

LAST DAYS OF PESACH

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

The Torah, when speaking about Pesach, tells us that "...and on the seventh day (of Pesach), it should be a holy day to you, all manner of work should not be done..."

Pesach is a seven day holiday. Those of us who live in the Diaspora, however, observe Pesach for eight days. The reason why we tack on an extra day stems from the times when the new moon was proclaimed by a court (see YomTov I: 52). Because there was a worry that those living outside of Israel would not know which of two possible days was the first of the month, holidays which carried with them a prohibition against working were observed for two days. We continue this tradition to this very day, and that is why there is an eighth day of Pesach outside of the land of Israel.

Unlike the last day of Sukkot (see YomTov I:48), the last day of Pesach is not a separate holiday. It is merely the conclusion of Pesach. It is for this reason that we do not recite the blessing of "Shehechianu" "Who has kept us alive," by candle lighting and by Kiddush as we usually do on a holiday.

We find no association in the Torah between the last day of Pesach and any event or occurrence in our nation's history. In truth, a miraculous event occurred on the seventh day of Pesach. After the Jews left Egypt, Pharaoh had a change of heart. He started pursuing the nation of Israel. The nation had reached the shores of the Yam Suf (popularly translated as Red Sea, more accurately translated Reed Sea) and could travel no further. On the day that we celebrate the seventh day of Pesach, G-d split the Yam Suf, so that the Jews were able to cross the sea on what was miraculously dry land. After the Jews crossed the sea, the waters came tumbling down upon the Egyptians, who were still in hot pursuit of the Jews. The Egyptians were drowned, and the entire nation of Israel was saved. This event would seem fitting for commemorating with a holiday such as the seventh day of Pesach. Yet, not only is this event not celebrated, but the day that it occurred on is not even mentioned in the Torah! Why is such a monumental day in our history passed over?

The Sefer HaToda'ah writes that the Jews were only given holidays by G-d that celebrated the salvation of the Jews. They were never given holidays that commemorated the downfall of their enemies. G-d does not celebrate the downfall and destruction of the wicked, as they are His creations. Therefore, the Jewish nation as well does not celebrate the downfall and destruction of the wicked. It is for this reason that there is no connection made between the splitting of the Yam Suf and the seventh day of Pesach. We cannot celebrate the downfall of the Egyptians. However, the Jews indeed were saved on this day, and sang songs of praise and thanks, Hallel, to G-d for their

salvation. We too sing Hallel to G-d on this day, just as our forefathers did. We can and do mark the occasion of our salvation. We cannot and do not, however, mark the occasion of our enemies' demise.