



Firstborn Fast or Feast

We know that on Erev Pesach, there is a Taanis Bechorim because the Jewish firstborns were saved from Makkas Bechoros – זכר לנס שנצולו (Tur, Orach Chaim, 470).

1) R' Yosef Salant in his Be'er Yosef is bothered why a Bechor nowadays fasts since it should be the descendants of those Bechorim who fast, not other Bechorim who descended from people who weren't Bechorim at the time of Makkas Bechoros? Future Bechorim wouldn't have been affected by the fact that the Bechorim were spared unless their ancestors were Bechorim at the time of Makkas Bechoros. Furthermore, those who are descendants of those Bechorim may not be fasting (if they are not Bechorim)?

2) If the purpose of a fast is to publicize the miracle of the firstborns being saved, then why do we fast? It should be done in a happy way, just as we see with other miracles which are commemorated with a Seuda.

3) R' Shlomo Zalman Aurbach asks that if we fast because the Jewish firstborns were saved from Makkas Bechoros, then why do we fast on Erev Pesach, the 14th of Nissan? Makkas Bechoros occurred on the 15th of Nissan, the first night of Pesach (Cited in Sefer Taanis Bechorim, p. 22. The reason we commemorate it on the 14th can't merely be because the 15th is Yom Tov causing them to move it to the 14th because then the fast should

have been moved to the 13th, since the 14th of Nissan is also somewhat of a Yom Tov, as it is Erev Yom Tov and the day that the Korban Pesach was brought. There are even restrictions against doing various forms of Melacha on the 14th. Furthermore, when Purim is on Sunday, Taanis Esther is moved back to Thursday and not to Friday [Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 686:2] and when Erev Pesach comes out on Shabbos, Taanis Bechorim is moved back to Thursday [470:2]. The Aruch Hashulchan [470:4] and Mishna Brura [470:6] explain that the reason Taanis Bechorim is shifted back to Thursday instead of Friday is because since it's anyway not in the proper time, it is preferable to distance it from Shabbos so that the Bechorim don't enter into Shabbos while fasting. Based on that, if Erev Pesach isn't the real time for the fast, it would seem inappropriate to reschedule the fast to Erev Pesach thereby causing the Bechorim to enter into Pesach while fasting.)

Taanis Bechorim is not to publicize the miracle of being saved rather it's a commemoration (זכר). This is just like we see with Taanis Esther where we fast as it is a commemoration to the original fast—since they fasted, we fast. The Zichron Yehuda (volume 1, 133. This was authored by R' Yehuda Greenwald (1845-1920), who was a student of the Kesav Sofer. He became the Rav of the city of Satmar.) says the same is by Taanis Bechorim as the Jewish Bechorim by Makkas Bechoros fasted because they knew the Bechorim

were in danger. That is, despite a divine guarantee of safety against Makkas Bechoros. This is because in a time of trouble, one needs heavenly mercy (This can be because of שמא יגרום החטא (Sanhedrin 98b), where if someone sins, then the promise may be annulled.)

The Jewish firstborns surely fasted to be saved, although they were promised since they needed heavenly mercy. Rabbeinu Yonah (Mesachta Brachos, first chapter, s.v. ואע"ג writes that when Hashem was ready to destroy Mitzrayim, the Jews were in fear and davened to Hashem that He should fulfill what He said—that the plague of Makkas Bechoros not affect them—because the way of Tzadikim is not to be confident with their righteousness, because שמא יגרום החטא. If the Bechorim davened, then they fasted, as the two go together as in דברי הצומות וועקת ם, the matter of the fasts and their lamentations (Esther 9:31). Therefore, we too today fast as a commemoration to the firstborns fasting in Mitzrayim (See the Tur, Orach Chaim, 686. When the Tur says זכר לנס שנצולו, it can be understood as, we fast as a commemoration to what brought the miracle—Tefila and fasting—and not that it is to publicize the miracle.). Consequently, we don't make it a Simcha rather a fast since that is what it is a commemoration for. With this we can explain why Taanis Bechorim is on the 14th although Makkas Bechoros was on the 15th at night—because the Jews fasted on the 14th.

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