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Torat Imecha
NACH YOMI

ב"ג

Celebrations of Geulah

Among the concluding chapters of *Divrei HaYamim* we learn of two unique Pesach celebrations conducted within approximately one hundred years of one another. The first was celebrated by Hizkiyahu and the second by his great-grandson, Yoshiyahu, two kings of Yehuda noted for their exceptional righteousness and attempts to effect a national *Teshuvah* movement.

In the very first year of his reign, Hizkiyahu introduced a program of spiritual rehabilitation, including the purification and restoration of the *Beit HaMikdash*, which had been defiled by idolatry and largely abandoned by a populace that had yielded to the temptation of other forms of worship.

The work of clearing and purifying the *Mikdash* began on *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*, and took over two full weeks - the work was completed on the *sixteenth* of that month. The *sixteenth*! What happened to the *Korban Pesach*, which was required to have been offered in the late afternoon of the *fourteenth*? When the Kohanim came to Hizkiyahu to tell him that the work was completed, he initiated a celebration that included *korbanot* numbering in the thousands, accompanied by the musical instruments of David HaMelech, but no mention is made of the *Korban Pesach*. Only after the celebration is

complete do we find a decision being rendered to celebrate Pesach in the following month, a move the Talmud tells us was not approved by the Sanhedrin. We might be justified in thinking that what we have here is a celebration of *Pesach Sheini*, as described in the Torah; however, the *mitzvah* of *Pesach Sheini* is for one day only; the Pesach celebrated by Hizkiyahu and the nation lasted for a full seven days!

There are two salient features of this Pesach celebration: The first is the sub-par level of spiritual exactitude. Pesach was celebrated at the wrong time and by people who were not in an ideal spiritual state. Many of those who joined the celebration, especially the refugees from the northern kingdom, had not had time for ritual purification before partaking of the *Korban Pesach*. With the clear lack of *Kedushah v'taharah*, it's very possible that expectations were low for a meaningful Pesach. Perhaps this is why there is such emphasis on the rejoicing following Hizkiyahu's prayer and Hashem's acceptance of this sub-par Pesach observance. *Simcha* becomes the second defining element of this Pesach.

The people were overjoyed that Hashem had accepted even their imperfect observance of Pesach as an expression of their sincere desire to renew their relationship with Him. At the core of these verses we find that Hashem had done the unexpected - He acquiesced to the prayer of Hizkiyahu and pardoned the people, going beyond the letter of the law as a special favor to His beloved nation.

After Hizkiyahu's death, under the leadership of his son and grandson, Menashe and

Ammon, the nation sunk to new lows, defiling the *Mikdash* once again with idols and impurity. Yoshiyahu ben Ammon was an outlier - he was a righteous king, a throwback to the time of his ancestor David HaMelech. At his initiative, a program of restoration was instituted in the *Mikdash*, and once again it was cleaned and purified. At the culmination of the rededication of the *Mikdash*, Yoshiyahu instructed the nation to celebrate Pesach.

In stark contrast to the Pesach of Hizkiyahu, this Pesach was observed in strict accordance with the law. While we might think of the two celebrations in one breath, given the chronological proximity and the similarity of the broad circumstances, they were in essence quite different from one another. Each highlighted a different path toward *Avodat Hashem*. Hizkiyahu emphasized purity of intention and the emotional, prayerful aspect of worship, while Yoshiyahu emphasized strict adherence to the letter of the law.

Sadly, while both of these celebrations were intended to mark new beginnings, they were followed by backsliding into sinfulness, and the spiritual renaissance fueled by each of these exceptional kings dissipated quickly as the path toward the destruction of Yerushalayim and the *Beit Hamikdash* gained momentum.

The key to the message of these celebrations lies at the heart of a passage following yet another Pesach celebration in Tanach, that foreseen by the Navi Yehezkel which will be celebrated in the future *Mikdash*. Yehezkel teaches that on the holidays, when the people come before Hashem, they should leave the Sanctuary by the gate opposite the one through which they entered (Yehezkel 46:9).

In order for religious inspiration to leave a permanent impact on our psyche, we have to be inherently changed by the experience that



offered the inspiration. If we're the same person coming out of the *Mikdash* as we were going in, that which took place therein is stripped of its meaning. The Pesach celebrations of Hizkiyahu and Yoshiyahu were regarded as so extraordinary as to be digressions from the "normal" way of the world, impossible to carry forward into daily life. The people enjoyed them, but were not, in essence, changed by them, and quickly regressed into their patterns of sinfulness.

As we approach the conclusion of the current cycle of Nach Yomi and prepare for a new beginning, let us ensure that our religious experience does not become stagnant but is a constant source of energy and renewed excitement. May our learning continue to serve as a source of inspiration, and may we strive to unify the *simcha* and enthusiasm with which we perform the *mitzvot* together with the strict observance of the *mitzvah* itself. In doing so may we hasten the rebuilding of the *Mikdash*, ushering in a celebration of Pesach the likes of which we have never yet been privileged to experience. ■

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