

Days of Joy: Exploring the Simcha of Chanukah

When the Rambam introduces the concept of Chanukah he uses one word that doesn't seem to fit with the laws of Chanukah. The Rambam writes:

התקינו חכמים שבאותו הדור שיהיו שמונת הימים האלו שתחלתן מליל חמשה ועשרים בכסלו ימי שמחה והלל. רמב"ם, הלכות חנוכה ג:ג

The rabbis of that generation instituted that these eight days which begin on the night of the 25th of Kislev are days of joy (simcha) and praise (hallel).

Rambam, Hilchos Chanukah 3:3

The Rambam's use of the word "simcha" differs from the Gemara's description of Chanukah as days of "hallel v'hoda'ah," praise and thanksgiving (*Shabbos* 21b). Perhaps the Rambam saw an allusion to the element of simcha in the fact that the Gemara prohibits eulogies and fasting on Chanukah. However, when we explore the laws that normally accompany days of simcha, we will notice that these laws don't apply on Chanukah. Why then does the Rambam use the word simcha and what elements of simcha are manifest on Chanukah?

What Laws Are Normally Associated with Days of Simcha?

The Gemara, *Pesachim* 109a, states that the primary method of fulfilling



Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

Rabbi, Congregation Ohr Hatorah, Bergenfield, NJ

simchas yom tov — the mitzvah to be joyous on yom tov — is by eating the meat of the korbanos. The Gemara also mentions that nowadays, when we don't have korbanos, the mitzvah can be fulfilled in a more subjective manner by partaking in things that make us joyous, recognizing that men, women and children have different interests. For men, that means drinking wine and according to the Rambam, eating meat (see Rambam, *Hilchos Yom Tov* 6:18, *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 529:1 and *Magen Avraham* 529:3). A similar requirement is recorded by the Rambam (*Hilchos Megillah* 2:15) regarding Purim, which is called "y'mei mishteh v'simcha," days of feasting and joy (*Esther* 9:22). Yet we don't find the Rambam or anyone else requiring one to eat meat or drink wine on Chanukah. This indicates that there is no element of simcha on Chanukah.

The Mishna, *Moed Katan* 19a, as explained by the Gemara, *Moed Katan* 14b and 19b-20a, teaches us that the simcha on yom tov is enough to override the laws of mourning. This is manifest in two different ways. First, if the mourning period started, the yom tov cancels the rest of that mourning period. Second, if the mourning did

not yet begin, the mourning is delayed until after yom tov. How does Purim's status as days of simcha affect the laws of mourning? According to the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 696:4, all of the laws of mourning apply on Purim. Yet the Rama writes that there is no public mourning on Purim. When it comes to Chanukah, there is no discussion in the *Shulchan Aruch* or the Rama about whether the laws of mourning apply because it is obvious that they apply. This is another indication that simcha is not apparent on Chanukah.

Recitation of Hallel as a Manifestation of Simcha

One common element that Chanukah shares with yom tov is the obligation to recite a complete Hallel. Perhaps the indicator that there is an element of simcha on Chanukah is the obligation to recite Hallel. The Ramban, in his *Hasagos to Sefer Hamitzvos, shoresh* no. 1, notes that the Gemara implies that the obligation to recite a complete Hallel on yom tov is of biblical origin. The Ramban then wonders: if there is a biblical obligation, what is the source? He suggests that

perhaps it is part of the obligation of simchas yom tov. He notes the Gemara, *Erchin* 11a, that derives the obligation of *shiras Halevi'im* (the song of the Levites) from the fact that the offering of korbanos require an element of simcha, and this simcha is accomplished through song. Ramban says that we see from the Gemara that *shira* provides simcha and therefore, if there is an obligation to recite Hallel on yom tov, it is logical that its source is the mitzvah of *simchas yom tov*. As such, one can argue that just as Hallel is recited to fulfill the mitzvah of *simchas yom tov*, the fact that we recite Hallel on Chanukah may be a manifestation of simcha on Chanukah.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to infer from the obligation to recite Hallel on Chanukah that it is a function of simcha. The Gemara, *Erchin* 10b, states that the recitation of Hallel on yom tov and the recitation of Hallel on Chanukah are fundamentally different. We might recite the same words, but on Yom Tov, we recite Hallel to celebrate the holiday. On Chanukah we recite Hallel to commemorate the miracle. When the Ramban suggests that recitation of Hallel is a function of simcha, he was only discussing the type of Hallel that serves to celebrate yom tov. The Ramban was not discussing the Hallel of Chanukah which commemorates the miracle.

What is the Simcha of Chanukah?

It is now evident that the laws and practices of Chanukah don't reflect the ordinary laws associated with holidays that involve simcha. There is no obligation to partake in meat or wine. Chanukah does not interrupt or suspend mourning practices. Even the recitation of Hallel is not a function of

simcha. If so, what did the Rambam intend when he branded Chanukah as days of simcha? What is the simcha of Chanukah?

Perhaps the simcha is based on the following verse:

וּבְיוֹם שִׂמְחַתְכֶם וּבְמוֹעֲדֵיכֶם וּבְרֵאשֵׁי חֳדָשֵׁיכֶם וּבְתַקְעוֹתֵם בַּחֲצְצֹרֹת עַל עֲלֹתֵיכֶם וְעַל זְבָחֵי שְׁלָמֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אָנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. במדבר י"י

On your day of joy and on your holidays and on your first of the month, you shall sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over your peace offerings and they shall be a remembrance before Your Lord, I am G-d, Your Lord.

Bamidbar 10:10

The verse teaches us about the requirement to sound the trumpets, but it does not give any indication as to what *yom simchaschem* — your day of joy — refers to. The Netziv, *Ha'amek Davar* ad loc., suggests that it refers to the dedication of the Mishkan or the Beis Hamikdash. We find that when the Mishkan was dedicated, the nes'i'im all brought korbanos and it was a big celebration. We also find that Shlomo HaMelech organized a great celebration for the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash. In fact, the Gemara, *Moed Katan* 9a, notes that the celebration of the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash was so significant that despite the fact that one of the days of dedication coincided with Yom Kippur, the Jewish people ate on Yom Kippur that year. The Netziv notes two other important components of the dedication celebration. The verse, in describing the dedication of the First Beis Hamikdash, states:

וַיְהִי כִּאֲחֵד לְמַחְצְרִים וְלְמִשְׁרָרִים לְהַשְׁמִיעַ קוֹל אֶחָד לְהִלֵּל וּלְהַדוֹת לָהּ וּבְקָרִים קוֹל בַּחֲצְצֹרֹת וּבְמִצְלָתַיִם וּבְכָלֵי הַשִּׁיר וּבְהִלֵּל לָהּ כִּי טוֹב כִּי

לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ וְהַבֵּית מְלֵא עֲנֵן בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה. דברי הימים ב' ה'יג

There was symphony among the trumpet blowers and singers to provide a unified voice to praise and thank G-d, and when the sound of the trumpets and the percussions and other instruments were heard and the praise to G-d for He is good and His kindness is forever [was recited], the cloud filled the house — the house of G-d.

Divrei Hayamim II 5:13

We find in this verse that at the time of the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash, they blew the trumpets and they recited Hallel. Similarly, when the Second Beis Hamikdash was dedicated, we find these two components:

וַיַּעֲנוּ בְהִלֵּל וּבְהוֹדוֹת לָהּ כִּי טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל הָעָם הֲרִיעוּ תְרוּעָה גְדוֹלָה בְּהִלֵּל לָהּ עַל הוֹסֵד בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה. עזרא ג'יא

They responded with praise and thanksgiving to G-d for He is good and His kindness is forever on the Jewish people. The whole nation sounded a great blast and praised G-d for the establishment of the house of G-d.

Ezra 3:11

Chanukah also celebrates the rededication of the Beis Hamikdash. We commemorate the miracle of the war and we also commemorate the miracle of the oil of the Menorah. However, neither of those miracles are worthy of transforming Chanukah into days of simcha. What gives Chanukah the status of “days of simcha” is the fact that we are celebrating the *Chanukas Habayis*, the rededication of the Beis Hamikdash.

With this background, we can understand a comment of the Rama:

ריבוי הסעודות שמרבים בהם הם סעודות הרשות שלא קבעום למשתה ושמחה. הגה:

וי"א שיש קצת מצוה ברבוי הסעודות משום דבאותן הימים היה חנוכה המזבח. שלחן ערוך, אורח חיים תרעב:

The enhancing of the meals that is done [on Chanukah] is not necessary because [the days of Chanukah] were not instituted as [days of] feasting and joy. Rama: There are those that say that there is somewhat of a mitzvah to enhance the meals because in those days, there was a dedication of the Altar. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 670:2

We can understand the opinion of the *Shulchan Aruch* that there is no requirement or mitzvah to have any special meals on Chanukah. As we noted earlier, we don't observe that type of simcha on Chanukah. Yet the Rama tells us that because Chanukah also celebrates the rededication of the Beis Hamikdash, we should mark the occasion by enhancing our meals.

Why should the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash be a cause for simcha? Perhaps the answer is based on a comment of the Rambam:

מצות עשה לעשות בית לה' מוכן להיות מקריבים בו הקרבנות וחוגגין אליו שלש פעמים בשנה שנאמר ועשו לי מקדש. רמב"ם, הל' בית הבחירה א:א

There is a positive commandment to build a house for G-d that is suitable for offering sacrifices and for celebrating [on the festivals] three times a year as it states "you shall build for Me a temple." Rambam, Hilchos Beis Habechirah 1:1

The purpose of building the Beis Hamikdash is not only for the ability to bring korbanos. It is also to enable

us to perform the mitzvah of *aliyah l'regel*. The mitzvah of *aliyah l'regel* is always performed in the context of simcha, on yom tov. It is a true simcha experience. If the purpose of building the Beis Hamikdash is to enable us to perform a mitzvah that brings about simcha, then we can understand why the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash is also considered a time of simcha.

The *Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chaim* 670:5, in addressing the question of why Chanukah is eight days, quotes from the Book of Maccabees that the eight-day holiday was originally modeled after Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres. What is the connection between Chanukah and Sukkos? Based on what we presented, we could suggest that the celebration of the rededication of the Beis HaMikdash was in part a celebration of the ability to perform *aliyah l'regel*. As such, it was appropriate to model Chanukah after Sukkos/Shemini Atzeres, the longest of the *regalim*.

The Simcha in Today's Times

If Chanukah is a celebration of the rededication of the Beis Hamikdash, now that we don't have a Beis Hamikdash, how do we celebrate? What is our source of simcha? The Netziv, in the very same presentation about the mitzvah to celebrate the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash, teaches us how we can have that same experience nowadays:

בעת שאנחנו בגלות והשגחת ה' עלינו ע"י ד' אמות של הלכה הוא דבר אחד עם חנוכה המזבח בזמן שישראל בארץ ישראל ובית

המקדש קיים שהשגחת ה' עלינו ושכינתו היה תלוי בעבודת בית המקדש ... כך בזמן הזה סיום התורה והתחלתה הוא שמחת לבנו. דרך כלל אין שמחת ישראל כמו בזמן שאנחנו עושים סיבה להשכין את אלוקי ישראל בקרבנו. הרחב דבר, במדבר י"ב:

At a time when we are in exile and G-d's providence over us is through the four cubits of Jewish law, [Torah learning] is one and the same with the dedication of the Altar when the Jews were in the Land of Israel and the Holy Temple stood. Because G-d's providence over us and His Divine presence were contingent on the service in the Holy Temple ... So too, nowadays, completion of the Torah and beginning it is the joy of our heart. As a general rule, there is no greater joy for a Jew than providing an atmosphere for G-d to dwell among us.

Harchev Davar, Bamidbar 10:2

The Gemara, *Berachos* 8a, teaches that after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the Divine presence rests in the four *amos* (cubits) of Jewish law. We connect with the Shechinah through Torah learning. As the Netziv teaches us, if we want to experience the same simcha that was experienced in the Chanukah story when the Beis Hamikdash was rededicated, we should renew and reinforce our commitment to Torah learning. Our focus this Chanukah should be on "rebuilding" the beis medrash. The places where we learn Torah should be reinvigorated and filled with joyous sounds of Torah learning. May our rededication of the Beis Hamikdash serve as a *zechus* to ultimately merit participating in the dedication of the Third Beis Hamikdash.



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