not want to break the cycle of oppressor and oppressed and usher in a new era.

We also understand why the Jerusalem Talmud says that anyone who eats matzah on Pesach is like a person who has intercourse with his fiance while she is still in her father's house. Again, we are speaking about somebody who has not taken upon himself the responsibilities of preserving Judaism. He only wants the benefits without the responsibilities. The Jewish people were only an Arusa on erev Pesach. They did not become a Nissua until the seder. The way we Jews have always dealt with evil is to concentrate on doing good. Matzah also means mitzvahs. We Jews established our relationship with G-d by concentrating on doing deeds of kindness, not only looking back and hating our enemies. What we are supposed to be is positive Jews, not people who are separate and prohibited but people who know that G-d loves us and cares for us and Who wants us to help Him make this a better world.

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On Shabbos Hagodol we do nothing special in shul except reading a special Haphtorah. We do not take out two Torahs; there is no ringing decisions about the importance of freedom; there are no special foods, no special kiddush. All we do is read a special Haphtorah about a time in Jewish history shortly after the Jewish people returned to Israel from Babylonia. It also does not seem to have anything to do with Pesach. Why should we read this Haphtorah? What's more, in the Haphtorah we have slanderous statements being made against G-d. "It is vain to serve G-d, and what profit is it that we have kept His charge? Now we call the proud happy."

This seems a very strange Haphtorah to read on the only Shabbos of the year which is called Shabbos Hagodol. Perhaps we can understand why we read this Torah portion if we read the next sentence. "Then they that fear the Lord spoke with one another, and the Lord harkened and heard and a book of remembrance was written before Him." The people learned how to talk with one another and then they were able to solve their problems. Reconciliation is the theme of this Torah portion. That's why at the end of this Haphtorah we say that "Elijah will return the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers". When people are not talking to each other, are not dealing with each other then things are difficult, but if generation talk with each other, if even people who have been insulted by one another can talk, then reconciliation can happen and great things can occur.

That's the theme, also, of our Torah portion Metzora, the reconciliation of the leper to the community. The leper we see is one who has slandered others; therefore, he was afflicted. When his affliction is over, a Kohen is told to visit him and to determine whether his leprosy

has been cured. If it has been cured, the Kohen, or priest, then has him undergo a special ceremony. He is to take two birds. He is to slaughter one bird into a clay pot over running water. He is to dip the other bird in the blood of the first bird and let it go free. This is to teach us that although slander is like killing a person and it muddies up the living waters of trust, yet if a person no longer slanders the water will soon be clean again, and the bird, who is dipped in the blood, after a short time will, too, be clean. If the slanderer will stop slandering and participate in society as a normal human being, the damage can be erased. People can be reconciled.

That's, too, why the leper after this ceremony stays one more week out of the camp, and then he offers a sacrifice in the Temple. If he stops slandering everything can be brought back to normal. We can all be reconciled. That, too, is the theme of Shabbos Hagodol. The Jews, by taking the lamb that they were going to slaughter, showed that they were reconciling themselves to G-d, that they no longer believed in the idolatry that the lamb represented. The rabbis tell us that they were commanded to do three things before the Exodus: to take and slaughter the lamb; to circumcise themselves; and to let their own slaves go free. Before they were worthy of the Exodus they had to be reconciled to G-d, to the Jewish people (that's what circumcision represents), and to each other. They had to free their own slaves.

That's, too, why they had to have a seder on the night they were redeemed. They had to prove they could live in harmony with each other, especially their family and close friends. Reconciliation is the pre-condition for redemption. That's why there is no pomp

and ceremony or special foods connected with Shabbos Hagodol. Shabbos Hagodol is concerned with the heart, with the ability of people to reconcile themselves to each other, even to people who have acted badly toward you.

The rabbis ask the question, why was it that Aaron or a descendant of Aaron, the priests, were selected to examine the leper and tell whether or not he now was clean. Why wasn't Moshe given this task or the rabbis? The answer is because Aaron was a person who made mistakes. He was the person who helped the people fashion the golden calf. The people could relate to Aaron. He was a man who made mistakes but who did not give up but kept trying. They found it hard to relate to Moshe because Moshe seemed to be a man who never made mistakes. The slanderer and others who have done wrong must feel that they can change and that they can be reconciled to their friends and family.

Shabbos Hagodol tells us that this reconciliation is possible. Even those who have been hurt can be reconciled to those who have harmed them. They just have to talk to each other. They have to talk to each other. They have to talk to each other in a straightforward manner without guile or trickery. If they can do this, then they can be reconciled. Our talk should not be a cover for sending the wrong message, for giving people the wrong number. Our talk should be straight so that we can be reconciled. If we can be reconciled one to another we can all be fitting partners with G-d in creation and bring the ultimate day of redemption closer.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a woman who calls up on the phone and said, "How are thing going?" The other woman said, "Mom, the kids are wild, the house is a mess, and I have six guests

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coming for dinner." The woman replied, "Don't worry. I'll come over, straighten the house, cook the dinner, and calm down the kids. By the way, how is your brother?" The woman said, "My brother?! He died three years ago." The woman said, "I'm sorry. I guess I have the wrong number." The young woman replied, "Does this mean you aren't coming over?" Reconciliation can be achieved if each of us talks straight and does not send each other wrong numbers.

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There are three main symbols of Pesach. Rabbi Gamliel tells us that we are obligated to mention them at the Pesach seder. They are the Korban Pesach, the Matzah, and Moror (bitter herbs). In the ancient days we could not invite anybody off the street into a seder. You had to be invited, ~~had to be counted before.~~ ~~You could not just come to a seder.~~ You had to be counted as a member of a group before the Korban Pesach was offered. After the Korban Pesach was offered, then you could not join the group. The people who offered the Korban Pesach had to have you in mind when they offered the Korban Pesach. Also, a person could not participate in a seder if that person was an apostate Jew, or if that Jew was an uncircumcised Jew. Pesach was entirely different than Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur we invite everyone in to daven with us. We would encourage them to come in. We ~~would~~ ask the ~~miradas in the older days,~~ ^{even} those who had publicly found themselves another religion, to participate in Yom Kippur services, but when it came to Pesach, they were not permitted to be at the seder. Apostate Jews, Jews who were not circumcised were not included in the Pesach seder. Why should this be so?

We know that the rabbis have a disagreement as to when Pesach actually begins. Is Pesach on the 13th of Nisan, the day we call Erev Nisan today, or is it the 15th of Nisan? In other words, was Pesach the day they sacrificed the paschal lamb, or was Pesach the 15th, the night they ate the paschal lamb? Some rabbis, based on a ~~sentence~~ ^{verse} in the Book of Bamidbar, say that Pesach is the 14th because it says on the morrow of the Pesach we left Egypt. We know we left Egypt on the 15th. Other rabbis say

that Pesach is really the 15th, because it says in the book of Joshua that ~~we~~ could eat the Chadash on the morrow of Pesach, and we know we do not eat the Chadash, new grain, until the 16th so, therefore, Pesach would be the 15th. The other days of Pesach the rabbis call Chag HaMatzo, or the Holiday of Matzah. ~~The reason for this disagreement as to what day is Pesach is to be considered the day upon which we brought the Korban Pesach, which is the 14th, or the day upon which we ate the Korban Pesach, which is the 15th?~~ ^{It} The Korban Pesach was different from all the other sacrifices. All the other sacrifices, immediately after you brought them, could be eaten, especially the peace offering. According to the Torah, though, the Korban Pesach was different because the Korban Pesach you slaughtered on the 14th, and then you could not eat it until the 15th. ~~According to most rabbis, you couldn't eat it until midnight.~~ We see the rabbis were not sure whether Pesach was the 14th or 15th. Actually, Erev Pesach is a holiday, too, because that was the day on which we brought the Korban Pesach. It does not have the work restrictions of Pesach, but it, too, was a holiday. Many people make the mistake of thinking that since all Jewish holidays start at night, therefore Pesach really does not start until night time, and, therefore, it is all right to eat chometz until night time. ^{They claim that} ~~Maybe~~ the rabbis made a fence around the law and said you should not eat it ~~until~~ ^{at the} 12:00, but actually you can eat it ~~any~~ ^{noon.} ~~time you want.~~ ^{Till evening} This is completely ~~false.~~ ^{noon} ~~is.~~ ^{could bring} The holiday of Pesach really begins at 12:00 when you ~~brought~~ ^{could bring} the Korban Pesach. From the time you ~~brought~~ ^{could bring} the Korban Pesach you could not eat any chometz. It is true the rabbis extended ~~it~~ ^{the prohibition} for two more hours and said you could not eat any chometz from 10:00 on. The ^{of not} ~~prohibition from the Torah about~~ eating chometz begins at 12:00 ^{noon} ~~EREV~~ ^{EREV} Pesach

noon Erev Pesach.

There is also something interesting, too, ^{on} about Erev Pesach, ~~too~~
about the 14th, and that is that ^{we} you are not allowed to eat any
matzah ~~on this day~~. In the last chapter of the Gemorah Pesochim,
we learn that we are not supposed to eat any matzah, ~~and then~~ ^{so that}
give the reason for it that ^{we} you should have a good appetite ~~when~~ ^{at}
~~you eat your meal~~. However, the Rambam, based upon Yerushalmi,
^{the sedek} says that it is a very serious offense to eat matzah Erev Pesach.
He says it is ^{as serious an offense as a person having} ~~similar to anyone who has~~ intercourse with his
fiance ~~while~~ she is still in her father's house. ^{The Talmud} In the old days
there were two marriage ceremonies a person went through. One
was called Erusin, which meant engagement, and one was called
Nesumi, which meant ^t marriage. When a man and women went through
the Erusin ceremony in which certain blessings were said, the
first cup of wine was used and the words "Hareat L'Kedeshes Lee
Ketabat Zu Ketabat Moshe Yisroel - Behold you are sanctified to
me with this drink on Moses" was said. For all practical
purposes they were married. If they broke the relationship there
had to be a "Get - Jewish divorce". However, the man did not
have to support her. She still stayed in her father's house, and
there was no sexual intercourse. There was no relationship of
that nature. In the old days a man was supposed to hustle and
get enough money to support his new wife, and at the end of a few
months, or even a year, he would then bring her into his own
house and there would be a second cup of wine and the Sheva
Brochas would be said. Today we combine both these ceremonies
because in the Middle Ages, especially, it could happen that a
woman would be engaged to a man and if he disappeared then she
would never be able to get married. The rabbis then decided we
would combine these two ceremonies, and that is what we do. That
is why we have two cups of wine at the modern ceremony. The

first cup of wine is for the Erusin and the second cup of wine is for the Nesumi. The only thing that separates them is the reading of the ketubah. The Rambam says eating matzah Erev Pesach is just as great an offense as a man who has intercourse with his fiance in her father's house. It even describes Lashes for such an offense. Why should this be so?

If we look in the Hagaddah we will find that Rebbe Gamliel gives reasons for the different symbols we have on Pesach. He tells us why we have the Korban Pesach and the Matzah and Moror. In fact, he says anybody who does not give these reasons has not fulfilled his obligations. It is interesting to note that each of these symbols have a positive and negative reason. Here Rabbi Gamliel only uses the positive reasons. We know why the Jewish people sacrificed the lamb. They did it to show they were rejecting idolatry. This showed they no longer believed in the Egyptian superstition that spirits inhabit idols, things that human beings made, or animals at certain times of year and we could manipulate these spirits if we knew how to make the right vessels for them to inhabit. We totally rejected this whole idea of spirit worship. Since the Jewish people had sunk to such a low level before the Exodus, they had to do some dramatic act to show they rejected these ideas which were even beginning to hold sway among them. When Rabbi Gamliel mentions the reasons in the Hagaddah, he doesn't mention that reason. He mentions that it is because the Holy One, Blessed be He, skipped over the houses of the Jewish people and spared our firstborn. The people bowed and worshipped. He does not mention anything about the negative reason at all.

The same is true of the matzah. The matzah stands for the bread of freedom, but it also stands for the bread of affliction. This is "Alecha Money - the bread of affliction" which the Jewish people ate in Egypt. They did not have time as slaves to make elaborate meals. They did not have the money to eat good food. They ate this bread of affliction, this broken bread, this bread of poverty. Rabbi Gamliel only mentions the Jewish people did not have time for their dough to rise, that they were in such a hurry for freedom that they went with almost no provisions, just a little matzah, into the desert. He uses the positive reason.

This is also true with the Moror. We learn about the bitter times the Jewish people had in Egypt. We do not learn how the Egyptians killed us and walled up our children in the pyramids and how they threw the boys in the Nile and about the bloodshed. All we learn about is that they made us work against our will harshly, rigorously. We all know that work, itself, is not bad. Work can be good, and, in fact, is even encouraged in our tradition. Again, Rabbi Gamliel uses the positive reason and not a negative reason.

If we look at the difference between an engagement and a marriage perhaps we will understand what is happening here. When a person is engaged it means they are prohibited to everyone. When a woman is engaged it means she is prohibited to go out with any other man. She has to be faithful with this man. However, she cannot join, have intercourse, with this man either until they are married. Engagement prohibit. Marriage, on the other hand, commits. Marriage commits a man and woman to each other. So we see that engagements prohibit and marriage permit. What did the

Jewish people do on the 14th? When they offered the lamb they did an act of negation. They did not positively do an act of affirmation of Judaism and G-d, but they rejected all other faiths. They rejected all other suitors, so to speak. What they did was to say, "I will now reject the spirit worship of the Egyptians." They had not yet, so to speak, consummated their marriage to G-d. They had to become faithful to the G-d of Israel. That is why they could not eat the matzah until the evening. The Korban Pesach in the evening became a positive symbol. It became a symbol of the Jewish people's dedication to G-d. We know that in the Torah where every time the Jewish people refer to this holiday, we refer to it as Pesach, and every time G-d refers to it, He refers to it as Chag HaMatzos, which means the Holiday of Matzah, and Matzah is spelled the same way as Mitzvah, which means the Holiday of Mitzvahs when the Jewish people agreed to do Mitzvahs. What is it that transformed the 14th, the Holiday of Pesach, into the Holiday of Chag HaMatzos into the holiday of eating the Korban Pesach? What changed the engagement into the marriage? It was the Jewish commitment to mitzvahs, the Jewish commitment to follow G-d no matter where it led.

That is why we cannot eat matzah on Erev Pesach. We cannot eat matzah until we have a commitment, just like an engaged person cannot follow through with a marriage until he is willing to make a total commitment to his beloved. That is why we call this holiday Pesach. Pesach has another meaning in Hebrew. It also means "to be merciful". It also means "to be lame". We believe in the mercy of G-d. We agree that G-d moves the universe even though sometimes He seems lame and sometimes it is hard to see

how right makes might and not might makes right, that we assume the Pesach, that we not only reject all other gods, which the Korban Pesach symbolized, but we also agree with the concept of Pesach. That is why we only eat the Korban Pesach at night, only after the redemption had begun. We sat in our homes and we ate the Korban Pesach as a symbol that we are now going to follow G-d, make this commitment. G-d, on the other hand, refers to this holiday as Chag HaMatzos. He says, "Jewish people, it is not enough to say you have a commitment. You have to follow through on the commitment." The word Matzah in Hebrew has another meaning. It means "to exhaust, to squeeze, to drain". When the Jewish people ate matzah it was because other people drained and exhausted them and exploited them and took everything out of them, but when it came to the Jewish people willingly committing themselves to G-d and to Judaism, we were to exhaust and drain ourselves in His service. That is, of course, why the Jewish people ate matzah when they left Egypt. They were willing to follow G-d into a howling wilderness without adequate provisions. The questions could be asked, why were they going without adequate provisions when Moshe told them two weeks earlier they would be going out of Egypt on the 15th? He told them to take the lamb. He told them all these things and even told them to leave the cities that were filled with idol worship and to make their seders outside so they knew they were going to leave. Why didn't they have bread ready? One answer is that they thought they would be leaving in the day and not at night. Another answer is that they had made a commitment now to go with G-d to the desert and, of course, we all know that in the desert matzah would last longer than bread. Bread would mold faster than matzah. They were thrust out of Egypt and did not have adequate

time. They would never be able to make adequate provisions because they were placing their trust in G-d. They were willing to exhaust themselves, so to speak, in His service. Therefore, before they made this commitment it was prohibited for them to eat matzah because matzah is a symbol of their relationship to G-d, and until they were willing to commit everything to this relationship they could not eat matzah. This is just as a man who, until he is willing to commit himself to support his wife and children, is not allowed to have sexual intercourse with her. Matzah was a symbol of the Jewish people's devotion to G-d and to, so to speak, eat this matzah without the commitment, would be a denial of the covenantal relationship between man and G-d, just like sexual intercourse without a commitment to support the wife and children is also a violation of the covenantal relationship between man and G-d. The relationship between man and G-d is a paradox for the relationship between men and women. Therefore, we see that the seder night was really the marriage of G-d and Israel and the offering the paschal lamb was the symbol of the engagement. Therefore, we sing the Shira, the Song of Songs, to announce this marriage, to rejoice in this marriage. We also, if we read the Hagaddah carefully, do not make any brocha when we begin the Haggadah. Only when we end the first part of the Hagaddah do we make a brocha. The reason is that we were first in slavery and then came to freedom. We do not rejoice in the negative things. It is not enough to be a negative Jew, to stay a Jew because we don't believe in this or that. We must be a Jew because we have a positive relationship with G-d, otherwise it is very difficult to be a Jew. There is a lot of pain being a Jew because you do not have that commitment, that joy which comes from consumating your relationship.

Also, we will notice if we read the Hagaddah carefully that there are 7 blessings similar to the 7 marriage blessings before we eat the matzah. We have the Boray Prehagofin, the Makayeish Yisroel Mahasmaneem, the Shecheonu, the Boray Piray Adono on the green vegetable, the blessing on the Hagaddah, itself, in which we praise G-d for redeeming our souls as well as our bodies - Ga'ah Yisroel - and then we have the blessing Biray Preagovin - the blessing on washing the hands - and then we make the blessing on eating the matzah, the first of the marriage blessings. Matzah then is a symbol of the relationship between G-d and man, and this relationship cannot be complete unless people are willing to make a commitment. This is the reason, too, why we do not eat the paschal lamb. The paschal lamb, too, became a symbol of the Jewish people's commitment to G-d. Therefore, we stress only the positive reason in the seder. We are Jews for positive reasons. We also divide Halel in half. We say half the Halel before the meal and half after the meal. This is one of the few times, too, when we say Halel that we do not make a brocha. Why is that? Because we are not sure we are still going to make this commitment. It is only after we are sure we are going to make the commitment, after we have said the seven blessings and eaten the matzah that we are going to make this commitment. Therefore, we do not say a brocha before Halel because we are not sure we are going to make the complete commitment when we first start Halel.

The end of the seder is filled with happiness, joy, singing, a lot of beautiful prayers, because we are celebrating the relationship between G-d and Israel, the marriage between G-d and Israel. Unfortunately, in our day, too, there are a lot of Jews

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who are negative Jews. They are Jews because they do not believe in this and that, but they do not have any positive in their relationship. Judaism does not fill them with joy and happiness because they do not make a positive commitment to it. It is true that many times Jews thought they could not be observing Jews because Judaism was opposed to Jewish security, as those early pioneers who went to Israel at the turn of the century. The rabbinic leadership did not realize the Holocaust was coming. Everybody could see it, but they put their heads in the sand because they did not want to see it. They had a wonderful religious society there. They said if the shtetel had been around for 1000 years, it would be around for another 1000 years. The youngsters defied them and went to Israel against all odds to build a new society. Of course, we now see that their own children and their grandchildren, unless they have a positive attitude to Judaism, want to leave all Jewish identity. They took a survey in Israel and found that 37% of the secular Jews would rather leave Israel. A similar survey of religious Jews showed that only 1% wanted to leave Israel. Of course, we shouldn't be smug and complacent because here, too, in the United States we have a similar situation. There is a spiritual holocaust going on. We are losing so many Jews to intermarriage and assimilation that within a very short time there probably will be no Jews in America, but nobody does anything about it because the secular leadership, which controls the communities, is afraid if we do anything about it, if we support Jewish education on a very high level, if we would insist that certain Jewish practices be observed, that we would, in effect, blot ourselves out and prevent ourselves from rising to high economic status in America, would lose our swimming pools, cars, etc.

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They do not want to take a chance. Therefore, they make one study after another. Therefore, the only Aliyah to Israel is religious people. We can see the handwriting on the wall. It is those Jews who try to eat matzah without commitment that are performing a grave offense because they are leading Judaism nowhere and Jewish survival will never be assured. We can only eat matzah if we are willing to make a commitment. That's why Rabbi Gamliel said that it is an obligation not to just do the mitzah of eating matzah and moror and pesach, but we have to give the right reason for it. Pesach and matzah and moror talk about a willingness to assume obligations, a willingness to exhaust ourselves in our commitment to Judaism and Jewish practices. Unless we are willing to make these commitments, a commitment he speaks about when he quotes the positive reasons and not the negative reasons, then we will have trouble remaining Jews, but if we adopt the positive reasons, if we are happy knowing we have this special relationship with G-d, a relationship for the benefit of all mankind which will bring redemption to the whole world, then we will have difficulty being Jews.

SHABBOS HAGODOL - TZAV 1988

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today is Shabbos Hagodol. On Shabbos Hagodol we read a special Haphtorah. The rabbis tell us that this is called Shabbos Hagodol because on this day the Jewish people took the lamb that the Egyptians worshipped and tethered it to their beds saying in five days they were going to slaughter it. This, of course, meant that they displayed a great deal of courage. It took a great deal of courage to do what they did. The ancient Egyptians believed that at this time of year Aries had sway, and because Aries had sway, therefore, the lamb was sacred. Aries is the lamb, and the spirit they thought was incarnate in the land and anybody who touched a lamb would cause violence and havoc to come upon Egypt. The rabbis also say it is called Shabbos Hagodol because in this Haphtorah we talk about the coming of the great day of G-d. Hagodol means the great day of G-d. Another reason they give is because on this day the rabbis give a long drosha, and some people say because of this this is the Great Sabbath because it never ends.

In any event, we read a special Haphtorah on this day. The Haphtorah opens with the words, "And then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord." It is interesting that we use the word "mincha" here. Mincha means a "meal offering". Mincha was the offering generally of the poor person. If he could not afford livestock or even pigeons, he would bring a meal offering. The meal offering was primarily the sacrifice of the poor. The rabbis ask, why is it that here when the offering of Judah and Jerusalem should be pleasant to the Lord refers to the meal offering? Why doesn't this refer to the regular offerings of the sheep or cows or bullocks? Why does it refer here to the meal offering?

The answer they give is that the offering of the poor is precious unto G-d. Many times a poor person, when he gives a meal offering of flour and water, proportionally it is a greater gift than the huge other offerings of rich

people, that G-d knows that this takes food away from the mouth of the person, himself. In the ancient days people were so poor that they went to bed at night because they did not have enough money to spend on oil for oil lamps. Their conditions were much harsher than they are today. In the world generally famine was a known commodity and was accepted. Even 120 years ago in England, in fact, one of the authors wrote just 90 years ago that now we have the means to combat famine, and he was talking about England, itself. In the English laws they let the Irish die in 1840 and 1850 rather than help them when there was a potato famine in Ireland because they thought nature should take its course and they really did not have the resources to stop the famine. They probably did, but that is the way they conceived of life. We do not realize the great prosperity that we are really blessed with in our day. G-d considered this offering to be very precious because it came from the poor.

The rabbis also give another reason that this offering was so precious because it was the work of the man's hand. Animals, basically, grow themselves. It is true that you have to give them hay in the winter. Over in Isreal it is a very mild climate, but when a person gives a meal offering it is comprised of his work. He had to till the soil, to sow it, to reap it, to grind the wheat, to bake the bread. It was a difficult process, and, therefore, we extol the fact that we are called upon to make a positive contribution to this world by working in this world and not just enjoying its fruits without working.

In this Haphtorah, too, we learn also that G-d complains about the people. It says, "The words have been too strong unto Me, saith the Lord." Yet, you say, why have we spoken against you? And the people have spoken against G-d. How did they speak against G-d? They said it was vain to serve G-d

and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts, and now we call the proud happy. They that work witness are built up, they that try G-d are delivered. In other words, the righteous people were complaining and saying what benefit was it to serve G-d? We don't become multimillionaires. We are not people to whom all the benefits of life seem to flow. What benefit is it to serve G-d?

In fact, we even hear these type of comments in our day, too. This Haphtorah really speaks about what is important in life, what it is really to be successful. Sometimes we have a terrible idea of what it is to be successful. We think that success is having a house with a pool, to have a Rolls Royce. That is what makes you successful. To have your name in the paper and be a social climber is what makes you successful. This is, of course, what the people in those days were thinking, too, that what made them successful was the material things in life. "Then they that fear the Lord spoke one to another and the Lord harkened and heard and a book of remembrance was written before Him and them that feared the Lord and had thought upon His name." It seems a strange answer to give. Here, they were complaining that G-d was giving His blessing to evil people, and what good was it to be good? Yet, all of a sudden, they talked to one another. When they talked to one another they realized that maybe that was not so bad, that their life was really good. After all, you know that in life there are inevitable problems, and who is going to save you from these problems? If you are afflicted with a disease, and we are all afflicted with disease sooner or later, who is going to help you? Your Rolls Royce? Who will give you moral courage? Your MG? What is your swimming pool going to do for you? When you have been afflicted with different problems, either financial or physical or mental, who is going to help you overcome these things? You need the support

of other people around you.

That is why it also says that "then they shall discern between the righteous and the wicked, between them that serve G-d and them that serveth not, for behold the day cometh when all the proud and the wickedness shall be stubble, and day that cometh shall set them ablaze, saith the Lord of hosts." In other words, those people who put their stock in material are going to get their comeuppance. They will not have the inner courage and strength to overcome their problems. That, of course, is what it says here. It says that the "day" shall set them ablaze, not G-d. What does it mean? It means that when the day comes when they have the inevitable problems of life they will not have the inner resources to overcome these problems. G-d never promised us that we will not have problems. In life there are always problems. He only promised that if we are religious and we try to do the right thing He will give us the strength to overcome our problems. We see around us so many people who crumble at the first instance of trouble. They do not have the inner resources to combat, to overcome these problems. Look at how many rich people end up committing suicide. Look at the movie stars and rock stars and what happens to them. In fact, it is not what is outside you that makes you a great person, that makes you a success in life. It is what is inside you. In fact, many times our children are misled. I remember hearing on the radio just yesterday a song which said, "I would rather be high and live short than be low and live long." What type of talk is that? Do people need their kicks from the outside in order to make life worthwhile, that they are, in effect, willing to commit suicide? That is not what we are talking about.

What we are talking about here is the capacity to really be successful in life, which means to be giving, to have a contributing life, to live a life

that is filled with meaning, with understanding. That is why the end of this Haphtorah is, "And you will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers." What makes life worth living is the support that you get from each other. That is the way you overcome your problems, by having friends you can turn to and loved ones you can turn to. Your MG and pool will not help you. "But then they that feared the Lord spoke with one another." It is the support which you get from your family and friends which allow you to overcome the problems of life, the sicknesses, the inevitable financial reverses, the problems of aging, the general run of the mill problems of life. A successful person is one who can handle these problems with dignity and respect with his head held up high. A person should understand this. It is not the the things outside him that make him but the things inside him. We should stress that to our children so that our children know that.

That is one of the lessons of Shabbos Hagodol, and that is why it is a great Sabbath because the Jewish people, themselves, had to have that inner courage before they were worthy of freedom, something that is not seen on the outside but can be felt on the inside. Sometimes we sell ourselves short for things that really do not help.

I am reminded of the story of the Aggie who won a gold medal at the winter Olympics. He was so proud of his gold medal that when he came home to College Station he was so overjoyed and decided that in order for his gold medal should mean more to him, he had it bronzed. That, unfortunately, is the way many people act today. Instead of stressing the inner man, they stress the outer things, and those things really do not help when it comes to a crunch in life. May we always have the inner resources to overcome our problems.

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We learn that the Korban Pesach is called Zos Chukasa Pesach. In the Torah portion Bo, Chapter 12, Verse 43, it reads, "This is the ordinance of the Pesach. This is the Chok of the Pesach." We also learn in the Book of Bamidbar, in Numbers, Chapter 19, Verse 2, we learn "Zos Chukas HaTorah, this is the ordinance of the Torah." In Verse 2, Chapter 19, in the Book of Numbers we are learning about the red heifer. We know that the red heifer is connected to Pesach. It is connected to Pesach because in order to bring the Korban Pesach a Jew had to be ritually clean. In fact, that is the reason we read the special portion of the red heifer a few weeks before Pesach on Parshas Porah, one of the four special Shabboses before Pesach is Parshas HaPorah, which means that is the Shabbos on which we read about the red heifer. Only in these two places do we refer to a Chok of the Chok and the Chok of Pesach. In other words, there is something unique and special about this law of the red heifer, and there is also something unique and special about the Korban Pesach, about the sacrifice that was brought on Pesach.

We will notice that the word Chok is used. It is a word which signifies a law which is not readily understandable to our reasoning ability. In other words, if the Torah would not have given us this law we would not have known about it. We do know about laws like not stealing, not killing, etc., although these laws, too, are not so simple when you try to apply them to real life situations. WE all know that you should not steal, but if you were a Holocaust victim and did not have anything to eat, wouldn't it be right to steal a potato and eat it? What happens if you were fighting against Hitler? Wouldn't it be right to rob a bank and use his own money against him or to counterfeit German marks? In real life sometimes it is difficult even to apply the laws and regulations that our reason would tell us, but when it comes to Chukim, to a law which is a Chok, there does not

seem to be any logical reason for it, for example, not eating pig, not wearing Shoes, etc., but as mankind progresses we have seen that some of these Chukim really actually have a basis in fact. In fact, we do now know that pork and pig is actually bad for you, high fat content. We know we should not really mix milk and meat because of high cholesterol, but until very recently these laws were not evident at all, and, in fact, some would even dispute the fact whether they now can be explained in this way because we have always maintained that G-d gave us these laws to be holy and we do not need any other reason for them. We see that the Chok, the law that had to do with the red heifer was not really intelligible according to reason, and, because, after all, why should it be that the ashes of the red heifer, when combined with water and sprinkled on a person on the third and seventh day, removes a person's ritual impurity? In fact, it even has a different and a stronger irrational element to it, and that is that the person who actually prepares the red heifer and sprinkles others becomes ritually unclean, while those who are ritually unclean when they are sprinkled upon by this substance become clean, so this seems to be a very great paradox.

We will notice that the Korban Pesach also has rules and regulations which are not very clear and understandable. For example, the Korban Pesach had to be eaten whole; you could not break a bone. There is the thing from other sacrifices. It could not be eaten during the day it was sacrificed. It had to be eaten at night. There were many rules and regulations. For example, unless you were counted as part of a group that were going to eat this Korban Pesach, unless you were designated before this Korban Pesach was slaughtered, you could not participate at the meal at which the Korban Pesach was eaten on that night. So we see that there were different rules and regulations which were not evident by the Korban Pesach by logic. Therefore, it also has the element of Chok, the element of laws which are not readily

understandable to logic.

There is another rule and regulation concerning the Korban Pesach which seems to be very strange, which seems to make it completely different from all the other sacrifices. You know that when a sacrifice was offered, in most instances it was eaten by the people who offered it, or at least by the Kohanim, and we know that it was eaten immediately and that was only considered one mitzvah. The slaughtering of it and the eating of it was only considered one mitzvah, but the Korban Pesach could not be eaten immediately. It could only be eaten that night and nothing could be left over and it had to be burned before dawn broke, and also we know that there are two separate mitzvahs. There is the mitzvah of slaughtering the animal and the mitzvah of eating the animal. In fact, the Korban Pesach occupies of the 613 commandments 11 of these commandments. Nine of them are negative and two of them are positive. In fact the failure to eat the Korban Pesach and to be part of this group is only one of two commandments in which you are punished by Korais, one of only two positive commandments which are punished by Korais, that if a person does not observe these rules and regulations then he is excised from the Jewish people. G-d takes care of it. This is not a judgement to be taken care of by a human court. The other one is Bris Milah. The other one has to do with circumcision. We know that part of the ritual of the sprinkling of the ashes of a red heifer on a person was that the person had to immerse himself in a mikvah first before he was sprinkled with the ashes of the red heifer, that it was immersion in the mikvah followed by the sprinkling of the ashes of the red heifer which purified a person, which caused a person to be purified from ritual uncleanness, the ritual uncleanness which came from contact with a dead human being.

We also have another strange element about Pesach. What is this other strange element? That is that the rabbis argue about when actually is Pesach. In fact, if you will notice that when the Jewish people refer to this holiday in the Torah they always refer to this holiday as Chag HaPesach, but when G-d refers to this holiday He refers to it as Chag HaMatzos, and some people claim that really on the 15th of Nisan the holiday Chag HaMatzos begins and the 14th of Nisan is really Chag HaPesach. It does not seem clear in the Torah where the holiday of Pesach is really the 14th or the 15th. There are two references that are used. One is found in the Book of Bamidbar in Chapter 3, Verse 3, which seems to indicate that Pesach is actually the 14th because it speaks about the day after Pesach, which was the 15th of the month, but in contradistinction to that, there is a quote from the Book of Joshua which speaks about the fact that on the day after Pesach they would eat the new crop. We all know that on the second night of Pesach they would harvest some of the barley and they would offer it the next day on the altar. After they offered this offering of barley, the Omer, on the altar then everybody could eat the new crops. We see from here that the Book of Joshua says that the holiday of Pesach really is on the 15th and not on the 14th.

We all know that we are not allowed to eat chometz from the time when they started to offer the sacrifice of the Korban Pesach, and they offered the sacrifice of the Korban Pesach on the 14th, from noon on, so, therefore, you are not allowed to eat chometz from noon on. It is not a rabbinical law; it is a Torah law. Some people are confused. They say, "Well, my seder does not start until 7:30 so, therefore, I can eat chometz until 7:30," but that is not true. We are not allowed to eat matzah even until the seder, but we are also not allowed to eat chometz from noon on by the Torah. The

rabbis, of course, have added 2 hours, from 10:00 a.m. The question remains, though, why do we have this confusion? The rabbis have come down solidly on the side of the fact that Pesach is really the 15th and not the 14th. Why have they done this?

Perhaps we can understand why they have done this because we can understand that each of the Pesach symbols have a double meaning, that when we talk about the Pesach the Pesach was not just offered so the Jewish people could put the blood on the door so that the Angel of Death would pass over them when he slew the Egyptian's firstborn, but that this is also a symbol of the rejection of the idolatry of Egypt, because the Egyptians believed in spirit worship. They believed that spirits could incarnate in animals and in things, and when they built an idol they were just building a habitat for the spirit and the spirit, being trapped in there, and then you had the power of the spirit and the spirit would have to do what you said and you would bring great power to Egypt, while, on the other hand, if you slaughter the lamb you might release an angry spirit who would cause all sorts of terrible things to happen to Egypt. The Jewish people, by slaughtering the lamb, what they were, in effect, doing was mocking the Egyptian religion and showing that they did not believe in it, that they took their lives in their hands when they did that because anybody who would touch a lamb would be subject to the death penalty, but we do not mention that reason for the Korban Pesach at the seder. We mention the reason that we put the blood on the door so that G-d will pass over our houses. The same thing actually applies for the other symbols, too. The matzah was actually the bread of affliction, the bread that they ate for 210 years as slaves, but when we mention the matzah we mention that this is the bread that they took out of Egypt because they did not have time for their bread to rise. What

this means, of course, is that they literally accepted upon themselves the sacrifice to go out into the desert with scant provisions because they prized freedom so much. The same thing is true for the maror. When we talk about the maror we talk about the hard work and we actually dip it into harosis, which is sweet, which talks about work. Of course, the bitterness of Egypt had to do with the slaying of their children, with the separation of husband and wife, but we do not mention that either. We realize that the Jewish people, in order to be free, had to do two things. The Jewish people had to willingly show that they would stand up for Judaism and the Jewish people and they would reject all idolatry, but they also, too, had to positively accept the mitzvahs. This is similar to what we do today in conversion. When a person wants to be a Jew a person has to be circumcized, a person has to have the mark of the Jew on him. A Jew has to be willing to stand up and say he is Jewish and he is willing to stand up against the enemies of the Jewish people even though he may be hounded and persecuted. He also, too, must immerse in a mikvah. When you immerse in a mikvah you are accepting the commandments of Hashem. Therefore, this is the symbolism of the Porah Adumah, of the red heifer, which symbolizes the fact that the Jewish people are accepting the mitzvahs and the Jewish people are not only declaring that idolatry is wrong but also positively accepting the mitzvahs of Hashem. That's why it says, "Zos Chukas HaTorah, this is the Chok of the Torah." It mentions the Torah, that the Jewish people are accepting the Torah by this. The Jewish people are accepting that they have to fulfill the laws of the Torah, and why is this called Zos Chukas HaPesach? Because on the Zos Chukas HaPesach is also the prerequisite to being a Jew. The prerequisite to being a Jew is being willing to bear the Jewish mark. They put the blood of the lamb on the door saying that they were Jews and they were proud to be Jews and they will take the consequences of the fact of being Jews because

being Jewish is a great honor. They also engraved it upon their flesh.

The rabbis say that the blood that they put on the door was just not the blood of the Korban Pesach; it was also the blood of circumcision. Therefore, we can understand why these two mitzvahs, the mitzvah of the Korban Pesach and the mitzvah of Bris Milah, are the only two positive commandments, that if you do not fulfill them will bring Korais because if a Jew is not willing to stand up for himself, if a Jew is not willing in his life and in his very body to claim that he is a Jew, then, of course, in a few generations he will not be Jewish. Then the question arises, though, why is it that the rabbis have come down firmly on the side of those people who say that the Pesach should be on the 15th and not that it should be on the 14th?

The reason for that is that on the 15th we do all the mitzvahs. In fact, the rabbis say that the word matzos and mitzvahs are spelled exactly the same. In fact, when you read in the Torah you cannot tell whether it says matzos or mitzvahs, that the matzah is a symbol of the mitzvahs that the Jewish people are willing to do. We Jewish people have never celebrated victories on the day we won the victory. We always celebrate the next day because then we can do the mitzvahs. The important thing about our victories is not the victory. The important thing is that we can practice the Torah and be Jews in the fullest sense of the word. We can practice mitzvahs and, therefore, the rabbis want to emphasize the fact that Pesach is really on the day where we can do the mitzvahs, but, then, the question is asked, if that is so, why can't a Jew be a part of the meal and eat of the Korban Pesach even though he was not originally designated to be part of that group when they offered the sacrifice? Why couldn't he be part of that group if he was not designated as part of that sacrifice? Of course, the answer to that is that, although it is true that the mitzvahs are important and it is true that we only have to sacrifice so that we can eventually do the

mitzvahs, yet, any Jew who is not willing to sacrifice for his people, who is not willing to stand up for his people, is not willing to fight for his people, that Jew cannot participate in the mitzvahs later on. The prerequisite to having a seder is to be willing to offer the Korban Pesach before. It is to be there when the Korban Pesach is sacrificed, is to endure the dangers of being a Jew, is to say proudly that you are Jewish and that you are fighting for the Jewish ideal. We know that a person cannot participate in the Korban Pesach unless he was ritually pure because unless a person was ritually pure, unless a person really knew that the ultimate goal of preserving his Jewishness was to observe mitzvahs and do mitzvahs then, of course, what was worth was all this sacrifice. However, the Rambam tells us and, of course, we learn in the Gemorah as well, that when it comes to a whole community what happens if the whole community cannot be clean, that the whole community has been tainted? Should we then celebrate the Korban Pesach or shouldn't we celebrate the Korban Pesach? The answer to that is that if the majority of the community is ritually unclean, then we still offer the Korban Pesach because it is only if individuals are ritually impure that they do not participate in the Korban Pesach and they offer a month later, but if the majority of the community is, then, of course, it is still offered. We see from this that why would it be that the majority of the community would be unclean? because obviously there was a battle, there was a fight. The Jewish people had to fight for their survival. These people were fighters in the Jewish cause, and, therefore, the majority of the people were ritually unclean.

In our day, too, there are many Jews who perhaps because of the Holocaust and because of all the troubles and stories and problems that we have had and because of the necessity to make sure that the Jewish people can survive, that many of them have not given much attention to all the mitzvahs of the

Torah, that they know that it is important for the Jewish people to survive, so even though technically the majority of the Jewish people now are probably not too concerned with Torah and mitzvahs, but they are concerned with Jewish survival, and because they are concerned with Jewish survival they are certainly worthy of offering the Korban Pesach because they are making sacrifices for the Jewish people and they are certainly worthy of eating at the seder and being full participants in the seder. Let us all hope and pray that times will soon change where the danger to the Jewish people and to the State of Israel will pass so that we will live in tranquil and good times so that once again every Jew will recognize that we sacrifice so that we can practice the Torah. We do not just sacrifice for the sake of sacrificing, because, of course, that message does not hold out much promise or hope to our young people, and because of that many young people turn away from Judaism, but that the important thing is that we sacrifice so that we can observe the religion. That is, of course, why we do not say a brocha when we start the Haggadah because we start the Haggadah with slavery, with struggle. We say the brocha only at the end when we say how G-d has redeemed our bodies and our souls because the essence of Pesach is the great joy that we feel at our redemption because now we are able to fulfill ourselves by doing mitzvahs. It is a shame that in our generation if you look at the Haggadahs the first part of the Haggadahs are worn and have spots and are tattered but the last of the Haggadah look brand new because many people stop with the persecution. They do not continue on to the joy and the happiness, to the Hallel and to the Nirtzah and to the great joy at the end of the seder. Let us all hope and pray that all Jews will realize that it is important to sacrifice for Judaism but it is more important to live Judaism and to enjoy its happiness and the meaning it gives to each one's lives. Yes, you cannot just walk into a seder, especially in temple times, if you were

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not willing to sacrifice, but the sacrifice is a means in order to get us
to the joy and happiness of Judaism. Let us all hope we will feel this
joy so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

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On Pesach, we all know that we read from the Haggadah. However, we do not make a brocha when we begin reading the Haggadah. Why should this be?

When we read the Megillah, we make a brocha. When we take the lulav and esrog, we make a brocha. When we blow the shofar, we make a brocha, but we do not make a brocha when we read the Haggadah.

Secondly, why is it that the Haggadah, itself, is based on three and a half sentences from the Torah portion Ki Sova in Devorim, which talks about a person bringing up the first fruits. Why isn't it based on Exodus where the whole story of our freedom from Egypt is recounted?

Thirdly, why is it that we have a statement in the Haggadah which says, "In the beginning our forefathers were idol worshippers, and now G-d has brought us close to Him?" Why do we have to mention that in the beginning we were idol worshippers?

Fourth and last, why is it that the seder plate is composed of two inverted triangles? You have the shankbone and egg, and then in the middle the bitter herbs, and then we have the harosis and parsley. Why this particular order,

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and why these particular symbols?

If we look at Pesach carefully, we see that we are celebrating three different deliverance on the holiday of Pesach. We are celebrating the deliverance of G-d's name. After all, when the Jewish people refer to this holiday, we refer to it as Pesach, which can also mean limping. If we look around us, we can see that evil flourishes. It looks like G-d is limping. Pesach proves that G-d is not limping. He is active in the world. The eggs stand for the Jewish people. Pesach celebrates the redemption of the Jewish people from slavery. Just as an egg, the longer you boil it, the harder it becomes, so the Jewish people, the harder they were persecuted, the stronger they became. We also know that we have a part in our redemption, that if we do not assume responsibility, we will not be redeemed. If we would not have taken the lamb, we would not have been redeemed. We also know that the day of the week of the first night of Passover is the same day of the week as Tisha B'Av in that year. This year the first seder is Wednesday night, and Tisha B'Av is also Wednesday night. This confirms the fact that unless we act responsibly, we can lose our freedom. The bitter herbs stand for the personal problems that we all face in life, sickness,

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death, disappointments. They, too, can be ameliorated if we attach ourselves to our people and to our G-d.

We all know that the symbols of Pesach have a double meaning. The lamb stands for idolatry and also for G-d's deliverance. The Jewish people, by slaughtering the lamb, rejected idolatry, the Egyptian god. They took responsibility for themselves. That's why Rabbi Soloveitchik says Shabbos Hagodol is called Shabbos Hagodol, because it was on this Shabbos that the Jewish people became a godol, an adult. They assumed responsibility for themselves. They also put the blood of the lamb on the door. G-d passed over the Jewish people and delivered them from the plague of the slaying of the firstborn. The Jewish people, when they slew the lamb, did not know that the Egyptians would not react violently. They assumed responsibility for their actions, no matter what the result. The lamb stands for G-d's protection, and reminds us that G-d does act in this world, even though it looks like He is limping. We know that it is up to us to help redeem G-d's name. We had to take the lamb. We had to put the blood on the door, and then G-d's name is redeemed.

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Life is filled with bitterness, sickness, death, problems, but with hard work we can overcome everything. That's why we take the bitter herbs and dip them into the harosis. Our personal problems can be lessened and mitigated and overcome if we will take the initiative and not wallow in self-pity. The Holocaust survivors of our day pointed this out to us. They did not say, "We will stay in camps forever, and you should support us for all the suffering we have endured," but, instead, they went out into the world and married and had children and started businesses, helped build the State of Israel and helped build the American Jewish community and others throughout the world. They took their bitter experiences and dipped them in the harosis. They did not just sit back but assumed responsibility.

We also must, too, assure the future of the Jewish people by dipping the greens into salt water. The greens stand for new life, as does the egg. The salt water stands for our tears. Many people, when we eat the egg, also dip it into salt water to proclaim again that with our tears we can create something positive. We can redeem the Jewish people, but it means assuming responsibility.

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Why is it that we base the whole Haggadah on the three and a half verses from the Torah portion Ki Sovo instead of some verses from the Book of Exodus, where our redemption from slavery is recounted? Because everything in ExoDus is in the third person, while in the Torah portion Ki Sovo everything is said in the first person. We have to assume responsibility each one individually to bring redemption for ourselves, for our people, and for G-d's name.

This portion also speaks about the first fruits, which teaches us that if we will assume responsibility, we will have fruits. We will be able to make positive contributions to the world. In the Haggadah, we learn about how the beginning forefathers were idol worshippers. Why? There is an argument in the Gemora between Rav and Shmuel. Shmuel says that what we are celebrating today is our freedom from physical slavery, while Rav says what we are celebrating is our freedom from spiritual slavery. Shmuel said it was the slavery which was preventing the Jews of Egypt from being observant, religious Jews, but if you remove the slavery from the Jewish people, they would immediately snap back and once again be religious. Rav said he was not so sure. The Jewish people were immersed also in spiritual slavery. They had adopted their masters' ways,

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including their religion and idols. The rabbis say that the Jewish people were on the 49th level of Tumah. If they would have sunk any lower, they would not have been able to be redeemed. Rav did not believe that there was any difference between the Jewish soul and any other soul. In fact, I vehemently deny those in our tradition who would say that the Jewish soul is different from anybody else's soul. This is a Christian doctrine. The Christians say that Jews are subhuman because their soul is defective. They do not believe, and, therefore, there is something the matter with them. That's why it was so easy for German Christians, after all, all the Nazis were either Protestants or Catholics, to make the Holocaust. If we, too, would believe that a Jewish soul is superior to other people's souls, then we, too, could be, under the right circumstances, driven to kill people for no reason. It is true that I believe the Jews have developed their souls' potential better because of the truths we have, just like in the United States we have developed a form of government which is superior, not because the people are superior, but the truths are better. Because of the truths in the Torah, the Jews have been able to develop their souls better. There is nothing in the Jewish soul which prevents a Jew from becoming an idol worshipper. Remove the slavery and you still have a problem, according to

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Rav. Jews will not automatically become religious and observant Jews. They have to be taught. We find this is true of Russian Jews who suffered under 70 years of communism. When communism lifted, some did come back, but most have to be educated. It is the responsibility of each of us to educate each other.

Why, then, don't we make a brocha before we begin the Haggadah? Because we are not sure that we are going to be able to assume responsibility for ourselves, for each other, and for G-d's name. It is a huge undertaking. On this Shabbos Hagodol, we are urged to become religious adults, to assume our responsibilities. We can do it. G-d said He will help us, but we have to take the first steps. We have to take our bitterness and put it in the harosis. We have to maintain hope in spite of our tears. We have to show courage, and we have to assume responsibility not only for ourselves but also for our people and for our G-d. Let us all hope we will do so so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

SHABBAT HAGODOL 2003
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

We just heard Nathan and Steven Mitzner speak beautifully. It was such a pleasure listening to them. You can hear the rabbinic genes in them.

As you all know, David is the grandson of the Chief Rabbi of Warsaw, Rabbi Yossi Prager. In fact, when David entered kindergarten, his teacher looked at him and said, "This is the grandson of Rabbi Yossi Prager." This, I am sure, was a great burden to live up to his grandfather's reputation. David came from wealthy people in Warsaw. His father was a women's clothing manufacturer, lingerie, and David went to the finest Jewish schools in Warsaw. He lost all his family in the Holocaust. Only his sister and he remain.

Ruth, too, comes from a very distinguished rabbinic family. Her father was the rabbi of the premier synagogue in Harlem, Rabbi Yaacov Tuvia Bookbinder. Harlem was originally a Jewish neighborhood until the 1930's. In the 1920's, her father was the rabbi there, and Yosele Rosenblatt was the cantor there. In the 1930's, her father took the whole family to Israel where he became an assistant to Rabbi Kook, the Chief Rabbi. When World War II

broke out, all the Americans were ordered back to the United States by the State Department. Her father then assumed a rabbinic position in Benson Hurst, which her brother assumed after her father's death. In fact, I knew her brother, Rabbi Bookbinder, before I knew the Mitzners.

The Mitzners came to Houston in the early 1980's. Jacob came to Houston in 1980, followed later by Ira and David and Ruth. I was privileged to be one of the rabbis who married Ira and Mindy and also Jacob and Marilyn. I knew Ruth's brother because of the RCA in the 1970's.

Today is Shabbat Hagadol, and the rabbis all ask, why is this called Shabbat Hagadol, and there are many interpretations, but the one Rabbi Soloveitchik gives is that this is called Shabbat Hagadol because this is the Shabbat upon which the Jewish people acted as an adult. Up to now, they had relied always on G-d to bring the miracles, but now they were commanded to take a lamb and tether it and proclaim to the Egyptians that they were going to slaughter it. They began to assume responsibility for their own destiny, and that is the mark of an adult. They assume responsibility for their destiny.

It is strange that the rabbis have arranged that we read this Torah portion,

Metzora, on a leap year on Shabbat Hagadol. After all, what does leprosy have to do with Pesach or Shabbat Hagadol? I believe that the answer to this is found actually in the last sentences of the previous week's Torah portion, Tazria, where it says, "And behold Lo Hofak Hanega Es Eno -- and the affliction has not changed its appearance." The person then becomes impure. The rabbis also explain this a different way. The word Nega ends with the letter Ayin, and they interpret it to mean that an Ayin has not changed its place. Affliction is spelled Nun Gimmel Ayin, but if you take the Ayin and place it in front of the word Nega, it becomes Oneg, or joy. It is our job to change our afflictions to challenges, to positive challenges.

They tell the story of the Chofetz Chaim, a person who wrote all the text on Loshan Hora, speaking bad about others. It once happened that he was invited to give a lecture in a town. He was met at the train station by a teamster with his wagon to bring him to the lecture. The Chofetz Chaim asked the teamster, "What's going on today in town?" The teamster replied, "Oh, there is a great rabbi, the Chofetz Chaim, coming to speak, and I'm going to hear him." The Chofetz Chaim said, "Oh, I know him. He's not so great." The teamster got very angry and picked up the Chofetz Chaim and threw him out of his wagon into the mud. The Chofetz Chaim picked himself

up and walked to the lecture. When he took his seat on the stage, he noticed the teamster was sitting in the first row. The teamster turned red and ran up to the stage and said, "Please forgive me. Please forgive me." The Chofetz Chaim replied, "You should forgive me because a person should never speak Loshan Hora, bad even against himself."

This is actually one of the symbolisms of the ceremony which a leper had to undergo to once again be clean. That ceremony entailed slaughtering a bird over running water in a clay vessel, and then dipping a live bird in this water and blood combination, and setting him free to soar in the sky. The normal explanation is that this speaks about the harm that Loshan Hora does. It destroys trust, the living waters. It destroys the person about whom it is talked and even besmirches the reputation of the person who talks Loshan Hora, and, what's more, Loshan Hora is almost impossible to undo since it flied all over. Rumors spread fast.

However, another interpretation talks about how we Jews are declared unfit, unclean by the whole world, and many times we are slaughtered and killed because of the living waters, because of our Torah by human beings who conceive themselves as only clay pots. They do not want to be moral human

beings. We are told that when tragedy befalls us, we should not just say, "Woe is me," and recoil into helplessness and believe the lies of our detractors, but we should ask the question, "What can I do now?" We should be like the bird that is dipped into this blood of the slain bird and the waters of the Torah, and we should soar. We should never give up. We should continue in spite of everything to help make this world a better place.

We know that this is the story of David's life. He did not let the Holocaust destroy him. He continued on. This is also the story of our Haphtorah. On Shabbat Hagadol, we learn how the people are complaining and saying, "To serve G-d is useless and what do we gain by keeping His charge or walking before Him? Those who did evil were built up, even those who tested G-d." In other words, the people were ready to give up. What good is it to be good? What good is it to try to make this world a better place? You are just knocked down and persecuted and hounded. In the next sentence it says, "And those who fear Hashem spoke to one another and Hashem listened and heard." What caused them all of a sudden to regain faith? It was when they talked to each other, when they worked together, and David and Ruth have supported so many wonderful organizations, not only the shul and the Federation and the Holocaust Museum and Yad Vashem, and we all know in

Poland 90% of the 13 million Jews were killed. There were only 300,000 left at the end of the war. 150,000 left Poland, and 150,000 left Judaism. They are now coming back, and David and Ruth have helped the Lauder Foundation to help these young people come back. All four of their grandparents were Jews, and people have asked David, "Why did you go back to Poland?" He said, "Because Poland should know that they need Jews." We Jews are ^apositive. *not negative.*

Ruth, too, has had to face so many challenges. She had a wonderful Jewish education. She even helped her father when they lived in Israel. She never has given up. She does not say, "Why me?" She says, "How can I still be a wonderful mother and grandmother," and all her children and grandchildren love her and respect her. She is so proud of her children and all their accomplishments. Ira and Mindy are the pillars of our community, serving as president of the shul, Sisterhood, Chairman of Education of Beren Academy, etc., and Jacob was our Baal Koreh for many years, and Marilyn was president of the Beren Academy Sisterhood.

At the end of the Haphtorah, we learn how it says, "And it will be and I will send to you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome

day of G-d, and He shall restore the hearts of the father to the sons and the hearts of the sons to their fathers." It is interesting to note that it does not say, "And He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their sons." It says, "And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons," to the future to help Judaism survive, as David and Ruth have done by helping so many Jewish institutions, our shul, and the Beren Academy especially, and it says, "And the hearts of the sons will be turned to their fathers." Their fathers means to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaacov, back to the Jewish tradition. David did not wallow in self-pity and neither does Ruth. They did not say, I am unfit and can never change this Nega," but, instead, ^{they} accept ^d this challenge of turning their plagues, the plague of persecution and sickness, into positive things. It is true that the enemies of our people kill millions, but that does not mean we should give up. We should still soar for the heights, as the second bird does, even though it remembers the blood of those who went before. Therefore, Holocaust Museums and Yad Vashems are important, but being a Jew is a blessing. It is not a curse. I remember once when I was a teenager, I attended a meeting of the Jewish Community Council, which was the forerunner of the Federation. The president got up and said, "I wish I was not born a Jew, but now that I am, I guess we have to help our people." That fellow believed the lies of the anti-Semites and truly was unclean. He never learned to soar. He would

never turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons nor would the children he encountered turn back to the tradition. Today, we are honoring a wonderful couple who truly have turned the hearts of the fathers to all children, and they have turned the hearts of their children and grandchildren and many other children back to the tradition.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who worked for a very miserly boss. He told his boss, "I'd like to take tomorrow off to celebrate my 50th wedding anniversary." His boss said, "Does that mean 50 years from now you're also going to ask for a day off?" This is a wonderful, wonderful occasion.

I am also reminded of the story about a girl who wrote an essay about Benjamin Franklin. She wrote, "Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston. He went to Philadelphia where he opened a printing business. He also flew kites. He then met a beautiful woman and they made electricity together." We hope and pray that David and Ruth will continue to make electricity together for many, many years, that they only will know good things and good health and always have naches from their children and grandchildren.

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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

We just heard Nathan and Steven Mitzner speak beautifully. It was such a pleasure listening to them. You can hear the rabbinic genes in them.

As you all know, David is the grandson of the Chief Rabbi of Warsaw, Rabbi Yossi Prager. In fact, when David entered kindergarten, his teacher looked at him and said, "This is the grandson of Rabbi Yossi Prager." This, I am sure, was a great burden to live up to his grandfather's reputation. David came from wealthy people in Warsaw. His father was a women's clothing manufacturer, lingerie, and David went to the finest Jewish schools in Warsaw. He lost all his family in the Holocaust. Only his sister and he remain.

Ruth, too, comes from a very distinguished rabbinic family. Her father was the rabbi of the premier synagogue in Harlem, Rabbi Yaacov Tuvia Bookbinder. Harlem was originally a Jewish neighborhood until the 1930's. In the 1920's, her father was the rabbi there, and Yosele Rosenblatt was the cantor there. In the 1930's, her father took the whole family to Israel where he became an assistant to Rabbi Kook, the Chief Rabbi. When World War II

broke out, all the Americans were ordered back to the United States by the State Department. Her father then assumed a rabbinic position in Benson Hurst, which her brother assumed after her father's death. In fact, I knew her brother, Rabbi Bookbinder, before I knew the Mitzners.

The Mitzners came to Houston in the early 1980's. Jacob came to Houston in 1980, followed later by Ira and David and Ruth. I was privileged to be one of the rabbis who married Ira and Mindy and also Jacob and Marilyn. I knew Ruth's brother because of the RCA in the 1970's.

Today is Shabbat Hagodol, and the rabbis all ask, why is this called Shabbat Hagodol, and there are many interpretations, but the one Rabbi Soloveitchik gives is that this is called Shabbat Hagodol because this is the Shabbat upon which the Jewish people acted as an adult. Up to now, they had relied always on G-d to bring the miracles, but now they were commanded to take a lamb and tether it and proclaim to the Egyptians that they were going to slaughter it. They began to assume responsibility for their own destiny, and that is the mark of an adult. They assume responsibility for their destiny.

It is strange that the rabbis have arranged that we read this Torah portion,

Metzora, on a leap year on Shabbat Hagadol. After all, what does leprosy have to do with Pesach or Shabbat Hagadol? I believe that the answer to this is found actually in the last sentences of the previous week's Torah portion, Tazria, where it says, "And behold Lo Hofak Hanega Es Eno -- and the affliction has not changed its appearance." The person then becomes impure. The rabbis also explain this a different way. The word Nega ends with the letter Ayin, and they interpret it to mean that an Ayin has not changed its place. Affliction is spelled Nun Gimmel Ayin, but if you take the Ayin and place it in front of the word Nega, it becomes Oneg, or joy. It is our job to change our afflictions to challenges, to positive challenges.

They tell the story of the Chofetz Chaim, a person who wrote all the text on Loshan Hora, speaking bad about others. It once happened that he was invited to give a lecture in a town. He was met at the train station by a teamster with his wagon to bring him to the lecture. The Chofetz Chaim asked the teamster, "What's going on today in town?" The teamster replied, "Oh, there is a great rabbi, the Chofetz Chaim, coming to speak, and I'm going to hear him." The Chofetz Chaim said, "Oh, I know him. He's not so great." The teamster got very angry and picked up the Chofetz Chaim and threw him out of his wagon into the mud. The Chofetz Chaim picked himself

up and walked to the lecture. When he took his seat on the stage, he noticed the teamster was sitting in the first row. The teamster turned red and ran up to the stage and said, "Please forgive me. Please forgive me." The Chofetz Chaim replied, "You should forgive me because a person should never speak Loshan Hora, bad even against himself."

This is actually one of the symbolisms of the ceremony which a leper had to undergo to once again be clean. That ceremony entailed slaughtering a bird over running water in a clay vessel, and then dipping a live bird in this water and blood combination, and setting him free to soar in the sky. The normal explanation is that this speaks about the harm that Loshan Hora does. It destroys trust, the living waters. It destroys the person about whom it is talked and even besmirches the reputation of the person who talks Loshan Hora, and, what's more, Loshan Hora is almost impossible to undo since it flied all over. Rumors spread fast.

However, another interpretation talks about how we Jews are declared unfit, unclean by the whole world, and many times we are slaughtered and killed because of the living waters, because of our Torah by human beings who conceive themselves as only clay pots. They do not want to be moral human

beings. We are told that when tragedy befalls us, we should not just say, "Woe is me," and recoil into helplessness and believe the lies of our detractors, but we should ask the question, "What can I do now?" We should be like the bird that is dipped into this blood of the slain bird and the waters of the Torah, and we should soar. We should never give up. We should continue in spite of everything to help make this world a better place.

We know that this is the story of David's life. He did not let the Holocaust destroy him. He continued on. This is also the story of our Haphtorah. On Shabbat Hagadol, we learn how the people are complaining and saying, "To serve G-d is useless and what do we gain by keeping His charge or walking before Him? Those who did evil were built up, even those who tested G-d." In other words, the people were ready to give up. What good is it to be good? What good is it to try to make this world a better place? You are just knocked down and persecuted and hounded. In the next sentence it says, "And those who fear Hashem spoke to one another and Hashem listened and heard." What caused them all of a sudden to regain faith? It was when they talked to each other, when they worked together, and David and Ruth have supported so many wonderful organizations, not only the shul and the Federation and the Holocaust Museum and Yad Vashem, and we all know in

Poland 90% of the 13 million Jews were killed. There were only 300,000 left at the end of the war. 150,000 left Poland, and 150,000 left Judaism. They are now coming back, and David and Ruth have helped the Lauder Foundation to help these young people come back. All four of their grandparents were Jews, and people have asked David, "Why did you go back to Poland?" He said, "Because Poland should know that they need Jews." We Jews are positive *not negative.*

Ruth, too, has had to face so many challenges. She had a wonderful Jewish education. She even helped her father when they lived in Israel. She never has given up. She does not say, "Why me?" She says, "How can I still be a wonderful mother and grandmother," and all her children and grandchildren love her and respect her. She is so proud of her children and all their accomplishments. Ira and Mindy are the pillars of our community, serving as president of the shul, Sisterhood, Chairman of Education of Beren Academy, etc., and Jacob was our Baal Koreh for many years, and Marilyn was president of the Beren Academy Sisterhood.

At the end of the Haphtorah, we learn how it says, "And it will be and I will send to you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome

day of G-d, and He shall restore the hearts of the father to the sons and the hearts of the sons to their fathers." It is interesting to note that it does not say, "And He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their sons." It says, "And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons," to the future to help Judaism survive, as David and Ruth have done by helping so many Jewish institutions, our shul, and the Beren Academy especially, and it says, "And the hearts of the sons will be turned to their father." Their fathers means to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaacov, back to the Jewish tradition. David did not wallow in self-pity and neither does Ruth. They did not say, I am unfit and can never change this Nega," but, instead, ^{they} ^{ed} accept this challenge of turning their plagues, the plague of persecution and sickness, into positive things. It is true that the enemies of our people kill millions, but that does not mean we should give up. We should still soar for the heights, as the second bird does, even though it remembers the blood of those who went before. Therefore, Holocaust Museums and Yad Vashems are important, but being a Jew is a blessing. It is not a curse. I remember once when I was a teenager, I attended a meeting of the Jewish Community Council, which was the forerunner of the Federation. The president got up and said, "I wish I was not born a Jew, but now that I am, I guess we have to help our people." That fellow believed the lies of the anti-Semites and truly was unclean. He never learned to soar. He would

never turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons nor would the children he encountered turn back to the tradition. Today, we are honoring a wonderful couple who truly have turned the hearts of the fathers to all children, and they have turned the hearts of their children and grandchildren and many other children back to the tradition.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who worked for a very miserly boss. He told his boss, "I'd like to take tomorrow off to celebrate my 50th wedding anniversary." His boss said, "Does that mean 50 years from now you're also going to ask for a day off?" This is a wonderful, wonderful occasion.

I am also reminded of the story about a girl who wrote an essay about Benjamin Franklin. She wrote, "Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston. He went to Philadelphia where he opened a printing business. He also flew kites. He then met a beautiful woman and they made electricity together." We hope and pray that David and Ruth will continue to make electricity together for many, many years, that they only will know good things and good health and always have naches from their children and grandchildren.