

# PREPARATION FOR HAPPINESS

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

The Talmud states (Ta'anis 29a) "Just as when the month of Av enters, we minimize our joy, so too when the month of Adar enters we increase our joy." There is a dual implication from this statement. First, we know that both of these months contain a commemoration therein: the fast of the 9th of Av, one of the saddest days of the year; and, the holiday of Purim, one of the most joyous holidays. This statement informs us that the mood or tone of the holiday "sets in," so to speak, with the beginning of the month. Second, the Talmud seems to link the two, by using a "just as, so too" connection. The reason why we commence sadness with the beginning of the month of Av is shared with why we commence joy with the beginning of the month of Adar.

Rav Yaakov Kulefsky zt"l notes that it is impossible to truly feel the sorrow and anguish that we are supposed to feel on Tisha B'Av without preparation. The pain we need to experience on Tisha B'Av cannot be realized by just trying to get in the proper frame of mind on one day. For that reason, beginning with the fast of the 17th of Tamuz, but intensifying beginning with the start of the month of Av, the decree of our Sages that we conduct ourselves in some respects as if we were in mourning comes into effect. It is only with this advance preparation we can reach the true strength of feeling that is not only appropriate, but also called for, on the fast of the 9th of Av.

You might imagine that preparation, needing time to properly orient one's feelings and not remain unmoved due to the routine of everyday life, would only be needed when shifting from the routine to sadness. Voluntary sadness is usually not sought, and therefore external stimuli are needed to set and maintain the proper frame of mind. Happiness, on the other hand, needs no preparation. It's not difficult to get happy, to put ourselves in an upbeat, positive frame of mind - especially when Purim is right around the corner. However, the Talmud is telling us that just as the sadness associated with the 9th of Av needs to commence with the start of the month, to ensure we attain the proper mindset come the fast day, so too do we need to commence feelings of joy and happiness with the onset of the month of Adar, so that we experience true and overwhelming joy on Purim.

Why does this joy need preparation? What makes this celebration special?

When discussing the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the Talmud states (Shabbos 88a) "'And they stood under the mountain.' Rav Avdimi bar Chama bar Chasa said: This (the verse, and they stood \_under\_ the mountain) teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, turned the mountain over them like an

[inverted] cask, and said to them 'If you accept the Torah, it is good; if not, there shall be your burial place. Rav Acha bar Yaakov said: This (being forced to accept the Torah) provides a strong protest against the Torah (as the nation, when confronted with the charge of failure, could state that they were forced to accept the Torah.) Said Rava, even so, they re-accepted it in the days of Achashverosh, for it is written, "Kimu V'Kiblu," '[the Jews] upheld, and took upon them,' meaning that they upheld what they had accepted long before."

The simple understanding underlying this discussion is that the flaw that existed with the nation of Israel's original acceptance of the Torah, namely, that it occurred under duress, was rectified in the days of Mordecai, when the nation reaccepted it free of any pressure. Rav Kulefsky cites a different explanation, that of the Meshech Chochmah. He writes that at the time the Torah was given to the nation, they experienced a uniquely incredible and magnificent manifestation of the glory of G-d. This awesome and holy sight was overwhelming. In the face of such a profound spiritual experience, the nation, who was like angels at that time, could only have one response when asked if they wanted the Torah: they accept. When the Talmud writes that if they had not said yes, "there shall be your burial place," the intent is that if, in light of that experience, and understanding that the Torah is the foundation of the existence and continuity of the world, the nation still said "no thank you," it would be as if they were dead. The nation profoundly understood at that moment that there was no life without Torah, and therefore they had to accept the Torah; there was truly no other option.

In the days of Achashverosh, however, G-d's hand was not manifest. It was hidden from view. The nation of Israel in the kingdom of Achashverosh thought their end was near. Yet, eventually the tables were turned: Mordechai was elevated, Haman was demoted and killed, and the events of the time seemed like the material about which political commentators write and analyze. The saved Jews understood that this turn of events was not just happenstance. This was an act of love from G-d. The nation of Israel responded in kind to the expression of love towards them from G-d. They willingly, lovingly and happily reaccepted the Torah and dedication to its mitzvos. This reacceptance, done out of a self recognition, out of feelings of love, joy and gratitude to G-d, rectified any flaw that might have existed when the nation accepted the Torah at Sinai.

The joy that we must have on Purim is not rooted solely in that we celebrate the fact that the nation was saved from destruction. It stems from our acceptance of the Torah anew, with a spirit of love and happiness, with a self-recognition of the importance of G-d in our lives and that of the continuance in the world. Before we commemorate the acceptance of the Torah each year on Shavuot, we undergo a 7 week period during which we prepare ourselves for that reacceptance. Perhaps the mandate to begin joy and happiness from the onset of Adar is akin to that preparation. We need to work ourselves up to that high and lofty level of "simcha," the level of happiness that allows us to reaccept the Torah, as was done in the days of Mordechai and Esther, out of joy and love, as well.

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