

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Pesachim 107-113

Week of 12 - 18 Kislev 5759 / 1 - 7 December 1998
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Feminine Equality

Women are generally exempt from fulfilling mitzvos asei (positive commandments) which are time oriented, such as hearing the shofar, sitting in the succah and shaking the lulav. However, there are a few exceptions. One is the obligation to drink four cups of wine on the eve of Pesach.

The explanation offered by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi for obligating women in this mitzvah is the same given for obligating them to hear the Megilla on Purim and to light the menorah on Chanuka — “they too were involved in the miracle.”

What does it mean that “they too were involved in the miracle?”

The Rashbam’s approach is that the women were actually the catalysts of these miracles. Esther was the heroine of Purim, Yehudis of Chanuka and “in the merit of the righteous women of that generation,” say our Sages, “our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt.” (Sota 11b)

Tosefos challenges this approach because the phrase “they too” suggests that they were not the main players. The alternative explanation is that they too were threatened by the dangers preceding those miracles.

But why, asks Tosefos, are women not obligated to sit in the succah? This may not be a problem for the first approach, because we don’t find any heroine playing a role in bringing about the miracle of Divine protection of our ancestors from the harsh climate of the wilderness. It is, however, a problem for the approach of Tosefos, since women too were affected by the wilderness climate and benefited as much as the men.

In regard to a Torah command which is time oriented, Tosefos explains, women are exempt even if they benefited from the miracle associated with it. Only regarding Rabbinic mitzvos — such as Megilla, Chanuka and the four cups of wine — did the Sages obligate women because “they too” were saved by the miracle.

Pesachim 108b

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

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A Watched Night

“Leil shimurim — a watched night” is the way the Torah (Shmos 12:42) describes the eve of Pesach.

In his commentary on Chumash, Rashi explains that it is called a “watched night for Hashem,” because He had long watched and waited for the time to come to fulfill His promise to Avraham to redeem his descendants from Egyptian bondage.

But Rabbi Nachman in our section of the gemara applies the term in a different way — it is a night when we are watched by Hashem and need not fear the mysterious forces which threaten us at other times.

Maharsha explains that the first part of the passage which speaks of a “watched night for Hashem” indeed refers to Hashem’s watching for the moment of redemption. But the passage concludes with the words “watched for all the Children of Israel throughout their generations.” This watching refers first of all to the watching that Hashem did over the Jewish homes when He slaughtered the Egyptian firstborn on the eve of the Exodus and ensured that “the plague will not strike you” (Shmos 12:13). The additional term “throughout their generations” extends this guarantee of Divine protection to every Pesach throughout history.

We have two familiar customs to remind us of the fact that it is a “watched night.” One is opening the door during the Pesach seder to indicate that we have nothing to fear. The other is the deletion of the special psalms we usually recite at the bedtime shema, whose purpose is to ward off the mysterious evil spirits which threaten one who sleeps.

It was a “watched night” for Hashem before the Exodus. It was a “watched night” for our ancestors at the time of the Exodus. And it remains a “watched night” for us every year that we remember and celebrate the Exodus.

Pesachim 109b

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