

HIDDEN YET LOVING - MOURNING THE DESTRUCTION

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

The Fast of the 17th of Tamuz, which commemorates the beginning of the destruction of the Temple, begins the three weeks of mourning over the Temple and our exile. These three weeks end with the Fast of the 9th of Av. (See I:27-28 for more information on 17 Tamuz, and I:30-31 on 9 Av.)

The Talmud (Ta'anis 29a) tells us that "just as from when the month of Av enters, we minimize our happiness, so too from when the month of Adar enters [Purim comes on 14 Adar], we increase our happiness." (See II:28 for more on this principle.) Generally, when the Talmud makes a "just as . . . so too . . ." comparison, it is suggesting that there is a common denominator between the objects of comparison. It is this common denominator that causes the results being compared. Consequently, the Gemora is telling us that whatever it is that causes us to mourn in Av, it too causes us to rejoice in Adar. This comparison is perplexing. How can it be that one underlying factor causes us to act in accordance with two opposing emotional extremes?

In his explanation of Megillas Esther, the Vilna Gaon pinpoints the uniqueness of the miracle of Purim. There were two elements to the story of Purim that caused the salvation of the Jews to be characterized as super-miraculous. The salvation occurred in a time when the Jewish people were in exile. The First Temple had been destroyed, and the nation was at a low point in its history. The astonishing spectacles seen in the Temple were gone and G-d's presence was not openly seen. In addition, the salvation did not come about through some fantastic supernatural display of G-d's power. The earth did not open and swallow Haman and his henchmen. Rather, the salvation came about through what appeared to the undiscerning eye as a series of political events, the making of history books. People both rise and fall in power, and this process is normal and accepted. The rapid decline of a once hailed and revered official is not what most people would term miraculous.

What makes the miracle of Purim so special is that it proves that G-d is always with us. Even when we were in exile, when we presumed G-d was angry with us, when we thought G-d was not with us, G-d saved us. Not only did He save us during this time when we thought He was hidden from us, but He saved us in a way that was hidden as well. The miracle was not readily apparent, and the nation had to appreciate this clandestine salvation. It was because the nation indeed appreciated the hiddenness that they came to recognize how much G-d loved them. (See I: 66 for more on this idea.) This resulted in a stronger bond of love between the nation and G-d. This was the miracle of Purim.

What is the factor that causes us to mourn in Av and rejoice in Adar? In Av, we were sent into the

exile in which we languish until this very day. The Holy Temple, the holiest place in the entire world, was destroyed. We were dispersed throughout the world, and we suffered often throughout the ages. G-d, during Av, hid Himself from us. We were no longer privy to open displays of His holiness. We no longer saw G-d out in the open. It is this very hiddenness that causes us to mourn in Av that causes us to celebrate in Adar! In Adar we saw that G-d was with us though we thought He was hidden from us. We celebrate this revelation with great joy, as this revelation brought us even closer to G-d. When Av enters, we decrease our joy because it is the start of period when G-d was hidden from us. We rejoice in Adar because then we realized that this very hiddenness does not mean that G-d does not love us, and that G-d still cares for us greatly, even while hidden. We rejoice in Adar because we recognized that punishment does not mean abandonment. We acknowledged that G-d may have to punish us, but the punishment is out of love, not out of spite nor hatred. Although we mourn in Av because we were punished, we rejoice in Adar because we saw that G-d is indeed nearby.

In the Gemora (Yoma 54b) we find that when our enemies entered the Sanctuary of the Temple, they found that the cherubs, k'ruvim, which were on top of the Holy Ark, were embracing. The Ritva, a commentator, questions how this could be. Our Sages have taught us that when the nation of Israel was not doing the will of G-d, the cherubs faced the Temple, not each other. At the time of the destruction, presumably the Jews were not in favor with G-d, and therefore the cherubs should not have been facing each other!

We can explain the answer once we understand why the cherubs embraced each other when the nation obeyed G-d. The performance of G-d's command was not why the cherubs embraced. Rather, when the nation obeyed the command of G-d, it caused the love between the people and G-d to increase. The nation was happy to do that which their Father in Heaven requested. This love between the nation and G-d was reflected in the cherubs. The Gemora tells us that (54a) when the nation used to come to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage festivals, the nation was shown the cherubs in an embrace and told "'See your love before G-d.'" The cherubs indicated when there was strong love between G-d and the nation.

As we saw at the time of Purim, G-d is with us even when He is punishing us. Although we may deserve to be punished, the punishment comes out of love. At the time of the destruction, the nation was entering exile. They were entering mourning. G-d was hiding himself. Yet, G-d was truly still with them. His love for the nation was strong and unwavering. Therefore, the cherubs embraced.

(from Chazon L'Moed)