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Freedom - Passover's Tragic Blessing, 1986.

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FREEDOM: PASSOVER'S TRAGIC BLESSING
Daniel Jeremy Silver
April 20, 1986

I would be very surprised and very disappointed if you were not going to be at Seder next Wednesday night and I suspect that after the first part of the Haggadah is read and after the first two of the four cups of wine are enjoyed and you sit down to your meal, you'll sit down to a meal which is beyond the usual matzakles and all of the familiar Passover food which will feature either chicken or brisket but will not feature what ought to be the staple of a Seder meal, a roast leg of lamb. I tried a number of years ago to convince whoever were the powers that be for Second Seder that year that we ought to serve lamb at the Second Seder and everybody told me, most people don't like lamb, it's a very precious kind of taste. And I thought to myself, you know, the thing that we like most about the rituals is when they tie us back through time to the very beginnings of our tradition and if you look back over time there was nothing that was more central and more basic to the Passover night, the Seder meal, than the eating of roast lamb. The paschal sacrifice, what is it? It was the bringing to the shrine of a lamb, the slaughtering of the lamb, that was the way they butchered meat in those days, the roasting of the lamb at the shrine, and then sitting down as a family unit to eat the roast leg of lamb and around the eating of the lamb was told the story of the Passover. And yet, this generation, even a generation such as ours which claims that it likes tradition, it wants to bring back tradition in its lives - chicken, brisket - what kind of tradition is that and that;s the question that lies behind what I want to talk about to you this morning.

If you read the Book of Exodus which is, of course, the

basic myth or story, history, from which we derive the Passover, the Exodus story, you'll notice something strange, even anachronistic, and that is that though we assume that Seder, Pesach, commemorates the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, in point of fact the first Passover was celebrated before the Jews had left Egypt. If you read the story, after Moses receives the mission to go down to Egypt to free in God's name the salves, he goes down, he confronts Pharaoh, Pharaoh is adamant. God has to inflict Pharaoh with a number of plagues. Nine plagues take place, and then, before the tenth plague takes place, God tells Moses to tell the people, each household is to take a lamb, an unblemished lamb of a year old, and to slaughter the lamb and to take the blood of the lamb and to paint it on to the door post of the house and then to sit down and to share the roasted animal in a Passover meal, although the word actually isn't used then. And obviously, this is part of the story which explains how it is that death, when it passes over Egypt, skips over the homes of the Israelites and enters only the homes of the Egyptians there to destroy each first-born.

Now, if you know your bible, and I'm sure all of you do thoroughly, you know that in a number of the Psalms there are different numberings of the plagues. Some psalms know seven plagues, some psalms know nine plagues. The traditional story, of course, has to do with ten plagues. The various enumerations of plagues are not always the same, and what we have here is very clear evidence that when the storytellers of ancient Israel talked and retold the story of the Exodus, they weren't sure how many plagues there were and so they embellished the story with as many plagues as they thought their audience could bkear.

Now, why the tenth plague in the form that it is told in

the Book of Exodus? And that's an interesting story. We, obviously, don't know what was in the storyteller's mind except one assumes this, that if you look at the other plagues they affect everyone, darkness over Egypt, the Nile turning to blood, locusts descending on the land. The tenth plague in that in this plague God specifically spares the Israelites. Obviously, what the storyteller wanted to emphasize by describing dramatically the tenth plague in this way was to suggest that God has a special care for His people for Israel and that He showed that care in this way. There is a special tie between God and this people.

Now, why did He choose this particular way to illustrate the point? And here the anthropologists and the archeologists and those who study ancient things have been able to uncover from the Middle East two facts which are of interest which suggest that the paschal sacrifice in the spring was a holiday which antedated the emergence of the Israelites, antedated the exodus from Egypt, that it goes back in the first instance to a spring shepherd's holiday, and most of the people in the ancient Middle East, in fact, maintained flocks. This was the lambing season in the spring and, as you know, whenever any animal, even the human being, gives birth that's one of the most dangerous times of all. And so it's believed, and it's still practiced in some out of the way rural places, that at the beginning of the lambing season the shepherds would take an unblemished lamb from last year's crop of kids, one-year old lamb, and slaughter it as a propitiatory gift to the gods in the hope that this would be enough of a gift so that all the lambs of the new season would be born hale, whole and well.

Now, what is this business of taking the blood of the lamb and washing it, painting it if you will, on the door posts of the home? Well, if you go through the Middle East today away from the great urban centers, you'll still see any number of homes with colorful paint on the door posts - it may be yellow, it may be blue, it may be orange, it may even be red - and one of the ways in which the ancients believed that you could keep the evil spirits out of the home was to paint the color which frightened the evil spirit which kept the evil spirit out of the home. And the technical anthropologists have a word for this, apotropeic, which comes from the Greek word, apotropein, which means to guard against. This was an act which guarded against the entrance of the evil spirits. And so what you have is two common elements much older than the exodus story itself, used by this storyteller who wanted to embellish the legend of the deliverance from Egypt to prove God's special care for Israel and he told of the tenth plague in this very specific kind of way.

Now, if we look at history we learn very quickly that the central rite of the Passover from the time of Moses down to the end of the first century, down to the year 70 of this era, was the offering of the lamb in the home or at a shrine and ultimately only in the Temple of Jerusalem. And the offering of the paschal sacrifice was the central rite, and then the animal, having been slaughtered, would be roasted and then it would be eaten at a communal meal, shared by everyone in the family unit. And as they sat around this meal they would recount the story of the original redemption.

Now, there are a group of people in the ancient Middle East,

there are hardly more than three or four hundred left, but they lived there for a long, long time, almost 2500 years. They're called the Samaritans. Their name is taken from the city of Samaria. They were near relatives of the Israelites, of the Hebrews, who broke away from the Jewish tradition, we believe around the third or second century B.C.E. on the grounds that they claim that Samaria, not Jerusalem, was intended to be the central sanctuary of the people. There was a temple in Samaria. That was their temple and they performed there their rites and they have a Torah scroll just like ours except, interestingly, they kept an archaic form of writing, ours is newer, theirs is older in that sense. And their Torah is identical to ours except in one respect. It changes the emphasis on a single central sanctuary in Jerusalem to the emphasis on a single central sanctuary in Samaria. Otherwise, the Torahs are identical. And these people have maintained a rather primitive form of Judaism down to modern times and on Seder night they go up a mountain called Grezim which is the hill right in back of Samaria and on the top of the mountain they offer there the paschal sacrifice. They have pits and they slaughter the lamb and then they barbecue it, they roast it, and sit around these pits and on Seder night they retell the very same story we tell of the original redemption from Egypt.

Now, all of this is interesting, but if you think of that Passover and ours you recognize how completely the paschal sacrifice has dropped out of this central focus that it once had. All that we have as a memorial of that 1500-year period is a roasted shank bone. It sits there on the table and at some point in the evening we pick it up and a child says, what is this paschal sacrifice all about, it's a very good question because nothing's been made

of it up to that point. And then we read that this is a reminder of the paschal sacrifice that was offered when our fathers left Egypt as proof of God's love for Israel.

This is not to say that the eating of matza or the mentioning of bitter herbs had no place in the Biblical Passover; they did, but it is to say that the balance has changed dramatically and it changed because of an historical fact, that it was no longer possible, once the Temple was destroyed, to offer the paschal sacrifice. And so in the new formulation which is the one that is in most of our haggadahs, the emphasis is less on the roasted lamb bone than on the matza. And if you ask a child in our school, any child, what is the food that is most associated with Passover, they'll say matzah. If you'd ask a child in ancient Jerusalem, they would have said the paschal sacrifice and that's the difference.

Now, what's the difference between the symbol of matzot, the symbol of the unleavened bread, and the symbol of the paschal sacrifice? When the child says my pesach what is the paschal sacrifice, we answer it is a proof of God's special care for us. My matza, what is this matza all about? This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in Egypt, this is the bread which they baked in haste when they went out into the wilderness. It is a sign not of God's special care but, rather, of redemption in a general sense. And if you look at the haggadah as it is written now, and you do what ought to be done with haggadahs, that is to use it as a springboard to a general discussion, the discussion is on deliverance, on redemption and on freedom. Passover is perhaps the most popular of all of our holidays because it represents that which people have needed most over time - freedom.

Most people in the ancient world were slaves. Most people in the medieval world were serfs. Almost all people who have ever lived have lived under some kind of arbitrary authority, of political tyranny, the oligarchy and autocracy of a family or a tribe. Freedom has been a very rare and precious commodity and so the theme of the Passover is political and social freedom. But our ancestors recognized also that there were other kinds of freedom which were needed. People who are illiterate are imprisoned by their ignorance. People who are handicapped are imprisoned by their deficit and so there is also the theme in Haggadah of a prayer that God will free us from those things which are not so much political as social, as deficits in terms of learning, of opportunity, of experience, of the things which so many of us have been blessed with. And it is a fact that so many of us have been blessed with so much which leads me to the point I want to make this morning.

When we sit around the Seder table and think of freedom, I wonder how many of us think in very personal terms or rather if we aren't thinking in vicarious terms. As I've read through a number of the new haggadot I find them speaking of the prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union. I find them speaking of Jews who are still trapped in the Arab world. I find them speaking of Jews whose lives are uncertain in the Argentine or in the Union of South Africa. I find them speaking of the blacks and others who are imprisoned by the prejudices of their own people or of other peoples. But I find very little which speaks directly to me, of my situation. And my situation is yours is a rare one. We are free people. We are free to vote, to choose our leaders. We are free, most of us have enough to eat. We are free of want. We are

free to express our views. We are free to meet here as a religious community. We are free of ignorance. We were given the opportunity of schooling even if we didn't all take the greatest advantage of it that we should. We are free to follow our chosen occupations and professions. In the history of the world we're that very tiny minority, probably one hundredth of one percent, who have ever been free.

Now, what does Passover mean for a free people? What does it mean for us?

Freedom's a strange virtue, a strange blessing. When the children of Israel left Egypt what happened? They crossed the Reed Sea and they were free, but within three days they were murmuring against Moses and they were saying, take us back to the flesh pots of Egypt, at least there we got twice a day enough gruel to survive. Here we've got to listen to some guy Moses who's telling us to go to a Promised Land that we don't particularly care about. Here we don't know where we're going, what we're going to do or how we're going to get there. What is the symbol of Haiti in our newspapers? Suddenly a people is free, free of a dictator, the baby doc and they don't know how to manage their freedom. they clearly don't know how to organize a life in which they can take advantage of a rare opportunity which has been given to them. They're like the ancient Jews after they left Egypt.

We live in a society which tends to downgrade all authority, all law. We live in a society where one of the emerging political parties calls itself Libertarian and argues that there ought not to be any governmental restraints at all. The economy and the individual ought to be completely free. that's not a Jewish way of looking at

life. Judaism believes in rules, in discipline, that's what the Torah is. Torah means instruction, duty, obligation, God's law, and though Judaism recognizes quite easily that the laws of the state, whatever state, are inevitably less than perfect, inevitably they, to a degree, manipulate people. Inevitably, they take advantage of certain groups. nevertheless, our tradition tells us the laws of the state are obligatory even if they're poor, poorly devised, poorly written, poorly constructed, somewhat unbalanced in their implication because without law, the rabbi said, people would eat each other up alive. There are only three cases in which you are commanded to disobey the law of your state: If some superior authority tells you kill another person; if you're told impose yourself sexually on another person; or if you're told to blaspheme God. Otherwise, the tradition is accept the idea there is essential virtue in an organized society. We couldn't move through our streets if they weren't organized by traffic lights, by laws. We wouldn't be free of infectious diseases if by law we didn't require a child to be inoculated for these diseases before they entered into the public schools. There are laws which protect and there are laws which are necessary and sound and good and even when they are not totally sound and good Judaism prefers a lawful society to an anarchic society.

And so it is that Judaism related two events. Historians now believe, interestingly, that the exodus from Egypt may have taken place at one time and the covenant of Sinai may have taken place at another time, that different tribes may have been involved, but somehow, over time our tradition bound together these two stories and this mixed multitude, the motley as the Bible calls them, this

stiff-necked people who came out of Egypt remained a motley, a murmuring group of people who didn't know where they were going or how or why they were going to get there until they come to Sinai, accept the covenant, and then there's the beginning of a sense of unity, of common purpose, it's not complete, obviously, but there's the beginning of a sense of a community, of people pulling together, of people trying to move in a single direction. And, interestingly, our fathers were never satisfied with Passover as a holy day, a festival unto itself. Just as the exodus is complemented and completed by Sinai, three months later according to the Bible, so the Passover is completed by the holiday of Shavuot which marks the giving of the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai which took place, by our tradition, fifty days later. And to symbolize that connection the traditional synagogue has a ritual in which each of the days between Pesach and Shavuot are numbered off. They're called sefira, the numbering. There are 49 of them and if you went into a traditional synagogue you would have seen on the wall a sefiric calendar which would be changed each day and the object was symbolically to tie these two themes together - freedom for, freedom for - freedom, responsibility - redemption, obligation.

And here we are, a free people, free human beings, free individuals. Yet, here we are, part of a society which is determinedly individualistic where people get elected to public office because they proclaim the deregulation of all of our lives, that is freedom, a society where one of the conventional bits of wisdom is I'm going to do my own thing and nobody is going to tell me how to do it, a society in which all of the basic ties of family and community have been weakened by this kind of approach. And here we have a society

which I think can learn something from the way in which our tradition reshaped Passover over time. At first it spoke of God's special care for Israel. And then it spoke of the general theme of redemption, redemption of all people, redemption of all communities as well as of Israel. To us in our new situation, I submit to you, Passover must speak not only of what others need but of what we need and what we need in our lives is a new sense of responsibility. Those who proclaim their freedom the most are often what my father used to call rebels without a cause, people who are porcupine people, every quill is up, don't touch me, don't come near me, I'm going to hunker my own way through life. But that's not the way Judaism suggests we must live. Passover is Seder, we come together. It's not a solitary holiday. It's a family moment, it always has been. It emphasizes the ties of love, of community, of responsibility which bind and it's only as we admit that freedom is to be enjoyed within the context of relationships, of community, not by walking off alone but by becoming one among and within, by learning to be free even as we accept the bonds and limitations of our responsibilities and our relationships - it's only in those terms, I think, that Passover can continue to have its most important meaning for you and for me. We no longer eat lamb Passover night, I gave up that fight. We will enjoy the matzah because most of our world still needs the freedoms that we enjoy, but the food that we need is the food of a new kind of acceptance of responsibility, not deregulation byt reregulation, regulating our lives by God's law, by duty, the divine ought and what we know what we must be.

In our tradition, and I close with this, in our tradition

Israel is described, all peoples are described as servants. Our tradition never says you're to be totally free. It always says you are to be servants to Me, that is to God, and the service we owe to God is a service of responsibility, responsibility to all those with whom we have ties and that means to all of God's creatures.

The Torah commands Israelites each household must
offer a lamb each household. Children might have already
known, but most Christians did, Christ, under a deadline
angel that children may already have celebrated a holiday, like
the Passover. The Torah focuses on a commandment of the Exodus
from Egypt - the feeling of the slaves. Animal sacrifices to
Roman & Greek Gods and community to celebrate Israel sacrifice
to offer the Israel sacrifice

& the Pagans have already come down. The Jews
answer, the killing of the first born in the city, God says
to take the innocent lamb and household into the - & sacrifice
& sacrifice it. The Israelites blood is to be smeared on the
doorposts of their houses. The lamb should not to be roasted
& eaten — — That evening should watch a Thursday, a
protection, & then have taken the angel of Death comes and
be avenged better. When I see blood I will pass over
you, it DIT NO plague will destroy you when I strike
the land of Egypt.

The Pagans and mankind saved him — to
Rome — power in the same order as them to save
mankind. It's the last major Christian element
God's remember redemption — the acts of the Pagans,
hand circumcision in the way of the Exodus, the
celebrated meals was embedded by generation
of storytelling. The Jews are not and the Christ, but

[illegible] most important. - Most of the 10th plague LOCUSTS, HAIL, DARKNESS down to Egypt will come — in a similar case to Jerusalem when the 10th plague struck — 2 to 10th plague struck in a land — unlike 1st two of Egypt are worked. Here G.d. spared CARE for his people & drastically affected

But how did they come together to think of the death of 1st-born — based of a superficial similar outside to those of 1st. The answer may be in the word Pesach to pass. The answer is in the word M.T. they left in a hurry

Exodus: a shepherd leader and sent under a pass but was sacrificial as a gift to the God. Here left in angel of the pass & also to the word passed to pass over [illegible] pass during same

a symbol to pass & pass over. & to avoid pass of pass. & to avoid pass — pass symbol — after sings out & pass symbol on the wood. marked above & the door. You can also see marked & wood. pass — pass — and to

Pesach - Pass on avoid pass symbol to symbol & redemption pass pass to avoid pass & the pass, pass pass pass

The Temple complex has changed appearance from one century
to the next. At times only the central sanctuary
and the altar, at other times the whole complex
with the 100 cubit - wide outer wall. The Temple
Mount has been altered to increase the size of the
complex and also to alter the topography - but
there is no evidence that any of the buildings
for the last 1400 years have been in the same location
as the Temple by the Romans in 70CE - The Israeli archeologists
and the Palestinians strongly do not want any new
evidence. - Any evidence that would be a direct
challenge to the claims of the Temple - Jewish
claims to the Temple Mount are very - that history
claims - different than the 100 cubit claims of the
Muslim Dome - that would be used by Jewish Zealots
to justify their destruction of the Dome of the Rock

As the Jewish people we do not have the
same attachment to any
of the buildings - But we
do have an attachment to the location
Building materials - but not to the 1 location
many times. - Today, stones, the remains of the
Temple are scattered from the Temple Mount
to the Kidron Valley - Jewish
tradition is that the Shechinah - God's presence
has been in the Temple Mount - Jewish

[illegible] at a Temple [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
Down - [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible].

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [

better education — to [illegible] than what it needs most today
of God: freedom. Freedom from Egyptian bondage — but Abraham
From the bondage of idolatry — moral intellectual idolatry
moral systems, economic conditions

Europe is in favor of freedom — America 2 [illegible]
but to Three aspects but — for they need not be combined
to produce same meaning and complete
out: Take us back to the Black Forest Serfdom — Golden
age Germans called "freedom", but were never happy
human emotionally and many times wanted back when he
storms hit. — 2 true Negro — good sit about Haitian [illegible]
needs in 1 to ancient freedom — or about fear of
Baby Doc last enough enables to appreciate true Peace.—
by need a name — but to avoid a decade or to [illegible]
is really exist inside Freedom, serious one try to do it
Form not — Beyond to inevitable courage of to meet
the crisis, see needed how to act in spirit
Light to individual of to Third World to transform
to only individuals with spiritual freedom —

But let us pray more intensively & see attitudes
to pray & people in other lands. We are relations
free — free to make about — free to love or hate
work — free to increase or [illegible] — free to create.
spend or [illegible] — most of our [illegible] enough
to live on 20 use free of resent — many of us
are even free of the Tyranny of employer, boss, wife

There seem to be Tides between us that we should be — not
ends as a family feast — but as a crossing with
family chosen by a moment of Tribulation — sometimes stark
reminders of our Tribulation — and to offer refuge to those
for whom — the pursuit of conscience in the world, the fear
with removed limits — to take control, or fellow fear of hostility
to pursue personal independence or rational interest — to sing
"a Dance" of our Rights against violence & the degree of freedom
we enjoy in our lives. — to see fear & speak our mind as
possible in public — free to express any aspect of knowledge
and understanding or imagination — our freedom have
become increasingly open — Fellow in AUSTRALIA AND
BRUNEI Table has become — on the Queen — we have
free to go where we want to go,
Once we were content to dance

Obama's Not[illegible] gathering should be a time of hope
responsibility — to make good use of the freedom we
enjoy — and it is passing here, & there, but may it
we fail to appreciate use of the below. we must
more up.

Parenthesis has become a theme may enjoy
our eye — Renegotiation is required to improve the
human Condition — Indeed! How we look to the
future of nursing please express views based on
how you intend to fully enjoy the Gandhi to our

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [

conventional modern method which is a right to
tell anyone else what to do — the simplest motto is
in Lat to DO, I'll do my own thing — somewhat modern
or FORWARD [illegible] which means every guild + tradition — don't
you dare come close + I'll make my own way.

On ages remark the incompletion of the Pentateuch
From Torah — they said however nobody is unable
Hebrew — Shavuot — the one of the feasts of the law. The law
was a natural one — from Sinai came for each week
out of Egypt — to mount Tabor — on הר הר — a
ARAFAT — a mount, tiff related words — from to
question + complaint. It remained until the time one is
being + introduced LAW into the Deuteronomic Torah.
Pentateuch began to be done — after Moses the one thing
TAKE me back. Dt. also a confused question, but
there is a beginning Y a name J shared purpose —

The Exodus, Moses was told or on Sinai
Passover + Shavuot " " " " Tent method
by a writer called: SEFIRAH — 49 days separate the
two festival words by a the expression to COUNT of
the day DAYS — it was counted — counting is
together up? The Israelites to Jubilee, Moses —
Exodus — assembly — built only the square — n
covenant — disciples — a name + the ruled + meaning

[illegible] to [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] -

So the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] a [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] to
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] - [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

because even only when we have notes to refer to
The freedom to make it a living relationship, because we
discover new notions & ideas, I have to leave out explicit
knowledge — or we only become one more notebook reader
prisoner of [illegible] — [illegible] but with me as speaker
& me as a [illegible] reader — but we are free to
[illegible] our performance, to feel what is now relational meaning
to change our lives by what our combined ideas — —
At least force — we are free — we not free to
understand one —

Judaism has not argued that we are absolute
Freedom — [illegible] — he wanted us
dignity more than — but we are God's partners — God
is no more — Freedom, Torah / Freedom & Duty / Revelation
are always together in our Tradition