

The Mitzvah of Simcha on Yom Tov

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One of the defining elements of our Yomim Tovim is the requirement to experience simcha – joy or happiness. The Torah presents the obligation of simchat Yom Tov most extensively in the context of Sukkot.

Rejoice in your festivals ... and you should be exceedingly happy.

Devarim 16:14,15

ושמחת בחגך ... והיית אך שמח:
דברים פרק טז:יד-טו

When there is a Beit Hamikdash, one fulfills the Biblical obligation of Simchat Yom Tov through eating the meat of shalmei simcha - special offerings.⁵³ How do we fulfill simchat Yom Tov absent the Beit Hamikdash? Is there an objective way of demonstrating simcha, or does the mitzvah assume a more subjective nature?

The gemara in Pesachim introduces us to other applications of Simchat Yom Tov.

The Rabbis taught: A person is obligated to make his children and the members of his household happy on Yom Tov, as the verse says, and you shall be joyous in your holiday. And how does he make them happy? With wine. Rebbe Yehuda said: men with what is appropriate for them and women with what is appropriate for them. Men with what is appropriate for them - with wine. And women with what? Rav Yosef taught: in Bavel with colored clothing and in Eretz Yisrael with pressed flax clothing. We learned in a Braita: Rebbe Yehuda ben Beteira said: when the Beit Hamikdash is standing simcha is only with meat, as the verse says and you shall slaughter peace offerings and eat them there and be joyous in front of Hashem your G-d, and when the Beit Hamikdash is not standing simcha is only with wine, as the verse says, and wine shall gladden the hearts of man.

Pesachim 109a

תנו רבנן: חייב אדם לשמח בניו ובני ביתו ברגל, שנאמר (דברים טז) ושמחת בחגך, במה משמחם - בייין. רבי יהודה אומר: אנשים בראוי להם, ונשים בראוי להן. אנשים בראוי להם - בייין, ונשים במאי? תני רב יוסף: בבבל - בבגדי צבעונין, בארץ ישראל - בבגדי פשתן מגוהצין. תניא, רבי יהודה בן בתירא אומר: בזמן שבית המקדש קיים - אין שמחה אלא בבשר, שנאמר (דברים כז) וזבחת שלמים ואכלת שם ושמחת לפני ה' אלהיך. ועכשיו שאין בית המקדש קיים - אין שמחה אלא בייין, שנאמר (תהלים קד) ויין ישמח לבב אנוש.

פסחים קט.

⁵³ See Pesachim 109a and Rambam, Chagigah 1:1

While Tosafot (Moed Katan 14b s.v. Aseh) are of the opinion that the Biblical obligation of Simchat Yom Tov can only be fulfilled through shalmei simcha, Rambam, following the implication of the above gemara, assumes that other forms of simcha fulfill the Biblical imperative as well.

Even though the simcha mentioned here refers to the korban shlamim as we explain in Hilchot Chagigah, included in this simcha is to make his children and members of his household joyous, each one according to his means. How? For children one gives roasted kernels and walnuts and candies. For women one buys clothing and pleasant jewelry based on what one can afford. And men eat meat and drink wine, for simcha is only with meat and wine.⁵⁴

Rambam Hilchot Yom Tov 6:17-18

אף על פי שהשמחה האמורה כאן היא קרבן שלמים כמו שאנו מבארין בהלכות חגיגה יש בכלל אותה שמחה לשמוח הוא ובניו ובני ביתו כל אחד ואחד כראוי לו. כיצד הקטנים נותן להם קליות ואגוזים ומגדנות, והנשים קונה להן בגדים ותכשיטין נאים כפי ממונו, והאנשים אוכלין בשר ושותין יין שאין שמחה אלא בבשר ואין שמחה אלא ביין
רמב"ם הלכות יום טוב ו:יז - יח

Rambam here indicates that even when there is a Beit Hamikdash there are alternative ways of fulfilling simchat Yom Tov. While the most basic element of simchat Yom Tov involves consuming kodshim meat, other manifestations of joy are subsumed under this mitzvah as well. As Shaagat Aryeh (65) explains, simchat Yom Tov is distinct from all other mitzvot in this regard. Classic mitzvot involve a defined religious act – be it taking arba minim and sitting in a succah on Succot, or eating matzah on Pesach. Whether a person is rich or poor, undernourished or overweight, he must take the same arba minim and eat the same kezayit of matzah. Simchat Yom Tov, however, has a unique subjective component. Everyone has to attain a state of joy, but the way that one does so may depend on his ability, wealth, and personal preferences. For men it may be through eating meat and drinking wine; for women it may be through getting new clothing; and for children it may be through new toys.⁵⁵

Along these lines, Rav Soloveitchik (Shiurim L'zecher Aba Mari Vol. II) demonstrates that the thrust of Simchat Yom Tov (the kiyum hamitzvah, the fulfillment of the mitzvah) is the emotional state of joy. The technical mechanisms of achieving that state (the ma'aseh mitzvah), which are objectively defined when we have a Beit Hamikdash and are more subjective

⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that the Beit Yosef (Orach Chaim 529) understands the gemara in Pesachim literally and asks why the Rambam includes the eating of meat as a method of fulfilling simchat Yom Tov nowadays, given that the gemara in Pesachim lists only wine. Apparently, for this reason Shulchan Aruch (529:2) makes no mention of eating meat. Maharshal (Yam shel Shlomo Beitzah 2:5) suggests that the gemara only includes wine because eating meat is an obvious form of simchat Yom Tov that does not need to be stated.

⁵⁵ Shaagat Aryeh notes that a number of rishonim explain Beit Hillel's allowance of carrying a baby in a public domain of Yom Tov (Beitzah 12a) as being predicated on simchat Yom Tov. (See, for example, Mordechai Beitzah 658.) The ability for families to take walks together outside can enhance their simchat Yom Tov. This is another clear example of a subjective type of simchat Yom Tov. There is no halacha that families must take walks together on Yom Tov, but if doing so enhances their Yom Tov experience then the activity is commendable.

nowadays, are merely a means towards that goal and are not inherently significant.⁵⁶ As proof to this, Rav Soloveitchik cites another source in Rambam.

Even though there is a mitzvah to rejoice on all of the festivals, on Succot in the Beit Hamikdash there was a day of added joy, as the verse says, "and you will be happy in the presence of Hashem your G-d for seven days."

Rambam Hilchot Lulav 8:12

אף על פי שכל המועדות מצוה לשמוח בהן, בחג הסוכות היתה שם במקדש שמחה יתירה שנאמר (ויקרא כ"ג) ושמחתם לפני ה' אלהיכם שבעת ימים.
רמב"ם הלכות שופר וסוכה ולולב ה:יב

The Rambam expresses the same idea in Sefer Hamitzvot.

Included in the verse, "and you shall rejoice in your festival," is what they said as well to rejoice in all forms of joy, and based on this to eat meat on the festivals and to drink wine and to wear fine new clothing ... and to rejoice with musical instruments and to dance only in the Beit Hamikdash, and this is the Simchat Beit Hashoevah, and all of this is subsumed under "and you shall rejoice in your festivals".

Rambam Sefer Hamitzvot Aseh 54

וכולל באמרו ושמחת בחגך מה שאמרו ג"כ שמח בכל מיני שמחה. ומזה לאכול בשר בימים טובים ולשתות יין וללבוש בגדים חדשים ולחלק פירות ומיני מתיקה לקטנים ולנשים. ולשחוק בכלי ניגון ולרקוד במקדש לבד והיא שמחת בית השואבה. זה כולו נכנס תחת אמרו ושמחת בחגך.
ספר המצוות לרמב"ם מצות עשה נד

It is obvious that there is no objective religious value to playing musical instruments and dancing. Just like the acts of playing musical instruments and dancing in the Simchat Beit Hashoevah constitute Simchat Yom Tov, all activities associated with simchat Yom Tov - from consuming kodshim meat to buying new clothing to shaking the lulav⁵⁷ - are simply a means to achieving an emotional state of simcha.

Based on our presentation of the Rambam and Shaagat Aryeh, it may follow that if a person enjoys other kinds of food more than meat, he may fulfill his obligation of simchat Yom Tov with the foods that he enjoys. Darkei Teshuvah (89:19) discusses this possibility in the context of the widespread minhag to eat dairy foods on Shavuot. While the Rama (494:3) refers to a minhag of eating dairy and then following the dairy with meat, many people have the practice of eating exclusively dairy meals. Darkei Teshuvah acknowledges that according to Shaagat Aryeh, if a person prefers dairy to meat he may eat an exclusively dairy meal. However, he quotes the Divrei Chaim (Sanz) as taking issue with Shaagat Aryeh's reasoning and opposing the practice of eating dairy meals on Shavuot.

⁵⁶ Rav Soloveichik employs this idea to explain the gemara in Moed Katan (14b) that says that a mourner does not practice his aveilut on a Yom Tov because the communal positive commandment of simchat Yom Tov pushes away the individual positive commandment of aveilut. If simchat Yom Tov is merely the eating of meat and drinking of wine, activities that a mourner may perform, there should be no reason that aveilut and simchat Yom Tov could not coexist. Rather, the critical component of simchat Yom Tov is the emotional state, which is irreconcilable with the emotional state of aveilut.

⁵⁷ See Yerushalmi Succah 3:11.

For those of us who prefer to eat meat as the primary means of attaining simchat Yom Tov (or if we assume an objective element to Simchat Yom Tov nowadays), how often do we need to eat meat on Yom Tov? Presumably our obligation to eat meat should be patterned after the obligation in the time of the Beit Hamikdash. Chazon Ish (Kodshim 129 – p. 446, commentary to Pesachim 71a) is uncertain as to whether in the time of the Beit Hamikdash the meat of shlamim had to be consumed once in the daytime and once at night or whether it was sufficient to eat the meat once in every twenty-four hour period. Shaagat Aryeh (68) writes that the obligation applies both in the daytime and at night.

Even if we assume that once in a twenty-four hour period suffices, it is unclear how to calculate that twenty-four hour period. On the one hand, in the Jewish calendar, the day generally follows the night, such that if one ate meat on the night of the nineteenth of Tishrei he would not have to eat meat during the following day. However, in the world of korbanot, the night follows the day, and the meat consumed on the night on the nineteenth would not fulfill the obligation of the next day.⁵⁸

Rav Hershel Schachter⁵⁹ presents a novel suggestion that there is a fundamental difference between the obligation of simcha on the yom tov of Succot and on the yom tov of Pesach. The gemara in Arachin (10a) raises the following question.

Why is it that on Succot we recite (the entire Hallel) on every day and on Pesach we do not recite (the entire Hallel) on every day? Every day of Succot has its own korban, whereas the days of Pesach do not have their own unique korbanot.

Airchin 10a⁶⁰

מאי שנא בחג דאמר' כל יומא, ומאי שנא בפסח דלא אמרינן כל יומא? דחג חלוקין בקרבנותיהן, דפסח אין חלוקין בקרבנותיהן.
ערכין דף י.

Rav Soloveichik explained that the gemara is not merely highlighting a technical difference between Succot and Pesach, but rather a fundamental distinction between the sanctity of the two Yomim Tovim. Whereas every day of Succot has its own unique kedushat hayom (sanctity), as evidenced by each day's distinct korbanot, Pesach has one singular kedushat hayom that covers all seven days of the festival. Since the recitation of hallel is a form of expressing simcha, if every day of Succot has its own kedushat hayom, each of those days must include the recitation of hallel. On Pesach, however, the recitation of hallel on the first day suffices for the entire Yom Tov. Based on this understanding, suggests Rav Schachter, it should follow that whereas on Succot simchat Yom Tov is a daily obligation, on Pesach it is sufficient to fulfill simchat Yom Tov on the first day, and one would not need to consume meat on Chol Hamoed.

⁵⁸ Rav Hershel Schachter (B'ikvei Hatzon 15:12) concludes that the kodshim calendar should be relevant for defining the obligation of simchat Yom Tov.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Shiblei Haleket (174), after citing this gemara, quotes a medrash that suggests an additional reason for the limited recitation of hallel on Pesach. Since the Egyptians drowned in Yam Suf on the seventh day of Pesach and we do not wish to appear as rejoicing over the downfall of our enemies, we restrict the hallel on Pesach to the first days of Yom Tov.