

"THE GLORY OF THIS LAST HOUSE": *Hershel Schachter*

Purim and Chanukkah as Harbingers of Redemption

From its inception, the second Beith HaMikdash was doomed; King Shelomoh had prophesied it. His fellow prophets hinted at the spiritual diminution of the second Temple, which lacked many features of the first. Yet these prophets enthused that the second Beith HaMikdash would surpass its predecessor. How did the second-Temple era — with its widespread corruption and lack of Jewish sovereignty — allow for shimmering prophecies? In formulating his answer, the author illuminates the second-Temple prophecies of Chaggai, Zecharyah, and Malachi and explores the Halachic basis of rabbinic holidays.

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Hershel Schachter

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1. INTRODUCTION: PROBLEMATIC PRECEDENTS

Rav and R. Chanina said, "*Megillath Ta'anith* [a scroll listing days on which the Sages forbade fasting due to miracles that occurred thereon] has been annulled."

R. Yochanan and R. Yeshoshua b. Levi said, "*Megillath Ta'anith* has not been annulled...."

It is a tannaitic dispute [predating the aforementioned *amora'im*]. For it has been taught in a *baraita*:

"These days recorded in *Megillath Ta'anith* are forbidden [for fasting], whether at a time when the Beith HaMikdash stands or at a time when the Beith HaMikdash does not stand." These are the words of R. Meir. R. Yose says, "At a time when the Beith HaMikdash stands, they are forbidden, because it is a joy for [Yisra'el]. When the Beith HaMikdash does not stand, they are permitted [for fasting], because it is [cause for] mourning for [Yisra'el]." ... Here [the ruling that *Megillath Ta'anith* is not annulled refers to Chanukkah and Purim. Here [the ruling that *Megillath Ta'anith* is annulled refers] to the other days [listed in *Megillath Ta'anith*].

(*Rosh HaShanah* 18b, 19b)

Given the destruction of the Beith HaMikdash, Chazal cancelled all the holidays listed in *Megillath Ta'anith* except Chanukkah and Purim.¹ Let us clarify the retention of these two festivals.

2. BAL TOSIF

We begin by quoting from Zechariah:

...when you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh [months]² during these seventy years did you fast unto Me [did I command you to fast (Mahari Kra)]?

(ibid 7:5)

Thus says the G-d of Hosts:

The fast of the fourth [month]³ and the fast of the fifth And the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth⁴ Shall be to the house of Yehudah for joy and gladness....

(ibid. 8:18-19)

In the first passage, Zechariah alludes to voluntary days of lament; in the second, he speaks of fasts and times of "joy and gladness" (ibid). According to Chazal, these three references imply three categories of observance:

- 1) With the rebuilding of the Beith HaMikdash, previous fast days are to be celebrated.
- 2) When the Beith HaMikdash does not stand and harsh, evil decrees afflict Yisra'el, fasting on these days is mandatory.
- 3) When there is no Beith HaMikdash, yet Yisra'el enjoys relative tranquility in exile, fasting is optional.⁵

Zechariah effectively established new holidays for the Temple era (category 1). Yet G-d enjoins us, "Do not add on to the word that I command you ..." (Devarim 4:2). Why does this injunction — known as *bal tosif* — not apply here?⁶

Temple Celebrations

At that time,

Shelomoh made the fest [inaugurating the Beith HaMikdash], seven days and seven days, [totaling] fourteen days

(Melachim I 8:65)

Said R. Parnech in the name of R. Yochanan: That year Yisra'el did not observe Yom Kippur [for it fell during the seven-day Temple celebration], and [the Jews] worried and said: "Perhaps 'the enemies of Yisra'el' [a euphemism for the Jews] deserve destruction." A Heavenly voice came forth and said to them: "You are all destined for life in the World to Come."

How did they derive [that the Temple dedication overrode Yom Kippur]? Now if, regarding the Mishkan — whose sanctity was not a permanent sanctity⁷ and whose dedicatory sacrifice was private [brought by the tribal leaders]⁸ — [its inauguration] took precedence over Shabbath, transgression of which is punishable by stoning, is it not all the more true that, concerning the Beith HaMikdash — whose sanctity is an everlasting sanctity and [whose dedicatory] sacrifice was public — [its inauguration] would take precedence over Yom Kippur, transgression of which is punishable only by excision?^{9, 10}

(*Mo'ed Katan* 9a)

Had the dedication of the Mishkan stemmed only from a one-time decree (*hora'ath sha'ah*), it could not have served as the *a fortiori* basis of another *halachah*. Rather, this inauguration set a Biblical precedent: We must celebrate the dedication of any Beith HaMikdash, even at the expense of Yom Kippur. The consecration of the second Temple was likewise a festive occasion, as will be the third Temple's dedication.¹¹

Zechariah expanded this principle. Although the Torah requires that we celebrate only the dedication of the Beith HaMikdash, subsequent commemoration of the event is not subject to *bal tosif*. The Torah credits those who engage in such festivity, though it is not obligatory. It therefore constitutes a *kiyyum* as opposed to a *chiyyuv*. Indeed, the fasts themselves are simply a corollary of this *kiyyum*: Just as we celebrate the construction, we mourn the destruction.

Megillath Ta'anith

The essence of *Megillath Ta'anith* must be viewed from this perspective. All the holidays recorded therein celebrate the Beith HaMikdash: its dedication, its consolidation (or that of the Temple service), or its protection from enemies.¹² Thus, upon the loss of the Temple, *Megillath Ta'anith* was annulled.

According to the Halachic guidelines established by Zechariah, Yisra'el was no longer to rejoice over the Beith HaMikdash but to mourn it.

(Furthermore, this annulment precludes any new holidays. For all such occasions, in order to circumvent *bal tosif*, would have to celebrate the Temple,¹³ which is impossible in its absence.)

How, then, have Chanukkah and Purim survived? In fact, how was exile-oriented Purim ever established?¹⁴

3. "THE GLORY OF THIS LAST HOUSE"

Spiritual Diminution

From its inception, Chazal knew the second Beith HaMikdash would be destroyed. King Shelomoh had prophesied it:

If she is a wall we shall build upon her a silver crown; and if she is a door, we shall fashion upon her a cedar panel.

(Shir HaShirim 8:9)

Had you made yourselves like a wall and all ascended in Ezra's days, you would have been depicted as silver, which decay does not affect. Now that you have ascended like doors, you have been depicted as cedar, which decay affects.

(Yoma 9b)

Had Yisra'el returned to Eretz Yisra'el en masse with Ezra,¹⁵ the second Temple would never have "decayed."¹⁶ But since it was as if one door were closed, allowing only a trickle of Jews into the Land of Yisra'el,¹⁷ the Beith HaMikdash was to deteriorate physically and spiritually, leading to its ruin and the absence of prophecy. Indeed, Malachi (whom Chazal identify as Ezra)¹⁸ realizes he will be the last prophet until Mashiach:

Remember the Torah of My servant Mosheh, which I commanded him in Chorev for all Yisra'el, statutes and ordinances. Behold, I send you Eliyyah the prophet Before the coming of the great and awesome day of G-d.

(Malachi 3:22:23)

In the second-Temple era, prophecy was apparently intended only to encourage the rebuilding of the Beith HaMikdash¹⁹ and — according to some — determine the site of the altar.²⁰ Once these goals were accomplished, prophecy ceased. According to Chazal, Chaggai predicted this cessation:

[Says G-d:] To up to the mountain, and bring wood and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it and be glorified through it.

(Chaggai 1:8)

ואכבד (and [I will] be glorified through it) lacks a final ה, alluding to the fact that the second Temple lacked five (the numerical value of ה) features of the first: the ark, the heavenly fire, the Shechinah, the prophetic holy spirit, and the Urim and Tummim.²¹

The spiritually diminished second Beith HaMikdash immensely disappointed those who had beheld the splendor of the first:

Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory, and how do you see it now? is it not as nought in your eyes?

(ibid. 2:3)

Nevertheless, the prophet promises:

The glory of this latter house shall be greater than [that of] the former, says G-d of Hosts....

(ibid. 2:9)

With the second Temple lacking so much, how could its glory exceed its predecessor's? The Talmud notes that the second Beith HaMikdash surpassed the first in longevity (420 years, versus the first Temple's 410) or height.²² Yet Rashi associates the second Temple's superiority with "the miracles performed for the children of Chashmonai" (com. on ibid. 2:6, On ibid. 2:6, ד"ה ואני מרעיש), referring to the Chanukkah miracle.²³ How did this miracle alone render the second Temple more spiritually glorious than the first?

The answer lies in the *haftarah* of Shabbath Chanukkah:

...behold a *menorah* all of gold and a bowl upon the top of it, and seven lamps upon it and seven and seven tubes for the lamps that were upon the top of it. And two olive trees upon it, one upon the right of the bowl and one upon its left. I answered [and] said to the angel talking with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?" ...

He answered [and] said to me, saying, "This is the word of G-d to Zerubbavel, saying: Not by might and not by power but by My spirit, says G-d of Hosts." ...I answered a second time [and] said to him, "What are the two olive sheaves that are by the two golden spouts emptying the golden [oil] by themselves?" ...

He said, "These are the two of the oil, which stand by the L-rd of the whole earth."

(Zechariah 4:2-4, 6, 12, 14)

The angel explains that the tubes transfer oil from the trees to the *menorah* automatically, without human involvement. So, too, the Beith HaMikdash will be built by divine spirit, not human agency.

"But why *two* olive trees?" queries the prophet. Couldn't just one convey this message?

"These are the two of the oil ..." (ibid. 4:14), the angel responds, referring to the monarchy and the high priesthood²⁴ (both of which employ anointment) and foreseeing glory for these institutions.

Surely the prophet is bewildered. Like his contemporaries, Chaggai and Malachi, Zechariah anticipates no great glory for the monarchy, for the Jews lacked independence for much of the second-Temple era. As for the high priesthood, it changed hands more than 300 times in 420 years, as priest after priest attained his position via corruption and died as a result.²⁵ Undoubtedly, when the prophet asks, "What are these?" (ibid 4:4), he seeks to reconcile his vision with reality. How does the dismal second-Temple era allow for shimmering prophecies?

Sanctity: Eternal versus Temporal

The Talmud differentiates between the Jewish nation's first and second entries into Eretz Yisra'el, each of which "sanctified" the land.²⁶ Regarding the first sanctification, once Yisra'el was exiled, the land's sanctity lapsed.²⁷ Following the second sanctification, however, the sanctity remained despite the second Temple's destruction and Yisra'el's exile.²⁸

Rambam attributes this distinction to two diverse modes of sanctification. Yehoshua's generation *conquered* Eretz Yisra'el, while Ezra's acquired it by "*chazakah*" (uncontested possession) after the Persian Empire permitted the Jews to return to their land and rebuild the Beith HaMikdash.²⁹ Conquest can be voided by reconquest. *Chazakah* cannot.

This idea, R. Yitzchak Ze'ev HaLevi Soloveitchik (Geriz) suggests, underlies the angel's response to Zechariah:³⁰

Not by might and not by power but by My spirit, says G-d of Hosts.

(ibid. 4:6)

The second-Temple era, declares the angel, shall be inaugurated not by the might of conquest but by divine inspiration, which moved the Persians to authorize the Jews' return. This Temple era's sanctity shall therefore endure forever, paving the way for the unparalleled glory of the third Beith HaMikdash.

Zechariah envisions the priestly and monarchial grandeur of the *third*-Temple period. The last prophets of Yisra'el incessantly encouraged the building of the second Beith HaMikdash not merely for its own sake but for its eternal significance. According to Geriz, Zechariah even calls the cornerstone of this Beith HaMikdash "the primary stone" (ibid. 4:7), because it established the Temple site's eternal sanctity.

Hence the literal translation of Chaggai's prophecy:

The glory of this *last* house shall be greater than [that of] the *first*...

(Chaggai 2:9)

Though ostensibly extolling the second Temple, the prophet terms it the *last* house, not the second. The greater glory of this Beith HaMikdash consisted of its unbroken sanctity, upon which the last Temple will eventually be founded.

4. CONCLUSION: HARBINGERS OF REDEMPTION

Purim and Chanukkah are celebrated today because, unlike the other holidays listed in *Megillath Ta'anith*, they herald redemption.

Occurring at the close of the seventy-year Babylonian-Persian exile, the Purim miracle signaled upcoming salvation.³¹ Indeed, Daryavesh, the benevolent Persian king who allowed Nechemyah to complete the second Temple, was — according to some — Queen Ester's son by Achashverosh.³²

If Purim simply commemorated a miracle, it would be subject to the prohibition of *bal tosif*. Instead, this holiday celebrates the imminent building of the second Temple,³³ which sanctified the third. Therefore, even the destruction of the Beith HaMikdash has not negated our obligation to observe Purim.

Chanukkah also affirms not only the great Chashmonai victory but the centrality of the Temple for posterity. As such, this holiday was not annulled along with *Megillath Ta'anith*. Even in exile, we rejoice over this precursor to the reestablishment of monarchy and priesthood in Yisra'el and the greater glory of the final Beith HaMikdash.³⁴ May it be built speedily in our time.

NOTES

1. Regarding Chanukkah, Rashi explains its retention based on the fact that "It was already well-known to all Yisra'el, because [the Jews] observed the *mitzvot* thereon and upheld it as if it were part of the Torah, [so] it would not have been proper to abolish it" (com. On *Rosh HaShanah* 18b, ד, ה דמפרסם ניסא)

Rashi's comment requires explanation. For the Talmud implies that the days enumerated in *Megillath Ta'anith* were forbidden after the destruction of the Temple. Yet Rashi suggests that Chanukkah endured simply because it was "well-known to all Yisra'el."

For a resolution of this difficulty, see my article "*Be'Inyan Megillath Ta'anith,*" *Or HaMizrach* 23, No. 3 (Nisan 5734), 168-70.

2. *Ed. Note:* the Jews "fasted and mourned in the fifth [month]" (Zechariah 7:5) on Tishah BeAv, when the Beith HaMikdash was destroyed. They did so in the seventh month on the Fast of Gedalyah (3 Tishrei), commemorating the murder of Gedalyah ben Achikam, governor of Yehudah. This tragedy eliminated the possibility of an independent Jewish community in Eretz Yisra'el after the destruction.
3. *Ed. Note:* "The fast of the fourth [month]" (Zechariah 8:18) refers to 17 Tammuz, when the walls of Yerushalayim were breached.
4. *Ed. Note:* "The fast of the tenth" (*ibid.*) is 10 Teveth, when the siege of Yerushalayim began.
5. See *Rosh HaShanah* 19b.

Ed. Note: Jewish life today corresponds to category 3, in which fasting is voluntary. However, since Yisra'el formally accepted the fasts in question, they are no longer optional. (see Ran on *Rosh HaShanah* 18b, citing Ramban.) Nonetheless, because these days are intrinsically voluntary, Yisra'el chose to limit their acceptance (excepting Tishah BeAv [see *Rosh Hashanah* 18b]) by beginning each fast in the morning, not the previous night, and by proscribing only eating and drinking, not the other comforts (wearing leather shoes, etc.) prohibited on the Biblically ordained fast of Yom Kippur. (See Ran *loc. cit.*)

6. "Forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses prophesied for Yisra'el, and they didn't subtract from or add to what was written in the Torah, except for the reading of the *megillah*" (*Megillah* 14a). Rashi explains that the *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukkah candles was no addition, because "... the prophets had already ceased, but in the days of Mordechai, there were Chaggai, Zechariah, and Malachi" (סו. אד לו. , ד"ה חוץ ממקרא מגילה). Rashi assumes that this Talmudic discussion concerns not *bal tosif* — which Chanukkah may indeed contravene — but another ordinance forbidding new *mitzvot*, based on the verse "*These are the commandments...*" (VaYikra 27:34). According to him (based on *Megillah* 2b), this prohibition pertains only to prophetic legislation, not to rabbinic enactment, which *bal tosif* also ignores. Thus, the Talmud challenges only prophetically established Purim, not rabbinically instituted Chanukkah.

Ramban counters that "*These are the commandments ...*" is not an independent injunction. Rather, it places even prophetic innovations within *bal tosif*. In his view, *bal tosif* would invalidate both Purim and Chanukkah if not for their Torah basis, which this essay seeks to formulate.

In contrast, rabbinic legislation that simply protects Torah law does not violate *bal tosif*, since the Torah instructs our sages to establish such safeguards. As it is written, "*Guard My ordinance...*" (*ibid.* 18:30). (See *Yevamoth* 21a; *Yad Hil. Mamrim* 2:9; Rashba on *Rosh Hashanah* 16a; and *Orach Chayyim* 666). Only non-protective innovations like Chanukkah, Purim, and inaugural festivities require Biblical mandates in order not to be subject to *bal tosif*. See *Sukkah* 46a; *Sefath Emeth* *ad loc.*; *Hassagoth HaRamban* on *Sefer HaMitzvot, shoresh* 1; Ramban on *Devarim* 4:2; and *Megillah* 14a.

7. See *Tosafoth, Shevu'oth* 16b, ד"ה קדושתו.
8. See *BeMidbar* 7.
9. *Ed. Note:* *Kareth* (excision) is a lesser penalty than *sekilah* (stoning), because unlike one sentenced to death by the court, one slated for excision may avert this punishment by repenting.
10. *Ed. Note:* In summation, if individuals could violate Shabbath in inaugurating the Mishkan (whose sanctity was temporary), the *nation* could cancel Yom Kippur to dedicate the Beith HaMikdash (whose sanctity is eternal), especially since Shabbath desecration is punished more severely than that of Yom Kippur.

11. *Ed. Note:* See Ezra 6:16-18 concerning the dedication of the second Beith HaMikdash and Yechezkel 45:18 and Malbim ad loc. regarding the prolonged inauguration of the third.
12. The centrality of the Beith HaMikdash in *Megillah Ta'anith* resolves the question asked in *Kedushath Levi*, "*Miketz*," regarding why the *megillah* excludes such miracles as Gidon's triumph in Shofetim 7:19-22.
13. See *Magen Avraham* 686:10 concerning the right to mark communal salvations. Also see *Shuth Chatham Sofer, Orach Chayyim* 191; and *Shuth Avnei Nezer, Orach Chayyim* 515.
14. See *Shuth Chatham Sofer, Orach Chayyim* 191; and *Shuth Avnei Nezer, Orach Chayyim* 515.
15. *Ed. Note:* For another example of a wall signifying mass movement, see *Ketubboth* 111a and Rashi ad loc. Both this *gemara* and Rashi probably base themselves on our *derash*.
16. According to the opinion of *Sefath Emeth* (R. Yehudah A.L. Alter) on *Yoma* 9b (ד"ה כנסף שאין רקב), this decay signifies not only the destruction of the Beith HaMikdash but the absence of prophecy. Rambam (*Sefer HaMitzvoth*, end *shoresh* 14) writes that prophecy will not return until the Messianic era.
17. See Rashi on *Yoma* 9b, ד"ה כדלתות.
18. See *Megillah* 15a. Also see *Targum* on Malachi 1:1.
19. *Ed. Note:* See Radak on Chaggai 1:1. Also see Radak on Zechariah 1:7, where he maintains that Zechariah had trouble interpreting his visions because prophecy was weak during this period. Commenting on *ibid.* 1:18, however, R. Yitchak Abarbanel attributes the prophet's confusion to the depth of his prophecies. This essay counters that Zecharya's difficulties stemmed from not knowing whether his visions referred to the second Temple or the third. The author has suggested this interpretation in lectures.
20. See *Chiddushei HaGeriz* on *Zevachim* 62a.
21. *Ed. Note:* See *Yoma* 21b. Also see *Tosafoth* ad loc., ד"ה ואורים ותמים, which suggests that the Urim and Tummim did exist in the second Temple. (Otherwise, the *Kohen gadol* would have lacked his breastplate, without which he could not have officiated.) They were absent only in that they did not respond prophetically to inquiries.
22. See *Babba Bathra* 3a-b and Rashi ad loc., ד"ה בבנין.
23. *Ed. Note:* Also see Rashi on *Sanhedrin* 97b, ד"ה עור אחת מעם היא.
24. *Ed. Note:* See Mahari Kra and Radak on Zechariah 4:14.
25. See *Yoma* 9a.
26. *Ed. Note:* This sanctity expresses itself through the manifold *halachoth* unique to Eretz Yisra'el, such as the obligation to tithe its produce.
27. *Ed. Note:* See *Megillah* 10a and *Zevachim* 116b.
28. See *Zevachim* 116b.
29. See *Yad Hil. Beith HaBechirah* 6:17.
30. See *Chiddushei HaGeriz Al HaTorah MiPi HaShemu'ah*, sec. 121 (p. 71).

31. *Ed. Note:* See R. Ya'akov of Lisa, *Megillath Setarim* on Ester 9:19.

According to *Megillah* 11b, the parties hosted by Achashverosh early in Megillath Ester celebrated the fact that — according to his calculations — the seventy years prophetically allotted for Babylonian-Persian exile had ended, yet Yisra'el's redemption (prophesied in Yirmeyahu 29 and Daniyyel 9) had not materialized. In this spirit, he served his guests using the vessels of eh Beith HaMikdash, thereby urging Yisra'el to despair of redemption and cast its lot with Persia. The Purim miracle restored the Jews' faith in G-d's role in their history, including their imminent redemption, which would lead to a rebuilt Beith HaMikdash. Also see *Sefath Emeth Al HaTorah*, "Chanukkah," 5644, ד"ה בענין קריאת, which suggests that the building of the Temple blesses both past and future and that, even prior to its construction, Yisra'el basked in its light.

32. See Rashi on Chaggai 1:1 and Malbim on Nechemyah 2:6.

33. *Ed. Note:* *Shabbath* 88a maintains that Yisra'el reembraced the Torah in the days of Achashverosh. Ramban comments ad loc. that Chazal here refer not to the Purim period but to the days of Era and the return to Eretz Yisra'el. The commentary seemingly views that return as the culmination of the Purim miracle.

34. According to Chassidic thought, "...I have prepared a light for My anointed" (Tehillim 132:17) refers to Chanukkah's role in ushering in the Messianic era. (See *Me'or Einayim*, "MiKetz," ד"ה זמן שיעור). Cf. Rashi on Zecharyah 4:3, where he contends that the prophet's vision of the *menorah* points to the great light of the ultimate redemption.