

A Riot on Sukkot

The Talmud relates (*Sukkah* 48b, Mishna):

One of the special rituals in the *Beit Hamikdash* on the *Sukkot* festival was the ceremony of pouring water on the altar, which was done with great joy. When the kohen approached the altar holding the pitcher of water, they would say to him, "Raise your hand." This was due to a riot that had taken place. Once, a priest who was a Sadducee poured the water on his feet instead of pouring it on the altar. The Sadducees did not believe in the holy ritual of the water libation on *Sukkot*, as Rambam explains (Commentary on the *Mishna, Sukkah* 4:9): The mitzva of this water libation is not stated specifically in the Torah. It is only based on a hint from which our sages derived the mitzva to pour the water. The Sadducees did not believe in the Oral Torah and ultimately vanished from the Jewish fold. When the Sadducee priest poured the water on his feet, a riot ensued and all the people pelted him with their etrogim. From then on they instituted the custom to tell the kohen charged with pouring the water, "Raise you hand," to show that he was fulfilling the *mitzva* by pouring the water into the intended opening on the altar.

This story raises a question:

Why did all the people pelt him with their *etrogim*, when a deviation in the Temple service was punished either by Heavenly death or by death at the hand of zealots, as stated (*Sanhedrin* 81b, *Mishna*)?

During the course of the year there was a special water libation. What is the difference between wine and water?

Wine has a taste and give pleasure. Water, by itself, has no taste and we get no pleasure from its taste. On water, however, a *beracha* is not only when one drinks it to quench his thirst

This distinction exists also in one's spiritual life. Divine service with logic is called "wine" since one derives pleasure from it, whereas Divine service by subservience is called "water" since, by itself, one has no pleasure in it.

In truth, there is pleasure even in subservience, when accepting the Divine yoke. The joy in subservience is even greater than the joy based on logic. Joy based on logic is limited, depending on the level of one's logic, but the joy based on subservience is not limited.

Therefore we see that the main rejoicing in the *Beit Hamikdash* was centered on the water pouring on *Sukkot*. This joy was so great that the *Mishmah* declares (*Sukkah* 51a, *Mishna*) that one who did not witness the *Simchat Beit Haso'evah* (the joy of the water Drawing) in the *Beit Hamikdash* never saw joy in his life~

At the time of *Mattan Torah* the Children of Israel said, "We will do" before they said "we will listen" (*Shabbos* 88a). This is true subservience. Since they did not know what it was about, they derived no pleasure; they accepted the Torah with pure subservience.

This is also seen in the Divine service of each person. The Mishna asks (*Berachot* 13a, *Mishna*): Why the section of "*Shema*" precedes "*Vehaya*" (in the *Shma* recital)? So that one should first accept upon him the yoke of Heaven and then the yoke of mitzvot, indeed a yoke that provides no pleasure, but we do it because this is what *Hashem* wants.

In light of this we can understand the story in the Talmud: The Sadducees' warped view was that the Torah observance should be based on logic and, therefore, they did not accept the Masoret (tradition) and teachings of our Sages.

That is why "all the people" pelted that Sadducee priest. The average, simple G-d fearing people who came from far and near to celebrate the festival felt that the Sadducees' view - that one need not show subservience to *Hashem* - was contrary to *Hashem's* Will. Therefore they pelted that priest.

Let us rejoice to the fullest on this Yom Tov and encourage every Jew to recite a blessing over an esrog and a lulav, which elicits *Hashem's* blessings for good health, happiness, nachas, prosperity and the speedy advent of *Moshiach*.