

# CYCLICAL CELEBRATIONS

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

The first Mishna in the tractate of Rosh HaShana states: "There are four 'New Years.' The first of (the month of ) Nissan is the new year for kings and for festivals." The Talmud elaborates on this statement: "(The Mishna states that the first of the month of Nissan is the new year) for festivals. How can the new year for the festivals be on the first of Nissan? It is surely on the fifteenth of Nissan (the date of the start of Pesach)! Rav Chisda said: What it means is that the festival which occurs in it is the New Year for the festivals."

Why is it that Pesach is considered the beginning of the cycle of holidays in the Jewish calendar, the beginning of the "New Year" for festivals? The S'fas Emes writes that a verse in the Megillah of Shir HaShirim, the Song of Songs, which is read on Pesach, explains the order of the holidays. The verse states (1:4) "Draw me after you, we will run; the king has brought me into his chambers; we will be glad and rejoice in you."

On Pesach, we celebrate the fact that the people who were enslaved in Egypt were liberated by G-d from that slavery to become His nation. Before the nation left, they had to undergo a purification. They had to elevate their spiritual levels from the depths to which they sunk in Egypt. They had to escape from the clutches of their evil inclinations so that they would no longer be enslaved to their earthly desires. The people were to be bound to G-d only, and only once the people were freed from the shackles of their temptations were they truly free to become G-d's people. On Pesach, we commemorate this. The consumption of Chametz, which represents the evil inclination and the earthly desires it foists upon us, is forbidden. We eat only Matza, a simple, primary food that represents the basic sustenance needed to dedicate ourselves to G-d. We illustrate through our actions that we are removing the yoke of the evil inclination from upon ourselves, just as our forefathers did in the time of the exodus. This step is referred to in the first part of the verse "draw me after you."

After the nation was drawn away from earthly temptation and towards the spirituality of G-d, they illustrated their devotion and dedication to Him. The nation was trapped by the Red Sea, with the Egyptians in hot pursuit. The sea split, and the nation went forward with utmost trust in G-d. This action, which we commemorate on the seventh day of Pesach, is also referenced in the verse - "after you we will run."

Once the nation dedicated themselves to G-d and demonstrated such, they were prepared for the next step - the receipt of the Torah. G-d gave us the ultimate gift to demonstrate the closeness of

our relationship with Him. We celebrate the giving of the Torah to the nation of Israel on the holiday of Shavu'os, the holiday referred to in the part of the verse "the King has brought me into His chambers."

Once the nation received the Torah, they were able to cherish it and appreciate the value of the gift they had received. They were able to celebrate the fact that they received something so special, a priceless manifestation of the love between G-d and His people. Sukkos is the holiday on which we have a special dictate to rejoice. We celebrate, on Sukkos, the final holiday in the cycle, as the final section of the referenced verse states "we will be glad and rejoice in you."

The holidays, beginning with Pesach and ending with Sukkos, demonstrate the progression of our relationship as a nation with G-d. It is this relationship we should keep in mind as we participate in our holiday celebrations. We should assure that our individual relationship with G-d progresses over time, just as our forefathers' did, and it is for that reason we have the holidays in the order the Talmud states.