

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Rosh Hashana 16 - 22

Week of 7 - 13 Av 5759 / 20 - 26 July 1999
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Happy Birthday World

"Today is the birthday of the world" say Jews in their synagogues on Rosh Hashana after hearing the shofar. What exactly do we mean by "birthday of the world?"

There are four different times of heavenly judgment during the year, says the mishna. On Pesach judgment is passed on the fate of grain, on Shavuot wheat and fruit, on Succot rainfall and on Rosh Hashana mankind.

The timing for the first three judgments is readily understandable. Pesach Shavuot and Succot are all critical times agriculturally, and Heavenly judgment therefore relates to that crop, or nutrients associated with that part of the year. But what does the first day of Tishrei, Rosh Hashana, have to do with judgment of man more than any other date?

Rabbeinu Nissim (Ran) cites a midrash which supplies the answer. The world was created, says Rabbi Eliezer (Rosh Hashana 10b), in Tishrei. The first day of creation, says the midrash, was really on the 25th day of Elul, so that the first of Tishrei — the sixth day of creation — was when man was created. Since the purpose of creation was man, we equate his birthday with the birthday of the world.

The midrash goes on to describe the hour by hour creation of man and his first day of life. The first seven hours of that day were spent on planning and implementing man's creation. In the eighth hour he was brought into the Garden of Eden and in the ninth he was commanded to refrain from eating from the Tree of Knowledge. In the tenth hour he sinned and in the eleventh he stood in judgment. In the twelfth hour he was reprieved. Hashem then said to him:

"This will be a sign to your descendants. Just as you stood in judgment before Me on this day and gained a reprieve, so will your descendants stand before Me on this day and be reprieved."

Since all this took place on the first day of Tishrei, this day is the day when all of mankind stands in judgment, praying for a repetition of the original reprieve.

There is even a sign in the stars, adds Ran, to confirm that Tishrei is the month of judgment. The mazal for this month — the Zodiac sign — is moznayim (Libra), a constellation of stars which seem to form a scale. The scale symbolizes justice and communicates that in this month man's merits and shortcomings are weighed on the Heavenly scales.

Rosh Hashana 16a

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Issue #284 - Rosh Hashana 16 - 22

For the week of 7 - 13 Av 5759 / 20 - 26 July 1999 (Parshas Va'etchanan)

Days of Fasting or Days of Joy?

"Thus spoke Hashem," says the Prophet Zecharia (Zecharia 8:19) "the fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth will be for the House of Yehuda holidays of joy and celebration."

"How can the same days be both days of mournful fasting and of joyful celebration?" asks the gemara.

The answer given is that when Jews enjoy peace — when they have the Beit Hamikdash — these days that were fast days after the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash will be days of celebration in which it is forbidden to fast or eulogize. But when they lack that peace — when the second Beit Hamikdash will no longer stand — they will revert to the status of fast days.

This is the biblical and Talmudic background for the four days in the year when Jews fast in mourning for the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. The fast of the fourth month is the 17th of Tammuz when the walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Romans; the fast of the fifth is the 9th of Av when both the first and second Beit Hamikdash were destroyed; the fast of the seventh is the 3rd of Tishrei when the leader of the Jewish remnant in Eretz Yisrael, Gedalia ben Achikam, was assassinated; and the fast of the tenth month is the 10th of Tevet when the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem began.

Maharsha wonders at the gemara's problem with the same date being described both as an occasion for mournful fasting and joyous celebration. Don't they refer to two different stages of history — the exile period of Zecharia when they still fasted for the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash and the joy-inspiring future of a rebuilt Beit Hamikdash?

The explanation is that our Sages were troubled by the implication in the prophet's words that once these days would become days of celebration with the building of the second Beit Hamikdash they would remain so forever. We know that this is not so, because the destruction of that Beit Hamikdash returned these days to the status of fast days. The gemara therefore must resolve this by explaining that mourning or joy was at the outset made conditional on whether there is peace.

But why is the term peace used to describe the existence of the Beit Hamikdash and the lack of peace its destruction? Here the Maharsha calls our attention to the closing words of the above mentioned passage "and you shall love truth and peace." The second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, say our Sages (Mesechta Yoma 9b) because of the sin of unwarranted hatred of one Jew toward another. If there will be peace amongst Jews, says the prophet, there will be a Beit Hamikdash and you will celebrate these days. But if there shall be no such peace, the Beit Hamikdash will be destroyed and they will be days of mournful fasting.

Rosh Hashana 18b

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