

זכריה פרק ח

(יח) ויהי דבר יקוק צבאות אלי לאמר:
(יט) כה אמר יקוק צבאות צום הרביעי וצום החמישי וצום השביעי וצום העשירי יהיה לבית יהודה
לששון ולשמחה ולמעדים טובים והאמת והשלום אהבו: פ

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ראש השנה דף יח. – יט:

משנה

על ששה חדשים השלוחין יוצאין:

על ניסן מפני הפסח; על אב מפני התענית; על אלול מפני ראש השנה; על תשרי מפני תקנת
המועדות; על כסליו מפני חנוכה; ועל אדר מפני הפורים.

וכשהיה בית המקדש קיים - יוצאין אף על אייר מפני פסח קטן.

גמרא

ולيفקו נמי אתמוז וטבת,

דאמר רב חנא בר ביזנא אמר רב שמעון חסידא:

מאי דכתיב "כה אמר ה' צבאות צום הרביעי וצום החמישי וצום השביעי וצום העשירי יהיה

לבית יהודה לששון ולשמחה"? קרי להו צום, וקרי להו ששון ושמחה!?

בזמן שיש שלום - יהיו לששון ולשמחה; אין שלום - צום.!!

אמר רב פפא:

הכי קאמר: בזמן שיש שלום - יהיו לששון ולשמחה; יש שמד - צום; אין שמד ואין שלום - רצו

מתענין, רצו אין מתענין.

אי הכי, תשעה באב נמי!?

אמר רב פפא: שאני תשעה באב, הואיל והוכפלו בו צרות,

...

איתמר:

רב ורבי חנינא אמרי: בטלה מגילת תענית; רבי יוחנן ורבי יהושע בן לוי אמרי: לא בטלה מגילת

תענית.

רב ורבי חנינא אמרי בטלה מגילת תענית - הכי קאמר:

בזמן שיש שלום - יהיו לששון ולשמחה; אין שלום - צום; והנך נמי כי הני.

רבי יוחנן ורבי יהושע בן לוי אמרי לא בטלה מגילת תענית -

הני הוא דתלינהו רחמנא בבנין בית המקדש, אבל הנך, כדקיימי קיימי.

מתלב רב כהנא:

מעשה וגזרו תענית בחנוכה בלוד, וירד רבי אליעזר ורחץ, ורבי יהושע וסיפר, ואמרו להם: צאו והתענו

על מה שהתעניתם.!!

אמר רב יוסף:

שאני חנוכה, דאיכא מצוה.

אמר ליה אביי: ותיבטיל איהי ותיבטל מצותה!?

אלא אמר רב יוסף: שאני חנוכה, דמיפרסם ניסא.

...

תנאי היא, דתניא:

הימים האלו הכתובין במגילת תענית -

בין בזמן שבית המקדש קיים בין בזמן שאין בית המקדש קיים - אסורין, דברי רבי מאיר;

רבי יוסי אומר: בזמן שבית המקדש קיים - אסורין, מפני ששמחה היא להם; אין בית המקדש

קיים - מותרין, מפני שאבל הוא להם.

והלכתא: בטלו; והלכתא: לא בטלו.

קשיא הלכתא אהלכתא!?

לא קשיא - כאן בחנוכה ופורים, כאן בשאר יומי.

רש"י מסכת ראש השנה דף יח עמוד ב

דמפרסם ניסא - כבר הוא גלוי לכל ישראל על ידי שנהגו בו המצות, והחזיקו בו כשל תורה, ולא נכון לבטלו.

Zechariah 8:18-19

The word of Hashem of Hosts came to me as follows:

Thus said Hashem Of Hosts: The fast of the fourth (17 Tammuz), and the fast of the fifth (9 Av), and the fast of the seventh (Tzom Gedalyah), and the fast of the tenth (10 Tevet) will be for the House of Yehudah for celebration and rejoicing and festivals - if you love truth and peace.

Talmud Rosh HaShannah 18a – 19b

Mishnah

The calendar-messengers went out regarding six months:

Nissan because of Pesach; Av because of the fast; Ellul because of Rosh HaShannah; Tishrei to establish the festivals; Kislev because of Channukah; Adar because of Purim.

When the Temple endured – also regarding Iyyar because of the ‘lesser Pesach’.

Talmud

Should not the messengers also have gone out regarding Tammuz and Tevet,
as R. Chana bar Bizna said R. Shimon Chasida:

What does Scripture mean by “Thus said Hashem Of Hosts: The fast of the fourth, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth will be for the House of Yehudah for celebration and rejoicing and festivals”? The days are described as fasts, and also as celebratory and joyous!?

When there is peace – celebration and rejoicing; no peace – fasting. !?

Said R. Pappa:

This is what the verse means: When there is peace – celebration and rejoicing; when there is persecution – fasting; neither peace nor persecution – optional fasting.

If so, 9 Av also (should be optional, and no messengers should have been sent)!

Said Rav Pappa:

9 Av is different, since multiple troubles occurred on it

...

An Amoraic dispute:

Rav and Rabbi Channina say: The Scroll of Fasts is defunct;

Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi say: The Scroll of Fasts is not defunct -

Rav and Rabbi Channina say: The Scroll of Fasts (a Tannaitic calendar of dates on which fasting was mandatory or prohibited) is defunct – they understand the verse as follows: When there is peace – celebration and rejoicing; no peace – fasting; and so too all the other dates mentioned in the Scroll;

Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi say: The Scroll of Fasts is not defunct – Scripture makes only those (4 fasts) depend on the Temple, but the rest stay as they were.

Rav Kehana cited a text as a challenge (to the position that the Scroll is defunct):

This happened: They decreed a fast on Channukah in Lod, but Rabbi Eliezer went down to bathe, and Rabbi Yehoshua has his hair cut, and they said to them: Go fast to atone for having fasted. !?

Said Rav Yosef: Channukah is different, because it has a mitzvah.

Abbayay said to him: Let both it and its mitzvah be nullified?!

Rather said Rav Yosef: Channukkah is different, because its miracle is publicized.

...

This is actually a Tannaitic dispute, as we learned in a beraita:

Those days which are written (as forbidden-to-fast) in the Scroll of Fasts:

Whether the Temple endures, whether not – they are forbidden, in Rabbi Meir’s opinion;

Rabbi Yose said: while the Temple endures – they are forbidden, as they are celebratory; when no Temple – they are permitted, as they are mournful.

The ruling is – they became defunct; and the ruling is – they did not become defunct.

The two rulings contradict!?

There is no difficulty – one refers to Channukah and Purim, the other to the other days.

Rashi

“Because its miracle is publicized” – it is already open to all Israel because they have practiced mitzvot on it, and they have adopted it as if it were Biblical, so it would not be proper to nullify it.

Channukah had a rough ride this year among American Jews, rather than occupying its usual bland niche as the Jewish Winter Festival, and a celebration of religious freedom. NYT columnist David Brooks implicitly drew a challenging analogy between the Maccabees and Al Qaeda (bearded religious zealots fighting a military superpower and modernizing cultural empire), and more people than ever noticed that the miracle of the oil is attested only in the Talmud, not in the liturgy, Josephus, Maccabees, or the surviving manuscripts of Megillat Taanit.

My response to the latter issue was generally as follows: The miracle itself seems insufficient to warrant a permanent 8 day festival; does it compare, for example, to the prophet Elisha's capacity to produce an infinite quantity of oil from one flask? Yet that remarkable feat doesn't even get one day, or even an hour! In other words, the miracle would not have been seen as significant while the Temple stood, and there would have been little point in mentioning it, as the festival clearly related to the Maccabean victory. The really interesting question is not why the miracle was not mentioned earlier, but rather that the festival survived the destruction of the Temple; at that point, a holiday celebrating the restoration of the Temple would have been tragicomic, and so a previously unremarkable miracle was dragged on to center stage to justify its continuation. But this begs the question of why Chazal wanted it to continue.

The Talmud (Rosh HaShannah 18-19) directly raises the question of why Channukah continues, but its answer may differ subtly from my approach. Rav Yosef's is initial understood as arguing that Channukah endured because the ritual of candlelighting was worth sustaining, but Abbayay wonders why it would be worth sustaining a ritual whose purpose was defunct. So Rav Yosef must instead mean that Channukah endured because of "pirsum hanes".

Here it gets tricky – my best recollection is that this is usually presented as "because it is important to publicize the miracle", and this is of course the halakhic rationale for lighting the candles. But Rashi compellingly argues that the Talmud means instead that the miracle had already become so well-known, and the festival commemorating it so popularly entrenched, that Chazal had no choice but to sanction its continuation – and to define it halakhically in terms of the miracle - even though, left to their own devices, they would happily have let it fade away. In other words, Rashi sees the endurance of Channukah as a consequence of a popular attachment to a miracle which the rabbis did not see as overly significant, rather than seeing the focus on the miracle as a rabbinic repurposing of a popular holiday. This particularly undercuts those who wish to depict the rabbis as focusing on, or even inventing, the miracle because they were deeply uncomfortable with the militarism of the holiday as originally conceived. Perhaps it gives unique legitimacy to popular rationales for Channukah even when they seem inconsistent with past explanations, and gives us license as a community to repurpose it again.

But nothing should be done without integrity, and in any case, Mr. Brooks' analogy requires addressing. Standard approaches include attempts to downplay the religious motivation of the Maccabees, seeing them instead as religious moderates with a strong commitment to cultural autonomy, or focusing on the Seleucid decrees as culturally genocidal and therefore justifying extreme responses. Each of these has both historical and ideological merit, but I think they are insufficient.

Rather, I suggest, it is a mistake to believe that people we admire in one context cannot be dangerous in another. As Americans we celebrated the mujahedeen when it was the Soviets they were fighting, and I don't know that we were wrong to do so. A community needs the capacity for zealotry if it is to survive extreme persecution – but it also needs the capacity to control its zealots when circumstances are not extreme. We can celebrate Pinchas while remembering that G-d imposed a brit shalom (covenant of peace) on him immediately after his celebrated act of zealotry.

So Channukah can be a good time to appreciate the good in the zealots among us. Yet the Hasmoneans degenerated rapidly, and rabbinic tradition tellingly sees their fall as resulting from the desire to combine religious and political authority – zealots are particularly susceptible to the temptations of power, and can never be permitted to control the machinery of the state. On Channukah, we should take the time to appreciate those among us with the capacity for zealotry – but also rededicate ourselves to keeping them out of power and subject to communal authority and norms. Zealots, like burning Channukah candles, are sacred but must not be used.