

## **Quarantined and Alone, but More Free than Ever Before**

This year's Pesach will definitely look quite different than all the other Pesachs of our lives. While we often complain about all the preparation and hard work that goes into making Pesach, most of the time it is easy to see fruits of our labors when we sit down and enjoy a beautiful Seder with our families. All the tunes, games, voices, customs, and antics are all memories that we cherish and bring warm loving feelings to our hearts. However, this year it seems like these things are being stripped away from us. Our poskim are telling us to spend the Seder without our extended families and without guests. It seems that this year's Seder is something to dread. How can we enjoy the Seder alone? Isn't family and guests such integral parts of the Seder that not having them challenges whether we can even call this a proper Seder? And even more fundamentally, how can we truly feel free when it seems we are being locked up into our houses without our loved ones?

The truth is, every single Seder, every single year, is met with a dichotomy of freedom and slavery. One of my favorite customs of the Seder is the Ashkenazic practice of eating an egg (usually before Shulchan Orech). The Rema brings down this practice and says the reason for this practice is to remember Tisha B'av. If you do the math, the day of the week that the Seder falls out on is always the same day of the week that Tisha B'av falls out on that year. In order to remember Tisha B'av, we eat an egg, a food that symbolizes morning.

While this rationale behind the minhag certainly makes sense, it still seems a bit out of place. Why is it so important to remember Tisha B'av on the one day of the year in which we are supposed to feel most free? Couldn't we have waited, at least one day, to bring back our misery? Can't we just enjoy our freedom for a few moments before bringing ourselves back to reality?

If you actually think about it, it seems like Judaism is filled with moments that are a mixture of intense happiness and profound sadness at the same time. One of these moments occurred to me just a few weeks ago when I got married. My wedding was definitely the happiest day of my life. It is a moment in which everyone looks

forward to their whole entire lives. The height of the joy of a wedding occurs when the Chosson and Kallah stand under the Chuppah and actually halachically get married to each other. Standing under a beautiful Chuppah with transcendent music in the background, the Chosson and Kallah and their family and friends are filled with overwhelming joy. The moment could not get any sweeter. Yet, before the Chuppah even ends we have a custom that the Chosson breaks a glass and dons ashes on his forehead in order to remember the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. Really? At that exact moment we have to interrupt our immense joy and think of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash? We can't wait just a few moments until the Chuppah is over? Is the three weeks in the summer that we dedicate to mourning the Temple not enough for us? While the standard explanation is that we mourn specifically at the times of our greatest joy to show that our joy is not complete due to the fact that we do not have a Beis HaMikdash (אם לא אעלה את ירושלים על ראשי שמתחתי), perhaps there is a deeper meaning to the sandwiching of happiness and destruction.

To answer these questions we have to go back in time to the actual destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. Right before the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, Yirmiyahu prophesized to Bnei Yisrael about Hashem's unbreakable love for the Jewish people. His words are famous: הֲלֹךְ וְקִרְאתָ בְּאָזְנֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר כִּי אָמַר יְקֻנָּקָה זְכַרְתִּי לְךָ חֶסֶד גִּדְּוָה וְעִירֶיךָ אֶהְבֵּת כְּלוּלֶתֶיךָ לְכַתֵּךְ אֶחָרֵי בְּמִדְבָּר בְּאַרְצוֹ לֹא זָרְעָה *Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.* In perhaps the saddest moment in our history, when the holy Beis Hamikdash was about to be destroyed, it would seem that the last thing to do would be to reminisce about the good old days! Wasn't Hashem angry at us? Why, specifically then, did Hashem decide to praise us for following Him in a barren desert?

Rav Avraham Tzvi Kluger (בני בכורי ישראל ח"א עמ' קכו) answers something beautiful. Hashem specifically wanted to reminisce and praise Bnei Yisrael about their days in the desert right before destroying the Beis Hamikdash in order to

show us that His great love for us. If Hashem destroyed the Beis Hamikdash without sharing with us His thoughts about us we would have thought that Hashem hates us and is just giving us a cruel punishment. However, Hashem specifically did it in the context of expressing His love to us to show us that even the destruction is done out of love. It is not a cruel punishment; rather it is an act necessary for our own benefit, done out of love.

Perhaps we can suggest that this is why a Chosson and Kallah must remember the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash specifically during the happiest moment of their lives. The point is not just to remember that their happiness is incomplete, but rather perhaps it is the only time in their lives in which they can actually understand the Churban. It is only at this time, in which they feel a tremendous sense of closeness and love towards Hashem, that they can realize that the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash was done too out of love. If they didn't remember the Beis Hamikdash at this point in their lives, they would forever lack the clarity and perspective that the destruction was done out of Hashem's great love for us.

Rav Kluger says this is the reason we eat an egg and mourn the Beis Hamikdash on Seder night. It is not a random coincidence that Tisha B'av always falls out the same day as the Seder. It occurs this way to impart with us the message that the mourning of Tisha B'av is only properly understood in the context of Seder night. Only when we feel truly free and loved by Hashem, can we properly understand that the destruction was also done out of love.

This same idea can be applied to our unique situation this year as well. Pesach and the Seder are supposed to be nights of exalted freedom and Ahavas Hashem, love of Hashem. Despite all the challenges that this year's circumstances bring, our avodah, our task, is to not lose sight of what the Seder is all about. A chosson and Kallah, although temporarily saddened when mourning the Beis Hamikdash, are able to remain besimcha because of the magnitude and overwhelming feeling of love they experience. On the contrary, their happiness is able to shed a true light on their mourning. Similarly, our eating the egg and remembering the beis hamikdash

on Seder night does not ruin our feelings of freedom but rather enhances our deep feeling of love for Hashem. This year, when we sit at our Seder, perhaps alone and saddened by the circumstances surrounding us, we must try our hardest to synthesize those feelings with the joy and freedom that the Seder can give us. Although it is not easy, let us take upon ourselves this challenge to turn a situation of darkness and enslavement to one where we can view these challenges in the light of the freedom of Pesach.