

# Happiness to Go: A Spiritual Plan

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Every holiday taps into a certain power that is relevant throughout the year—not just relevant to the days of the holiday itself. In this article we will see that there are five components to the joy of the holiday of *Sukkos*<sup>5</sup>. These are really 5 distinct steps of joy. The pattern is reminiscent of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs<sup>6</sup> where each step builds upon the next, and the pinnacle is a spiritual component of self actualization. Once internalized over the holiday of *Sukkos*, these lessons may be helpful in the cold winter months ahead as well.

## Step 1: Thoughtful Joy

At first glance, the Talmud's dictate to fulfill the obligation to be joyous on *Yom Tov* seems simplistic.

*A person is required to make his children and the members of his household happy on the Regal, as it says "You shall rejoice on your festival" (Devarim 16:14). With what should you make them happy? With wine. R. Yehuda says, with men (you should make happy) with what is appropriate for them and with women with what is appropriate for them.*

**Pesachim 109a**

תנו רבנן: חייב אדם לשמח בניו  
ובני ביתו ברגל, שנאמר (דברים  
טז:יד) ושמחת בחגך, במה משמחם  
- ביין. רבי יהודה אומר: אנשים  
בראוי להם, ונשים בראוי להן.  
**פסחים דף קט.**

<sup>5</sup> The structure of this article was inspired by a dramatic Sicha delivered by Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro z"l (circa 2002 and recorded by his students in *Zehav Mishva*). R. Shapiro delineated 4 stages of joy (I have added a fifth) in broad Halakahic terms. This approach is unique because it sheds light on emotional categories of Avodas Hashem. I find R. Shapiro's methodology very attractive because I also have been inspired by my great teachers in Yeshiva Torah Vodaas and RIETS to analyze a sugya systematically in the tradition of Rav Chaim Soloveitchik z"l, and this is how I study with my students. At the same time, learning with students does not take place in a vacuum. Every talmid, especially in the post adolescent period, is also emotionally growing and changing. Rav Shapiro's approach is very valuable because it is consistent with the rigorous method of the Beis Hamedrash of Rav Chaim z"l but can be used by people of all ages as a tool for religious and emotional growth.

<sup>6</sup> "Abraham Maslow described ... a hierarchy of needs. As its base are our physiological needs, such as those for food and water. Only if these needs are met are we prompted to meet our need for safety, and then to meet our uniquely human needs to give and receive love and to enjoy self-esteem. Beyond this, said Maslow, lies the highest of human needs: to actualize one's full potential." (David Myers, *Psychology* 6<sup>th</sup> ed., Worth Publishers, NY, 2001)

Were Chazal simply presenting a fact that has not changed in the last 2,000 years that men like to eat meat, women like to shop and kids like candy? The greater one's sensitivity to nuance in Rabbinic literature, the more one realizes that there is more than meets the eye. In order to glean a little more insight, it is appropriate to examine a basic issue discussed by the *Gemarah*.

*Gemara Moed Katan* (14b) relates that if (G-d forbid) an individual is in mourning when *yom tov* arrives, the *aveilus* is "broken". "The positive commandment which applies to all the Jewish people (to celebrate *yom tov*) pushes away the private commandment (the mourning of a relative)." Rav Soloveitchik noted that the *Gemara's* rationale seems strange. After all, the two precepts don't really contradict each other. According to Torah law, an individual in mourning can eat meat and drink wine. Why does *aveilus* have to be pushed away altogether?

Despite the fact that the *mitzvah* is presented as an obligation of action, in this case that men should eat meat and drink wine, that is only the technical component of the *mitzvah*. Its primary fulfillment, however, is achieved when the appropriate emotion is experienced. At times, the Rav referred to this primary emotional component as the soul of the *mitzvah*. (For example, see *Al haTeshuvah* where Rav Soloveitchik explains that the Rambam codifies confession as the *mitzvah* of repentance, but the "soul" of the *mitzvah* is the emotion of repentance.) In the case of *Yom Tov*, the crude requirement is the action, but the actual fulfillment is the state of being joyous. Similarly, although during *shiva* the *avel* has certain physical prohibitions (not to bathe or shave), the actual fulfillment is the emotional state of mourning. This explains why *Gemara Moed Katan* assumes that *Simchas Yom Tov* and *aveilus* are mutually exclusive halakhic states - not based on the religious obligations, but on their emotional states. (shiurim l'zekher Aba Mori, vol. 2)<sup>7</sup>.

Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch extends the thought in an interesting manner. The Raavad (*Hil. Chagiga* 1:1), based on Abaye (*Kiddushin* 34b) writes that the obligation of joy for women is actually an obligation of the husband to provide for her the things that make her happy. Rav Shternbuch points out that if we would take this to its logical extreme, all single women would not be included in the *mitzvah*. This position does not seem tenable because it is hard to understand why single women would be different than married women, and there is no source that differentiates between the obligation of joy for married and single women. Therefore, Rav Shternbuch concludes that there are two distinct components to the *mitzvah*. Firstly, the action that precipitates the *mitzvah*, and secondly, the emotional state that is experienced<sup>8</sup>. Of course single women have the *mitzvah* of joy. However, the Raavad assumes that the responsibility of action is incumbent only on the man of the home to provide the necessary tools, while the "soul" of the *mitzvah* is fulfilled by all when they are happy on *Yom Tov*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> According to many contemporary authorities, this concept goes so far as to say that as long as one is experiencing joy on *Yom Tov* that is associated with *Yom Tov* (see step 2) one need not fulfill it through the action described by Chazal. (see *Moadim uZmanim* vol. 1, and *Contemporary Halakhic Problems*, vol. 3, pg. 248.

<sup>8</sup> For both methodological and philosophical reasons it is interesting to note that Rav Soloveitchik was much more interested in emphasizing what is the *soul* of the *mitzvah*. Rav Shternbuch seems content in simply presenting the 2 *dinim* or categories.

<sup>9</sup> Why the Torah, according to the Raavad, places responsibility of action specifically on the man of the house is beyond the scope of this article.

## Practically Speaking

If one is to make an attempt at true happiness, it cannot be done by simply following mechanical rules. Time and effort must be invested in thinking about what makes ourselves, our wives, and our children content. The first step requires a basic level of self understanding. "What do I truly enjoy that creates a spiritual context of joy for me on Yom Tov"?

Just as significantly, it is the responsibility of men, before every Yom Tov to spend a significant amount of time and effort thinking about what will bring their wives and children joy. It is not always so easy, as John Gray writes in his book, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, "We expect the opposite gender to be more like ourselves ... we desire them to want what we want." Chazal seem to be emphasizing that there are differences in what make men and women happy, and men have a responsibility to think like "Venusians" and not only as "Martians".

Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach met a student of his who was holding a very expensive etrog on sukkos. He asked the student if he also fulfilled the mitzvah of buying his wife something for yom tov with the same hiddur.

*Halichos Shlomo, Moadim, pg. 26*

## Step 2: Sharing Joy with Others

Even if one has fulfilled the above, according to the Rambam, one has not necessarily fulfilled the mitzvah of Simchas Yom Tov at all.

*And when you eat and drink, you are required to give food to (Devarim 16:11) the stranger, orphan and widow among the other poor and unfortunate ones. However, one who locks the doors to his courtyard and eats and drinks with his wife and children, and does not give food or drink to the poor and indigent this is not the joy of a mitzvah, but rather it is the joy of his stomach.*

**Rambam Hilchos Yom Tov 6:18**

וכשהוא אוכל ושותה חייב להאכיל  
(דברים טז:יא) לגר ליתום ולאלמנה עם  
שאר העניים האמללים, אבל מי שנועל  
דלתות חצרו ואוכל ושותה הוא ובניו  
ואשתו ואינו מאכיל ומשקה לעניים  
ולמרי נפש אין זו שמחת מצוה אלא  
שמחת כריסו  
רמב"ם הלכות יום טוב ו:יח

Rambam's words speak for themselves. Even religious joy can be self-serving. How is one assured that the entire religious experience is not a selfish one which ultimately becomes nothing more than "the joy of his stomach?" Rambam answers that if we link our joy with the joy of others less fortunate than us, then our joy is elevated to a truly religious experience.

Along with Step 2 emerges a fundamental difference between these steps and the similar secular model of Maslow. While the initial stages of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs focuses on personal physical needs, the spiritual sphere of joy almost immediately focuses on sharing with others because without it, spirituality would be self-serving.

## Practically Speaking

A person who is honest about their self growth often struggles with the question, "How can I become more sensitive to the feelings of others?" Anyone who is part of a family structure constantly has the opportunity to empathize, sympathize, and help others. Chessed begins at home, and home is the training ground for how to behave in the world-at-large.

At the same time, Rambam teaches us that if one's energy is entirely focused at home, then ultimately the chessed at home can be self-serving. Are we truly helping for the sake of being merciful or do we just want our families and homes to be perfect?

## Step 3: Joy in Front of G-d

The first 2 steps of joy on *Sukkos* involve sharing spiritual joy with others. Every holiday, and indeed every moment throughout the year, also has a unique angle of man's relationship with Hashem. The spiritual theme of joy for *Sukkos* is expressed in the pasuk, "*And you shall rejoice in front of Hashem, your G-d, for seven days.*" Halakhically, the expression refers to the celebration of *Simchas Beis Hashoevah* which took place throughout *Sukkos* (Succah 41a).

*The Sages of Israel, heads of the Yeshivos and the Sanhedrin, Chassidim, Elders and virtuous people were the ones that danced, clapped, sang and were joyous in the Beis Hamikdash during the days of Sukkos, but the rest of the nation would come to see and hear.*

**Rambam Hilchos Lulav 8:14**

גדולי חכמי ישראל וראשי הישיבות והסנהדרין והחסידים והזקנים ואנשי מעשה הם שהיו מרקדין ומספקין ומנגנין ומשמחין במקדש בימי חג הסוכות, אבל כל העם האנשים והנשים כולן באין לראות ולשמוע. רמב"ם הלכות לולב ח:יד

Of all holidays, only *Sukkos* has this added dimension of dancing in the *Beis Hamikdash*. Why does *Sukkos* specifically have this extra component of dancing, and why is it specifically referred to as an expression of being "in front of Hashem?" Before dealing with these basic questions lets examine a common theme that surrounds *Sukkos*.

### ענני הכבוד

Generally, a *mitzvah* requires a reasonable amount of exertion and effort or demands a certain spiritual context. The *mitzvah* of *sukkah* seems different in this regard. Simply by eating, drinking and sleeping inside a *sukkah*, one easily fulfills the commandment. How can such a mundane experience be spiritual? With closer examination, we see that the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* does demand something of the individual in a subtle yet large way. The walls and roof of the *sukkah* represent the clouds that protected us in the desert (see *Sukkah* 2a) and the Divine Providence that we have had as a nation throughout the generations.<sup>10</sup> When we dwell in the *sukkah* we are reenacting and reinforcing the idea that G-d is with us in every part of our existence - even when we simply eat, drink, and sleep.

<sup>10</sup> It is not a coincidence that the holiday of *Sukkos* immediately follows Yom Kippur. After Yom Kippur and true repentance, G-d shows that we reestablish our closeness to Him. We manifest this physically through the *sukkah* which represents the clouds of glory that protected us in the desert.

### When it Rains, the Sukkah Falls Apart

There is a fascinating *halakha* which exemplifies the idea that the *sukkah* represents Divine Providence. The Vilna Gaon (O.C. 639:5), based on Rashba, writes that when it rains on *Sukkos*, the *sukkah* loses its identity as a *sukkah*. For this reason, on the first night of *Sukkos* when there is an obligation to eat in the *sukkah*, the Vilna Gaon argues that it cannot be fulfilled when it is raining. The source behind the Vilna Gaon's approach is the vivid description of the *Mishna*.

*When it begins to rain, at what point can you leave (the Sukkah)? When the makpneh gets ruined. To what can this be compared to? To a servant that tries to dilute a cup of wine for his master, and he throws the pitcher in his face.*

#### Mishna Sukkah 28b

ירדו גשמים, מאימתי מותר לפנות -  
משתסרחה המקפה. משלו משל: למה  
הדבר דומה - לעבד שבא למזוג כוס  
לרבו, ושפך לו קיתון על פניו.  
משנה סוכה כח:

The *Mishna* seems to suggest that rain is an absolute rejection of our attempt to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*. The Vilna Gaon<sup>11</sup> explains the symbolic meaning behind the analogy of the servant having the flask of water poured back in his face. Vilna Gaon explains that wine represents absolute judgment, and water represents mercy. In the times of the Talmud, wine was very heavy and dense. It was made more "merciful" by adding water. In our analogy, the servant came to mix water with wine. The master poured the water back in his face, indicating that he was not interested in accepting the water – the mercy – to mitigate the heavy wine – the harsh judgment<sup>12</sup>.

This may explain why the *sukkah*, although physically standing, does not halakhically exist when it rains. It is not simply because one is uncomfortable sitting in the *sukkah* during the rain. Rather, the rain represents a distancing of *Klal Yisroel* from *Hashem*, which is the antithesis of the divine protection exemplified by the *sukkah*.

One year, when Rav Soloveitchik was a child, it rained on the first night of *Sukkos* in Chaslovitch. In the middle of the night he felt his father nudging him awake. "Berel, Berel, get up. It stopped raining. We can go eat in the succah." Already a child prodigy, Rav Soloveitchik asked his father, "Father, I don't understand. Isn't the reason we assume that we didn't fulfill the *mitzvah* of eating in the succah earlier this evening is that we were *mitzta'er* when we were sitting in the rain? But it is also uncomfortable now to get out of bed and go outside." Rav Moshe then explained to his son that initially they did not fulfill the *mitzvah* (according to the Gra) because when it rains, the succah loses its identity as a succah.

*Harerei Kedem vol.1 chap. 115*

<sup>11</sup> *Sefer Kol Eliyahu*. See also *Zman Simchaseinu* by Rabbi Dovid Cohen, who finds this idea in other writings of the Vilna Gaon, and applies it to other contexts as well.

<sup>12</sup> This also explains the symbolic significance of water on *Sukkos*, as exemplified by the water libations that took place in front of the altar on *Sukkos*.

### **A New Paradigm of Lifnei Hashem: Sukkos Following Yom Kippur**

The notion of sukkah, as developed above, embodies the notion of surrounding every part of our corporeal existence with Divine presence – "in front of G-d." The month of Tishrei has a gradual process of service "in front of G-d." On Yom Kippur the Torah also uses a similar expression, "in front of G-d you shall be purified," indicating that on Yom Kippur as well the whole body is purified "in front of G-d." All corporeal desires are denied and the entire body subjugates itself by bowing and falling in front of the Master of the Universe. On *Sukkos* a similar subjugation of the entire body to the service of G-d takes place. However, on this occasion, after the process of negating the adverse impulses of man during Yom Kippur, those same impulses can now be raised to be used and enjoyed in front of G-d<sup>13</sup>.

Often joy is associated with asceticism. Some believe that a truly spiritual and joyous person is one who encounters G-d in the upper spheres. *Sukkos*, however, emphasizes that we can elevate all components of the corporeal condition in the service of Hashem.

This may also explain the unique role of dancing on *Sukkos*. Dancing is a spiritual activity that involves the use of every limb of the body. It is unique to *Sukkos* because the theme of "joy in front of G-d" is about elevating every part of our physical bodies to be used in the service of Hashem.

## **Practically Speaking**

Recognizing that mundane activities can be a joyous experience with the Divine can transform many of our daily activities into spiritually uplifting ones. Often people who leave the Beis Hamedrash and head off to the workplace resign themselves to a life of spiritual mediocrity. *Sukkos* emphasizes that this reality is not inevitable. Every component of the human condition can be elevated in the service of Hashem.

This idea is not meant to be taken homiletically. Rav Soloveitchik explained that one who goes to work in the morning and returns to learn at night does not need repeat Birchas Hatorah even if he did not learn the entire day because the entire human condition for an observant Jew, including one's work day, is constantly being examined from the perspective of Torah. A person who lives according to this ideal is Lifnei Hashem even when he is in Midtown Manhattan.

## **Step 4: Joy With Hashem**

After seven days of rejoicing "in front of Hashem", another layer of simcha can be added. A higher level of joy can be attained on Shmini Atzeres, which is joy *with* Hashem.

*Once the seven days of Sukkos have finished, Hashem says to the Jewish nation, "Now you and I shall rejoice together, and I will not burden you with more than one cow and one ram".*

**Yalkut Shimoni Pinchas 782**

וכיון שיצאו שבעת ימי החג אמר  
הקב"ה לישראל עכשיו אני ואתם  
נשמח יחד ואיני מטריח עליכם  
הרבה אלא פר אחד ואיל אחד  
ילקוט שמעוני פינחס תשפב

<sup>13</sup>It is interesting to note that 7 days in Kabbalah represents the totality of time (since the entire universe was created in seven days) while a day represents a particular component of universal existence. Yom Kippur may represent a particular component (the ascetic form) of *avodas hashem* and is the holiest day of the year but it does not encapsulate the essence of the challenge of the human condition in the way that *Sukkos* does.

A person can be cognizant that he is in *front* of Hashem but not necessarily *with* Him. The first seven days of Sukkos emphasize and highlight Divine providence. However, *Shmini Atzeres* represents joy expressed in a personal relationship with G-d. "*Let us rejoice together*" indicates that the quality of the relationship has changed. Until this moment, G-d, the king, is recognized as having a direct impact on our lives, but he has not initiated a desire to have a personal relationship. On *Shmini Atzeres* a bi-directional relationship is reaffirmed. A bi-directional relationship is one that involves true communication. Therefore, a person who truly feels a strong connection to G-d will feel that G-d is rejoicing along with him. Since the joy is no longer simply in *front* of G-d but *with* G-d, we reach a higher level of *simcha*. After all, Hashem is rejoicing with us, too!

## Practically Speaking

According to Rabbi Abraham Twerski, MD, the most common psychological malady which troubles many people in our generation is lack of self-esteem. I often find that *talmidim* come up short, both in regards to their academic capabilities of excelling in Torah study as well as excellence in *middos*, because they are entirely unaware of their potential. One reason for this is the lack of awareness that G-d rejoices with us in every step of our growth. Many of us are conscious that Hashem is in front of us, and we even attain some level of mastery over the first 3 levels. However, we often focus on our shortcomings. If we believe that Hashem also focuses on our shortcomings, we will find it hard to mobilize our energy toward improvement. After all, whatever the improvement, there will always be so much more that is lacking. Having the ability to realize that Hashem rejoices with us and revels in our joy of being close to him despite our shortcomings is an extremely powerful emotional and religious tool.

“Where can G-d be found?” asked Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Kotzk. “Anywhere people let him in” he answered.

## Step 5: Rejoicing with an Internal G-dliness

*Maaseh Rav* records the Vilna Gaon's behavior on *Simchas Torah*.

He (the Vilna Gaon) would dance in front of the *sefer Torah*, clapping his hands and dancing with all his might... and when the *sefer torah* was returned to the *Aron*, (his enthusiasm diminished a little) and he rejoiced as if it was a regular *Yom Tov*.

According to *Maaseh Rav*, it seems that *Shmini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* constitute 2 different forms of joy. Rejoicing with the Torah, for the Vilna Gaon, had a higher dimension of joy than the joy of *Shmini Atzeres*. What is this joy? According to Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, the joy of *Simchas Torah* is the greatest level of joy because it is celebration of G-d within us.

This notion of internal G-dliness can be best understood as based on an idea developed by Rav Chaim of Volozhin<sup>14</sup>. All of us have a G-dly component to us - "in the image of G-d He created them." Rav Chaim explained that this G-dliness is the capacity to join our Divine Image with G-d himself through the internalization of Torah. G-d allows us to become G-dly when we work hard to have his Torah become part of our beings. This is the most intimate celebration of joy with G-d since it is entirely internal. *Simchas Torah* is not actually a celebration of the Torah, but a celebration of the Torah that we have made a part of us. Hence, when rejoicing on *Simchas Torah*, we are rejoicing with our internal G-dliness<sup>15</sup>.

All human beings have struggles that affect them adversely, whether they are deep traumas or small issues that impede happiness. In many modern cultures today, people think that they will achieve happiness if they successfully cope with those traumas or negative components of existence. However, coping simply removes the negative. How is internal happiness achieved? Rejoicing with the Torah that we've learned and accomplished is rejoicing with the G-dly component within us. *That* is internal happiness.

## Practically Speaking

Many people get discouraged when they look over their shoulders and see others who have accomplished more in terms of Torah study, and they feel inadequate. The highest state of joy is accessible to all because it is rejoicing in our own internal G-dliness that is accessed through our unique spiritual talents and accomplishments. Rejoicing in the learning of Torah is not uniform. Every individual has his own G-d-given talents. If one has tapped into his internal strengths through analysis of Torah and the passion for mitzvos, then the pinnacle of *Simcha* can be achieved by rejoicing with our personal internal G-dliness

The 5 steps of joy begin with the most basic form of happiness - personal contentment in the context of G-d's spiritual calendar - and return to the personal plane in a much loftier manner. After one has shared joy with others, rejoiced in Divine providence, and celebrated his personal relationship with Hashem, complete happiness is achieved at the final stage when we access the G-dliness inside ourselves. Spiritual happiness reaches its zenith when there is an inner happiness. *Sukkos*, in particular, and *Avodas Hashem* as a whole, emphasize that inner happiness is not simply a sense of inner peace, of accepting who we are within our social context, but rather involves reuniting our G-dly component to its source. To achieve inner happiness, each individual with his unique capabilities should revel in their toil and accomplishments in Torah. These accomplishments transform the individual into a more caring and more pure person - a true manifestation of G-dliness in our corporeal and turbulent world.

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<sup>14</sup> *Nefesh Hachaim* ch. 1.

<sup>15</sup> There is a distinction between the way joy was expressed during the *Simchat Beit haShoeiva* and the way it was expressed in the customs of *Simchat Torah*. The Rambam writes that the dancing of *Simchat Beit haShoeiva* was done only by the leading Torah scholars of the time. Everyone else just watched. However *Simchat Torah* is a holiday that encourages the involvement of the masses. Everyone dances, and everyone gets an aliyah (including the children). Although there may be other explanations as well, it could be suggested that this reflects the distinction between the particularistic joy of *Simchat Beit haShoeiva* which is assessed in objective terms and the pluralistic component of joy of *Simchat Torah* which is actualized in subjective terms.