

The Weekly Daf



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Ta'anit 30 – Megilah 6

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Week of 25 Elul 5759 – 2 Tishrei 5760 / 6 – 12 September 1999

Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Day of the Broken Ax

"There were no happier days for Israel than Yom Kippur and the Fifteenth of Av," says the *mishna*. Yom Kippur, comments the *gemara*, is understandably a very special day because it was on that day that Hashem forgave the Jews for the sin of the golden calf, establishing it forever as a Day of Atonement, and the day when the Second Tablets of the Ten Commandments were given to our people. But what is so special about the Fifteenth of Av?

The last of the half-dozen explanations offered is that of the Sage Rabbah and Rabbi Yosef:

On this day each year, the work of cutting wood for use on the altar in the *Beit Hamikdash* came to a halt. The heat of the sun after this day was no longer intense enough to dry the wood, whose dampness not only caused excessive smoke when burned but led to worminess which disqualified the wood for use. For this reason, the day was nicknamed "the day of the broken ax."

The commentaries offer two perspectives as to why the end of the woodcutting season was a cause for celebration.

Nimukei Yosef sees this as an expression of the custom to rejoice in the completion of a mitzvah and to celebrate with a feast and a holiday. This observation is cited by Rema (*Yoreh Deah 246:26*) as a source for the feast in celebration of the completion of a tractate of the Talmud.

Rabbeinu Gershom takes a different view of this mitzvah of cutting wood for the altar. No matter how important it was, it came at the expense of Torah study. Once the season for such efforts was completed, the ones involved could resume full-time Torah study. This was indeed a cause for celebration.

Ta'anit 31a

Remembering the Land

Purim is not celebrated on the same day everywhere. In walled cities, we are told in Megillat Esther, the celebration is on the 15th of Adar, while in cities without walls it is on the 14th.

The reason for this is that in the unwalled cities, the Jews overcame their enemies on the 13th of Adar and celebrated on the 14th, while in the walled capital of Shushan the battle still raged on the 14th, and the Jews there could not celebrate their victory until the 15th. Therefore, all walled cities celebrate Purim on the 15th because of their similarity to Shushan.

The designation "walled city" does not depend on a city's present situation, but rather on whether it had a wall at the time Joshua led the Jewish nation in the conquest of *Eretz Yisrael*. But why is Joshua's time the criterion for the designation "walled city?" Wouldn't it have been more logical to make this determination based on the time of the Purim miracle?

The answer is found in the Jerusalem Talmud where Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi declares that this was done in order to accord honor to *Eretz Yisrael* which lay desolate at the time of the Persian miracle.

Rabbi Nissan ben Reuven (Ran) explains this as follows: At the time of the Purim miracle there were hardly any cities in *Eretz Yisrael* with their walls still intact. Had the determination of "walled city" been made according to the situation at that time, almost all cities in *Eretz Yisrael* would have the status of unwalled cities. To avoid this disgrace, it was decided to base the status "walled city" on the situation of the city at the time of Joshua. This made many more cities in *Eretz Yisrael* eligible for this distinction.

Rabbi Yosef Karo (*Beis Yosef*) has a different approach. Our Sages wanted some memory of *Eretz Yisrael* in the celebration of this miracle which took place in a foreign land. In the spirit of " *zecher lemikdash*" — those laws and customs we follow to recall the *Beit Hamikdash* — the Sages linked the determination of "walled city" to *Eretz Yisrael* so that the Jews living abroad would not forget their holy land.

Megillah 2a

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