

# Simchah Shel Mitzvah

**W**hy exactly do we celebrate Yom HaAtzmaut?

Is it because of the physical salvation that the establishment of the State brought to the survivors of the Holocaust (and world Jewry as a whole)? Undoubtedly, that is a good reason to celebrate. In fact, Chazal indicate that escaping death is one of the most compelling reasons to sing praise to God:

ומה מעבודות לחירות אמרי' שירה ממייתא לחיים לא כל שכן.

*If we sing praise for going from slavery to freedom [on Passover, which commemorates the Exodus from Egypt], isn't it obvious [that we should do so when we were saved] from death to life [on Purim, which marks our escape from Haman's decree to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews (Esther 3:13)]?!"*

## Megillah 14a

Definitely a good reason, but is that all?

Perhaps we celebrate because on the fifth of Iyar, 5708, the Jewish people regained sovereignty over their ancestral homeland after 2,000 years of exile and oppression? Definitely a legitimate reason to rejoice! After all, the Rambam states: "The days of Mashiach are [part of] 'this world,' and [during that period] the world will function normally. The only [difference is] that Jewish sovereignty will be restored, as the earlier sages said, 'There is no difference between this world and the days of Mashiach other than [Israel's] subjugation to the



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kingdoms' (*Sanhedrin* 99a)" (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 9:2). To no longer have to worry what the ruling gentiles might do to us, on a whim, is quite liberating. To be able to decide our own destiny (even if we don't always make the best decisions) is something to thank God for. In addition, being independent is the way things are supposed to be, as the Maharal writes:

כי מקומם הראוי להם לפי סדר המציאות להיותם בארץ ישראל ברשות עצמם, ולא ברשות אחר. כמו כל דבר ודבר מן הנמצאים הטבעיים יש להם לכל אחד מקום בפני עצמו. *The place that suits the Jews according to the order of existence is for them to be in Eretz Yisrael under their own rule, independent of others, like every natural being that has its own place.*

## Netzach Yisrael 1

Another great reason, but is that it?

Maybe we are celebrating the beginning of the ultimate redemption, for which we have waited so long? That is definitely one of the main reasons we rejoice on this day. In the words of Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan zt"l:

*Other generations have expected the Messiah's imminent appearance on the basis of the forced interpretation of one or two prophecies, whereas we are living through the entire range of Messianic tradition, often coming to pass with uncanny literalness. If you keep your eyes*

*open, you can almost see every headline bringing us a step closer to this goal.*

## The Real Messiah, p. 96

Just think about it: the Land of Israel, which was desolate throughout our exile, awoke from its slumber when its children came back to till its soil, exactly as the Torah and Chazal predicted (see *VaYikra* 26:32; *Sifra*, *ibid.*; *Sanhedrin* 98a). Moreover, the ingathering of the exiles, which is probably the most important phase of redemption, is clearly underway. Around half the Jewish people currently live here, thanks almost entirely to the establishment of the State of Israel.

All of these reasons are nice, but I believe our celebration should primarily be a *simchah shel mitzvah* (mitzvah-related joy). After all, whenever we celebrate something in Judaism, it is related to the fulfillment of a mitzvah. Think *brit milah*, *pidyon ha-ben*, *bat/bar mitzvah*, a marriage ceremony, *simchat yom tov*, etc.

So what mitzvah are we celebrating on Yom HaAtzmaut? Well, first and foremost there is the actual mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel (*yishuv HaAretz*), a mitzvah that was essentially out of reach for most Jews for close to 2,000 years. Imagine if a certain community couldn't obtain

the four species (lulav, etrog...) for several decades, and then, finally, one year, they got their hands on a set. How joyous would they be when they held those branches in their hands on Sukkot? I remember how excited I was, a few years back, when we recited the once-in-28-years blessing of *Birkat HaChamah*, even though it's only a Rabbinic precept. All the more so, we should rejoice over the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of settling the Land, about which Chazal say (three times!) that it is equal to all the other mitzvot in the Torah combined. And even though regarding most other mitzvot, our joy would not warrant the establishment of a yearly holiday, *yishuv HaAretz* is different, because it relates to our ultimate redemption and is a constant, all-encompassing mitzvah.

Living in Israel is a special mitzvah in many other ways, as well. It is one of the few mitzvot that are fulfilled with one's entire body (Vilna Gaon). In addition, one who lives here fulfills the mitzvah 24/7, just by being here and contributing to the country's development (*Chatam Sofer, Sukkah 36a*). Furthermore, Eretz Yisrael is the only place where all of the mitzvot can be kept (at least theoretically). R. Yechezkel Abramsky points out that approximately one-third of the 613 mitzvot cannot be fulfilled anywhere but in the Holy Land (*Eretz Yisrael Nachalat Am Yisrael*, note 61).

Most important, though, living in Israel elevates every mitzvah we do — even those that are independent of the Land — to a much higher level. So much so that Chazal use the term “practice” when referring to mitzvah performance in Chutz LaAretz. On some level, it is practice for when we return to the Land (see *Sifrei, Eikev 7*).

Or as the Ramban (*Vayikra 18:25*) puts it, “The main fulfillment of all the mitzvot is for those who dwell in God's Land.” Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l relates how his rebbe, Rav Yitzchak Hutner zt”l, would put on tefillin upon arriving in Eretz Yisrael, even though he had already prayed on the airplane. Rav Hutner explained: “Beforehand, I put on Chutz-LaAretz tefillin; now I am putting on Eretz Yisrael tefillin.”

As a direct result of the establishment of the State of Israel, every Jew can now perform the mitzvot of HaShem as and where they were meant to be kept. We no longer have to practice; we can do the real thing. Is this not reason enough to celebrate?

One last point: I mentioned above that one of the main reasons we celebrate Yom HaAtzmaut is because the establishment of the State marked the beginning of the redemption. This, too, is included in the *simchah shel mitzvah* aspect of our celebration. The Talmud states in *Berachot 31a*:

ת”ר אין עומדין להתפלל לא מתוך עצבות ולא מתוך עצלות ולא מתוך שחוק ולא מתוך שיחה ולא מתוך קלות ראש ולא מתוך דברים בטלים אלא מתוך שמחה של מצוה.

*Our Rabbis taught [in a beraita]: One may not stand up to pray amidst [a state of] sadness, laziness, laughter, [mundane] chatter, lightheadedness, or idle talk. Rather, [one must pray amidst a state of] simchah shel mitzvah.*

At face value, it sounds like one should go out right before davening and find a joyous mitzvah to perform. Rashi, however, explains Chazal's intention very differently (and it is based on the continuation of the Gemara):

אלא מתוך שמחה. כגון דברי תנחומים של תורה כגון סמוך לגאולת מצרים או סמוך לתהלה לדוד שהוא של שבח ותנחומין כגון

רצון יראיו יעשה שומר ה' את כל אוהביו וכגון מקראות הסדורות בתפלת ערבית כי לא יטוש ה' את עמו וכיוצא בהן

*Rather, amidst simchah shel mitzvah — like words of consolation from the Bible. For example, [we recite Shemoneh Esrei] immediately following [the mention of] the redemption from Egypt; or right after [we say] Tehillah LeDavid [i.e., Ashrei], which is [filled with] praise and consolation, like He will do the will of those who fear Him, and The Lord guards all who love Him (Tehillim 145:19-20). Another example: the verses that are arranged in the evening service, like The Lord will not abandon His nation.*

In other words, Rashi defines *simchah shel mitzvah* as the joy one gets from knowing that God is on our side and that He has and will console and redeem us.

We, who have been privileged to see the fulfillment of so many prophecies of redemption and consolation, certainly have an obligation to give thanks to God and rejoice in this *simchah shel mitzvah*.

