Permission to Celebrate

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 20b) cites a Beraita that describes a series of three mitzvot which must be accomplished in a specific sequence. First, a Jewish government must be established in Eretz Yisrael, which then organizes a Jewish army. Then, that army must wage war against Amalek and eradicate it. After completion of the first two introductory steps in the Geula process, labeled achatalta deGeula, there is a mitzvah to build a Beit HaMikdash and offer korbanot, which is synonymous with Geula itself. Commenting on the passuk, "These are the commandments" (Vayikra 27:34), Chazal derive the principle, אֵין נָבִיא רַשַּׁאי לְחַדֵּשׁ דָּבָר מֵעַתָּה – “a Navi is not permitted to introduce anything new from now on” (Megillah 2b). This prohibition includes the establishment and observance of additional rabbinic Yamim Tovim if they are meant to be celebrated by all Jews all over the world. Such a practice would be a violation of bal tosif, adding on to the mitzvot of the Torah.¹ The only exception to this rule seems to be a Yom Tov related to geula, defined as hasharaat haShechina in the Beit HaMikdash. This is based on the idea the Ramban develops in his commentary to the Torah (Bamidbar 7:13-17) and in his Hasagot to Sefer HaMitzvot (shoresh shlishi, s.v. aval), that there is a mitzvah to celebrate the building of a Beit HaMikdash.

The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 18b- 19b) discusses MegillatTa'anit, a scroll that lists many Yom Tov days added by the Chachamim of the Second Beit HaMikdash period, on which fasting, and on some, eulogizing, were prohibited. The Gemara explains that the days listed all revolved about protecting or fortifying the Beit HaMikdash, the avodah therein, or its institutions, such as the Sanhedrin and the Kehuna. These days of Yom Tov could be established without being considered a violation of bal tosif because they are subsumed under the mitzvah the Ramban discussed – to celebrate the building of the Beit HaMikdash.

The Netivot, in his commentary to Megillat Esther (Megillat Setarim 9:19), wonders how the Chachamim were justified in adding the Yom Tov of Purim, since, according to Talmudic tradition, the miracle of Purim occurred prior to the Second Beit HaMikdash period. It must be, the Netivot explains, that the Chachamim felt that the miracle of Purim would in some way serve as an achatalta deGeula, leading to the building of the Second Beit HaMikdash. He suggests (as does the Sfat Emet, Purim 5643) that they may have felt this way because the destruction of the descendants of Amalek, the stage immediately prior to the building of the Beit HaMikdash, was accomplished through the execution of Haman and his sons.

It is interesting that the Netivot assumes it was permissible for the Rabbanim to establish a Yom Tov merely because they thought it represented an achatalta deGeula, even though their conclusion was not reached through ruach haKodesh. Indeed, the Netivot argues that at a later time, the Rabbanim revised their original assessment, concluding it was erroneous. We see that the determination of whether a historical event is to be judged as an achatalta deGeula does not require a Navi or ruach haKodesh, but only that the event be one that possesses a reasonable probability of bringing a future geula.

We may add that the Purim miracle did, in the end, enable the building of the Second Beit HaMikdash. From a political perspective, the Persian King, Daryavesh (Darius, son of Esther and Ahashverosh), granted permission to continue the building of the Beit HaMikdash. Moreover, from a religious perspective, the renewed acceptance of Torah SheBe'Al Peh engendered by the Purim miracle was a necessary prerequisite for Ezra’s entry into Eretz Yisrael and the geula, the building of the Second Beit HaMikdash (Sfat Emet, Purim 5638).

Thus, in addition to the Yamim Tovim that appear in the Torah, we are able to institute additional Yamim Tovim that conform to the above-mentioned rules and regulations of Megillat Ta'anit. An event labeled as achatalta deGeula would fit within those rules because such an event is related to the future building of the Beit HaMikdash. If the event signifies one of the steps in the three-step process that will lead to the building of the Beit HaMikdash, it may be celebrated as an achatalta deGeula.

¹ See Pri Chadash, Orach Chaim 496:14, Yoreh De’ah 233 and Orach Chaim 191.

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