

EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY: A SPIRITUAL CELEBRATION

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

"For the Conductor, On the Ayeles HaShachar, a psalm by David." So begins Psalm 22, which, commentators explain, alludes to Queen Esther and her trials and tribulations. The psalm, towards the end of its description of our request for deliverance from exile and persecution, states, "the humble will eat and be satisfied, those who seek Hashem will praise Him..."

Rav Shlomo Kluger explains that this portion of the psalm is alluding to the fact that on Purim, we are commanded to "eat, drink and be merry." This commandment is in stark contrast with the way we are told to celebrate Chanukah, "to give thanks and praise." The difference in how we celebrate these two holidays stems from an intrinsic difference between the miracles that we commemorate on these two holidays.

Every person, we are taught, is born with two inclinations: the "yetzer tov, the "good inclination," and the "yetzer ho'ra," the "evil inclination." These two inclinations are in constant battle for our soul, trying to encourage us to either act in accordance with Hashem's dictates or to disregard them. The benefit and pleasures of this world, the physical world, are the tools of the yetzer ho'ra. The promises of eternal reward and joy in the World to Come are the munitions of the yetzer tov. Eating and drinking, earthly activities clearly fall within the domain of the yetzer ho'ra. They are methods of enticing a person into forsaking spiritual pursuits in favor of instant gratification. Abstinence from these activities is promoted by the yetzer tov. We are to eat and drink only to the degree necessary to sustain ourselves, to provide us with ample strength to serve Hashem.

The salvation of the nation of Israel can come in different ways. There are times where the nation has fought back from oppression and defeated its enemies. Even after defeat, the enemies remain our enemies, and a threat of persecution lingers. There are situations, however, where we are able to turn the opinion of our enemies. They no longer pose a threat, as they side with the nation and may even offer protection and support.

On Chanukah, we celebrate a victory. The Greeks oppressed the nation of Israel. The Chashmonaim fought back, and the Greeks were defeated. However, the Greeks, even after being defeated, still despised the Jewish religion and its adherents. They still desired the destruction of the nation of Israel. The physical manifestation of the "yetzer ho'ra" was weakened, and we therefore celebrate accordingly: we do not have mandated feasting; rather, we give thanks and praise. We engage in the spiritual, to strengthen that aspect of our being, as opposed to engaging in physical expressions of celebration. We commemorate the victory of the righteous over the wicked, the pure over the

impure, by engaging in activities that are in line with this success.

Purim, however, was different. Achashverosh, who consented to the initial edict mandating the annihilation of the nation of Israel, reversed himself. The nation was not only allowed to defend themselves, but offensive measures were permitted and encouraged. Haman, who was a loyal and trusted advisor to the king, ended up as a victim of his own gallows. The physical manifestations of the "yetzer ho'ra" ended up benefiting the nation of Israel. We, therefore, celebrate in similar fashion. We take the implements of the yetzer ho'ra and use them for good. We celebrate and give thanks and praise to Hashem using food and drink. This sort of celebration is not merely recommended; it is obligatory.

Chag Purim Same'ach!

Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Yehudah Prero and **Torah.org**.

The author has Rabbinic ordination from Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem, NY.