

STORIES THAT TEACH

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Throughout Sukkos, special offerings were brought on the Altar in the Temple. Our Sages have taught us that the 70 special bull sacrifices brought on Sukkos were for the benefit of the 70 nations of the world. On Shemini Atzeres, the holiday that appears to be the eighth day of Sukkos, only one bull sacrifice was brought. Shemini Atzeres is a holiday that G-d gave the Jewish people as a send-off of sorts. It is one last time for the Jewish nation to rejoice with G-d before the long stretch until Pesach, the next holiday (see vol. I:48). The Maggid of Dubno explains by means of a parable why one special offering was brought on this day which is dedicated to the Jewish nation.

A wealthy man went on a long journey. While on his trip, he purchased many gifts for his family back home. Upon his return, he gave out the presents. He showered the children of his wife (his stepchildren) with many gifts, while to each of his children he gave a few small presents. He did such based upon the following rationale. My stepchildren will be happy now only with presents. However, my children should be happy because I have returned. Although I want them to have gifts, I do not want the joy of receiving the presents to overshadow the joy they should feel upon my return. Therefore, I will give them some small gifts.

In order to bring joy to the nations of the world, G-d felt it was necessary to command the offering of a large amount of sacrifices. As it is the offerings on their behalf alone that bring them joy, the nations were given 70 sacrifices. However, the Jewish people experience great joy just knowing that they are in the company of G-d. On Shemini Atzeres, when G-d wants to rejoice with us one last time, all we need is one sacrifice to compliment the joy that already exists.

This joy extends to Simchas Torah, the day that follows Shemini Atzeres in the Diaspora (see vol. I:49). (Simchas Torah begins at nightfall on Thursday, October 23, 1997) Reb Naftoli from Ropshitz once told of a man he met who taught him what he considered an amazing lesson about joy. On Simchas Torah one year, he saw a man who looked like he was thoroughly enjoying the day's celebration. His mouth did not stop singing and his legs would not stop dancing. He was totally immersed in the joy of the celebration of completing the Torah. What Reb Naftoli thought was unusual was that this individual was a simple porter, who knew little of Torah and its study. Reb Naftoli called him over and asked him how come he was celebrating with such fervor. Did he learn so much this year that his celebration should be so enthusiastic? The porter's answer was what impressed Reb Naftoli. He said "Rebbe - how can my brother make a simcha - a celebration - and I not be happy?!"

Hopefully we will all celebrate Simchas Torah as a celebration of our own accomplishments. Even if that is not the case, we should celebrate together with our brothers and sisters, and hope that next year the joy will be personal as well. However, although we celebrate, there is still not total joy, as we are in exile.

The Prince of Mannheim once approached the Netziv, Rabbi Naftoli Berlin, with the following question: Every year at the Seder on Pesach, Jewish children ask their father "Mah Nishtana...." "Why is this night different from all other nights...." Pesach is not the only time Jews perform unusual commandments. On Sukkos, the Jews move out of their comfortable homes and dwell outdoors in a hut. Shouldn't this cause a child to ask Mah Nishtana on Sukkos as well?

The Netziv answered that the observances on Pesach are truly different. A child sees actions that are not in accordance with Jewish life. The whole family sits and reclines together at the table with tranquillity and perform actions of truly free people. All actions are performed deliberately and with precision and order. This causes a child to wonder what is going on. How is it possible that Jews can live with order, peace, and tranquillity? However, on Sukkos, the child sees the family exit their house and take shelter in the Sukkah. For a Jewish child, this is not a strange sight. He knows that the Jews are treated as a lowly nation by others. He knows that the Jews have been forced to constantly wander in exile. He knows that the Jews have never considered their house their permanent home because they may have to move in a moments notice to flee persecution. For the child, leaving the home is not a strange sight. Therefore, the child does not ask Mah Nishtana on Sukkos.

May it be G-d's will that come next Sukkos, asking Mah Nishtana will be totally appropriate for the occasion.

Check out all of the posts on Elul and Rosh HaShana. Head over to <http://www.torah.org/learning/yomtov/> to access the YomTov Page. Then click on the icon for the holiday of your choice.

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