

Rejoicing in Destruction of Enemies (Source Sheet)

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Source: Original

On Succot, we are told three times to rejoice, but on Pesach we are not even told to rejoice once. This is because on Pesach the produce is judged and no one knows whether he will have a productive year. Another opinion, because the Egyptians died. And similarly on Succot, each of the seven days we read Hallel, but on Pesach we only read Hallel on the first night and day, because as Shmuel says 'don't rejoice in the downfall of your enemies.' (Proverbs 24:17)

R. Jonathan said: The Holy One, blessed be He, does not rejoice in the downfall of the wicked. For R. Samuel b. Nahman said in R. Jonathan's name: What is meant by, "and one came not near the other all the night"? In that hour the ministering angels wished to utter the song [of praise] before the Holy One, blessed be He, but He rebuked them, saying: My handiwork [the Egyptians] is drowning in the sea; and you want to sing! Said R. Jose b. Hanina: He Himself does not rejoice, yet He allows others to rejoice.

In the hour in which Israel were encamped on the sea, the ministering angels came to praise the Holy One blessed be He, yet He did not allow them, as it is said "and one came not near the other all the night" ...thus, Israel found themselves in trouble on the sea, the ministering angels came to praise the Holy One blessed be He. He rebuked them saying, "my sons are in distress and you are praising me?"

At the time when God wanted to drown the Egyptians in the sea, Uzza, Egypt's Guardian angel bowed down before God and said "Master of the world! You created the world through the attribute of mercy. Why do you seek to drown my sons? God immediately summoned the entire celestial family and said to them 'arbitrate between me and Uzza, angel of Egypt.' The guardian angels of the nations began to defend Egypt... until the angel Gabriel showed God a brick from Egypt with a baby entombed in it. 'Master of the world,' he said, 'thus did they enslave the Israelites.'

God immediately sentenced the Egyptians with midat hadin and drowned them in the sea. The ministering angels wanted to sing praises to God. But God silenced them, saying, 'My children are drowning in the sea and you want to sing before me?' (Sefer HaAgaddah - Bialik and Ravitsky)

Our calendar currently has a cycle of three redemption holidays in spring. The central of course being Pesach which is preceded by Purim and followed by Yom Ha'atzmaut. Each one of these is preceded by a day of introspection. Ta'anit Bechorot before Pesach, Ta'anit Esther before Purim and Yom HaZikaron before Yom Ha'Atzma'ut. I propose that these days of introspection balance the celebration of redemption by raising awareness to the casualties of the process of redemption. Sadly, redemption is often a step away from human oppression and as such has often manifested in violent upheavals which left their own casualties in their wake. Ta'anit Bechorot thus raises awareness of the death of the Egyptian firstborn (there are a few other moments like that on Pesach such as spilling wine from the cup during the seder) and Ta'anit Esther raises awareness of the thousands of deaths described in Chapter 9 of the Megillah. Yom HaZikaron is dedicated to the memory of the IDF soldiers who were killed fighting for the state of Israel. In light of the previous two models might it be possible to propose that it be dedicated to all the casualties of this process? For me, the lesson of this liturgical cycle is profound. It teaches me that the celebration of redemption and the sadness over the process do not cancel each other out. Too often we are tempted by the choice between ignoring the victims and denigrating the achievement. This liturgical cycle teaches me to celebrate redemption but to stop to think about the process and the victims before that. (Ebn Leader)