POST 9 AB: The delicate balance between mourning and celebration

After the destruction of the Second Temple, year 68 of the common era, a new and more difficult situation started for the people of Israel. It seemed that after the defeat of the Jewish uprising, the killing of a third of the Jewish population, the exile of another third of the population and the loss of the independent Jewish State, it would no longer be possible to continue living in a normal way. Now the Jews who remained in Israel were, by force, "tolerated" subjects of the Roman Empire. The morale was down and people were in despair, because it seemed that without the Bet HaMiqdash, a Jewish religious life no longer made any sense. Many Jews chose to become ascetics (*parushim*) that is, they deprived themselves of physical pleasure or joy, including eating certain foods which were associated with the service in the Temple.

The Talmud (Baba Batra 60b) records the following story:

"*When the Temple was destroyed, many Jews began to live as ascetics, and they no longer ate meat or drank wine. Ribbi Yehoshua told them, 'My children, why do not you eat meat or drink wine? They answered: How are we going to eat meat, that used to be brought as an offering on the altar, now that the altar is in ruins? How are we going to drink wine, which used to be poured as a libation on the altar, now that the altar is in ruins? He said to them: If so, let us not eat any more bread, because the offering of bread (lehem hapanim) has also been interrupted. They said: [You are right, we are not going to eat anymore bread, and from now on] we will consume only fruits!' But you should not eat fruit either! Ribbi Yehoshua told them, because the first fruits (Bikurim) are no longer*

offered without the Bet haMiqdash. Then, they said, we will eat only vegetables and legumes. And Ribbi Yehoshua said, well, you should not drink water anymore, because the water libation ceremony (nisukh hamayim) has also been discontinued. At this point the ascetics did not find any answer so Ribbi Yehoshua said to them: 'My children, listen to me, not mourning at all for our Bet haMiqdash, is impossible, but too much crying is also not possible, because [although a few individuals like you can live a life of deprivation] these restrictions cannot be imposed on most people. Average people will not be able to follow them. Rabbi Yehoshua then explained that we cannot allow our great pain for the destruction of our Temple to produce a permanent and eternal state of mourning and national depression. We need to find the delicate balance between national mourning and personal joy. And for that we will establish some symbolic acts to remind ourselves of the destruction of the Bet haMiqdash at moments of personal celebration. And in this way, while our Temple is in ruins, our joy will not be complete.

It was then that the Rabbis established, for example, that to remember the destruction of the Temple, a groom would place ashes on his head on the day of his wedding as a sign of mourning. In the same way, it was established that when a celebratory meal is prepared, a one food should be left out, in memory of the destruction of the Temple.

In the following days we will explain some of the customs that we have adopted to remember our Bet haMiqdash, until it is rebuilt.