

PESACH SHAINI AND RABON GAMLIEL'S PRAYER

Parshas Bechukosai

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

It is common knowledge that Pesach, the first of the three festivals, is harbinger, source of sanctity, inspiring the days that follow. The observance of Shabos, fundamental of fundamentals, Neshama of the Neshama, calls for remembering the Exodus, in the Ten Commandments of Devorim (5:15). The Tefilin contains reference to the Exodus. It stands to reason, therefore, that Pesach Shaini, too, contains elements of basics of Yehadus, leaving an indelible impression on the complete cycle of the year.

Pesach Shaini is based on a historic anecdote. A handful of individuals who were occupied with the remains of Joseph, thus lacking the state of Tahara, a requisite in order to bring the Pesach Korbon, approached Moshe with the claim "why should we be deprived... (of this Mitzva)?" At this point the law of Pesach Shaini was decreed (Bamidbar 9:6-11). The structure of the Heavenly response presents a difficulty. One would expect the response to emphasize in the first sentence the solution, to bring the Pesach Korbon a month later, having attained the necessary Tahara. Instead, however, the first statement reads "this group shall observe the mitzvah of the Pesach Korbon." Only in the second sentence they are instructed on the time, to be done a month later.

The Kiviyashder Rav in his Sheor Yoshuv elucidates the group's request. They realized, he explains, that they will be able to observe the mitzva at a different time, following purification. What disturbed them was the inability to observe the mitzvah together with all others in Kelal Yisroel, "BETECH BNEI YISROEL". The response, therefore, was the assurance that it will be reckoned as fulfilling the mitzvah properly and together with all others. This is the thrust of the response. Then, in the sentence that follows, the Torah pinpoints the day it should be done, in the second month.

Upon deeper reflection one can see in Pesach Shaini an additional basic Judaic concept, not found in the Korbon of Nisan. The group's urge to be part of Klal Yisroel in observing the mitzvah together, and the Heavenly response of consent to indeed consider it as an observance of the multitude together,

attests to the principle of “berov am”, observing a mitzvah on a higher level when done in multitude.

This vital principle is indicated in our Sidra. “If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments...” (you will be granted the blessings of this world...). You will pursue your enemies who will fall before you. “Five of you will pursue a hundred, and a hundred of you will pursue ten thousand” (26:8). Is this mathematically correct? If five Jews can pursue a hundred enemies, a ratio of one to twenty, then a hundred Jews should be able to pursue two thousand, not ten thousand, as stated in the passage. “This teaches”, quotes Rashi from the Sifra, “that when more people are united in serving G-d together, they can be more powerful.”

The same principle outlined here regarding the observance of a mitzvah, is applicable regarding Torah study. The Mishna in Avoth (3:7) begins to commend ten people learning Torah together, then the Mishna continues, even five, and even three, ... and even one. It is obvious that ten learning together is a greater achievement.

This principle is furthermore applicable in Avoda, prayer. The Talmud states (Brochos 8a) “Hashem never rejects the prayer of a multitude”. It is for this reason that our prayers are led by a chazzan, a Sheliach Tzibur, messenger of all the assembled. Such an arrangement constitutes prayer of a multitude.

A far-reaching debate is recorded in the Talmud (final Mishna, Rosh Hashana) about the Shemona Esra, which is repeated by the chazzan (at Shachris and Mincha). Which one is the more important one, the silent one, or the Chazan’s repeat, called Chazoras Hashatz? Rabon Gamliel maintains it is the Chazan’s repeat that is the pivotal, for he speaks in the name of all participants, who listen attentively to his prayers. The silent prayer, he contends, only serves as prelude, as preparation, to make the Chazan’s repeat more meaningful. Tana Kama disagrees. He insists the silent prayer is central; the Chazan’s repeat is intended for those who cannot “daven”, and (one dares to add) who cannot concentrate sufficiently.

Although the Halachic decision does not concur with Rabon Gamliel, (except, perhaps, on Rosh Hashana Musaf, see Mevartenura Rosh Hashana ibid.), his opinion cannot be ignored. It is, thus, strictly forbidden to converse during Chazoras Hashatz, even when the silent prayer was fulfilled according to most stringent requirements.

Also, even according to Tana Kama, the devoted “davener” is not perturbed by the inclusion, in “Chazoras Hashatz”, of the one who cannot “daven” or concentrate. On the contrary, it adds impetus, energizing the repetition Shemona Esra in the knowledge that this is a public, community involved, supplication, which possesses the above mentioned assurance, “Hashem does not reject the prayer of the multitude”.

What constitutes a community-wide prayer? Both the Talmud and Zohar speak of the quorum of ten people, qualifying to speak in the name of the collective Klal Yisroel. The source for this number, according to Talmud (Brochos 21b) is the passage “I should be sanctified among, “BETOCH”, children of Israel” (Vayikro 22:32). The word TOCH is mentioned with the word “Aida” (Bamidbar 16:21), which refers to a quorum of ten, as seen by the use of “Aida” at the spies (Bamidbor 14:27), who numbered ten. This is the source for all pronouncements of Kedusha (as in Venikdashti BTOCH, I should be sanctified among...) to be presented by a minimum of ten.

It is interesting to note that in grace after meal, when a quorum of ten participated, the word Elokainu is added, even though the word “Kedusha” is not mentioned in the grace. One may suggest it is based on the Jerusalem Talmud source for the quorum of ten, (J. Talmud Brochos 7:3) that of the ten brothers of Joseph coming to seek sustenance in Egypt during the years of famine. In that context the word BTOCH is used So “So the sons of Israel (Jacob) came to buy provisions among (b'TOCH) the arrivals” (Beraishis 42:5).

Additional clarification here is apropos: The Jerusalem Talmud refers to pronouncements of Kedusha (sanctification) in Venikdashti b'TOCH. In the grace after meal, however, no word related to Kedusha is mentioned.

In Avoth (3:4) it is taught, however, that during a meal one should study some Torah, elevating the dining table to the level of an altar. It is to this inclusion of learning that the second chapter of grace refers, thanking Hashem “for the Torah we have learned”. This contains an element of Kedusha, as we are called “Kodesh” upon accepting the Torah (Shemos 19:6).

The purpose of their coming to Egypt is to find bread, thus a quorum of ten for special mention at grace.

