

Darkei HaChizuk

ארבעה צריכים חיוזוק (ברכות לב:) - שיתחזק אדם בהם תמיד בכל כחו (רש"י)

A Sichah from Maran HaGaon Rav Gershon Edelstein shlita, Rosh Yeshivas Ponevez • Erev Pesach 5772

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REJOICING ON YOM TOV

I saw the following parable, cited from the Midrash, which explains why we celebrate Sukkos after Yom Kippur. A person is on trial, and the court hands down a verdict. He knows what the verdict is, but other people don't. Now, if he's cheerful after the verdict, people will see this as a sure sign that he was declared innocent. So, too, when B'nei Yisrael are especially joyous on Sukkos — expressing *simchas Yom Tov* — this is a sign that they were exonerated in judgment.

This answer is surprising. Though the parable mentioned in the Midrash is understandable — if someone is still happy after his verdict, it's because he knows that he was found innocent. But how can someone who is not yet aware of the outcome of his court case be happy? And how can we be happy on Sukkos if we are unaware of the court's ruling? And even though the Jewish nation collectively is surely meritorious and are confident that they'll be declared innocent, what can the individual be happy about? What makes him confident that he will be granted a positive ruling?

I think the following introduction can explain this: Happiness is something natural; it's impossible to create artificial happiness. Artificial happiness is nothing more than a show. A person is naturally happy when he is in a happy situation. He doesn't have to work on himself to be happy — the happiness is a natural result. And the more a person enjoys himself — and the more the happy situation is important to him — his joy grows in direct proportion. But if there's no reason to rejoice, a person can't force himself to be happy. This being so, we must understand the mitzvah of *simchas Yom Tov*, being happy on Yom Tov.

The verse in *Koheles* (2:2) states: "*L'schok amarti mehollal, u'l'simchah, mah zeh oseh.*" That is, happiness exists, but what's the cause of this happiness? At times, a joyous occasion was one big mistake and is not justified. Or sometimes, some silly nonsense makes a person happy.

"*Mah zeh oseh*" — What is the reason for the joy? Let us understand the reason for *simchas Yom Tov* — what's the catalyst of our joy and how can one be joyous on Yom Tov.

The *Rishonim* give two answers.

Rabbeinu Yonah (*Sha'arei Teshuvah* 4:9) states: "On the other holidays we designate special meals to express *simchas ha-mitzvah*, the joy of the commandment." We have two entities here: 1) the actual *simchas ha-mitzvah*, and 2) the meal that is a result of the happiness we feel for carrying out the mitzvah. Now, what is the "*simchas ha-mitzvah*," the joy of the mitzvah? The inner joy a person has when he does a mitzvah reveals that he recognizes the immense importance of mitzvah observance, so much so that it makes him happy. This is a very high level of a person's *penimiyus*, his inner self. There are mitzvos that are specific to Yom Tov, Jewish holidays; it's a day that's designated for holiness, and we are commanded to abstain from *melachah*, creative work. Someone who aspires to spirituality will recognize the importance of these special mitzvos and will thus be joyful.

With this in mind, we can understand very well why a person on such a level — that is, one who has *simchas Yom Tov* because of the mitzvos of the day — will be sure that he was exonerated in judgment on Yom Kippur. Why? The *Mesillas Yesharim* (Chap. 19) writes that feeling joyous due to mitzvah observance is an offshoot of *ahavas Hashem*, loving God. It is a very profound level of loving God and falls under the category of "recognizing his Master." Now, though it is a great level, after all, it causes him joy, it is not the highest level of *ahavas Hashem*. In any case, it is still a profound level — it is an offshoot of loving God.

Regarding loving God, the Gemara tells us that if a person has *ahavas Hashem*, his intentional sins are transformed into merits. Someone who repents because he loves God, states the Gemara (*Yoma* 86a), his intentional sins are transformed into merits. As a result of his sins, this person

attained the level of repenting out of love, and Rabbeinu Yonah explains (*Sha'arei Teshuvah* 1:1) that *ba'alei teshuvah* merit special Divine assistance to attain *ahavas Hashem*.

Now when someone loves God, he automatically regrets his wrongdoings and repents; loving God is a contradiction to the sins he committed. His love of God, which comes from the force of his lofty soul, makes him distressed about his previous actions. This distress is the “level of sorrow” that Rabbeinu Yonah (*Sha'arei Teshuvah* 1:13) discusses: “Sorrow occurs because of the purity of the lofty soul.” The lofty soul loves Hashem and is pained by sin.

It emerges that when someone loves Hashem, he naturally is deeply pained over and very regretful about his sins. This effects repentance out of love, about which the Gemara says, “His intentional sins are transformed into merits.”

It's important to add that repentance is effective not only from the moment one repents and onward, but it is also effective retroactively, as is explained in *Mesillas Yesharim* (Chap. 4): “When the penitent recognizes his sin, admits his guilt, and contemplates on the bad he has done, this uproots the sin, just like when a person reneges on a vow and completely changes his mind about it. The penitent would rather that he had never committed the sin; he is so terribly pained about the deed that was already done, and he resolves never to do it again in the future — he practically runs away from it. This is called willfully uprooting the matter, and it's similar to one who uproots a vow, and his sin is atoned for.”

Let's explain. Even though the sinner blemished the upper worlds with his sin, and ruined the entire Creation, he still can fix what he ruined. This is just as a wise person has the ability to uproot a vow retroactively. Even if a person reneged on his vow, and *beis din* has already ruled that he must bring a *korban* or receive *malkos*, lashes, if he regretted making this vow in the first place, everything is nullified retroactively. Once his vow is uprooted, there is no sin involved, and he is completely innocent.

The same holds true regarding someone who repents out of love for Hashem. Any condemning verdict (God forbid) against him is nullified. Someone who rejoices in the joy of mitzvah observance on Sukkos — which is resultant of his high level of love of God — he automatically completely regrets his sins. And once he regrets his sins, they are retroactively nullified and transformed into merits. Even if he was already found guilty on Rosh Hashanah, his judgment now makes a turnaround, and he is innocent.

Therefore, if someone is happy on Sukkos, it is a sure sign that he is innocent — for at least now, he is pure and righteous in the merit of his joy of mitzvah observance.

Although we explained that the mitzvah of *simchas Yom Tov* is the joy resultant of mitzvah observance, this is a very high level of *simchas Yom Tov*, as inferred from Rabbeinu Yonah's words.

However, there is an even simpler level of *simchas Yom Tov*, which can be explained based on the Rambam (*Hilchos Yom Tov* Chap. 6) and the *Sefer HaChinuch* (Mitzvah 488).

The main part of the commandment of rejoicing on Yom Tov is bringing *shalmi simchah*, *korban* offerings, since the meat of the *shelamim*-offerings, which is holy, makes the person who eats it holy. Just as eating impure foods has a detrimental effect on a person and blocks his soul and makes him impure, *l'havdil*, matters of holiness make one's soul holy. It follows that eating the meat of the *korban*-offering adds more holiness to a person, and it's well known that all holiness increases happiness. This happiness, which comes from a person's inner self, is an extremely pleasant feeling of extraordinary good fortune. And this is the principle joy found in eating the meat of the *shelamim*-offerings.

However, the Rambam explains that even though the most important part of the mitzvah of being joyous on Yom Tov is eating the *shelamim*-offerings, included in this mitzvah of happiness is the obligation to make himself and all the members of his family happy — each person according to his specific needs. “How? By giving the young children roasted nuts and pastries; by buying nice clothing and jewelry for the women — each person according to his means; and the men eat meat and drink wine, for there is no happiness aside from in eating meat and drinking wine. And when he eats and drinks, he is obligated to feed the convert, the orphan, and the widow, as well as all other needy and unfortunate people.”

This begs explanation. When the Rambam defines which things make which people happy, he says that eating meat and drinking wine is what makes men happy. If so, the happiness one experiences when eating the meat of the *korban* isn't the joy of doing a mitzvah, it's simply enjoying good food and drink. After all, when a person drinks a little wine, he's becomes “high,” and happy. Can a person fulfill the mitzvah of *simchas Yom Tov* with this type of happiness? This certainly can't be called rejoicing in a mitzvah, and “*u'l'simchah mah zu oseh* — what's the

reason for this rejoicing?”

One must explain the Rambam’s intention as follows: the commandment is that each person should rejoice on Yom Tov via whatever makes him happy because the Torah commanded him to rejoice through these means. That is, as he carries out the physical acts that make him happy, he should have the intent that he is doing it for a mitzvah, for the sake of Heaven. He should think: I am eating and drinking on Yom Tov because Hashem commanded me to do so.

Thus, according to both the Rambam and the Sefer HaChinuch, eating and drinking on Yom Tov is no simple culinary act. Even though the focus of the joy is on a physical act and not on a mitzvah, the joy is about eating and drinking with a mitzvah intention. It turns out that the mitzvah caused the joy concerning the physical.

If so, we have a very easy level of *simchas Yom Tov*, a level that is not hard at all to observe. Based on this explanation, it’s enough for a person to eat and drink on Yom Tov with the intent to be doing a mitzvah. Then even the joy that he experiences while dining and wining will be regarded as *simchas Yom Tov*, since he is doing so because of the mitzvah involved. And he is considered one who serves Hashem through his food and drink.

The truth is that it is the same throughout the year. All of one’s physical necessities, like food, sleep, rest, and happiness (as explained in *Sefer HaChinuch*, *ibid.*) are needed for one’s service of God. If a person wouldn’t eat or drink, or if he wouldn’t rest or sleep, he wouldn’t have enough strength to learn Torah or observe the mitzvos properly. After all, he is a soldier in the king’s army. The king needs strong, healthy soldiers who will carry out their duties properly, and if a soldier refuses to eat, he’s considered a rebel. Since Torah study and mitzvah observance require physical strength, that which a person needs to maintain his strength is included in service of God.

The Rambam discusses this idea explicitly in *Hilchos De’os* (3:3): “Someone who follows this path his whole life will constantly be serving Hashem... since he has a singular intention in whatever he does — that he should be complete (healthy) to serve Hashem. This holds true even when he’s sleeping — if when he goes to sleep, it’s because he wants to refresh his thoughts and rest his body so that he won’t get sick and won’t be able to serve Hashem properly. This type of sleep is service of Hashem. And this is as our Sages said: ‘All your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven.’”

For this reason, someone on a mitzvah mission is not obligated in the mitzvah of sukkah even when he is sleeping (and is obviously not busy carrying out his mitzvah mission). The *Mordechai* (*Siman* 740), citing Ravyah, explains: “Since while they are resting comfortably and enjoying their sleep at night, they will be able to do more the next day, and everything is included in being ‘occupied with the mitzvah.’” That is, since sleeping conditions in a sukkah aren’t very comfortable, *sheluchei mitzvah* are permitted to sleep comfortably outside the sukkah so they’ll have more energy the next day to carry out their mitzvah mission with greater perfection.

It follows that on Yom Tov, when a person thinks about doing something for the sake of Heaven, this is service of Hashem. During the Yom Tov meals, he is fulfilling the mitzvah of *simchas Yom Tov*, since he is obligated to eat and drink as much as he needs to feel good — and that good feeling itself is *simchas Yom Tov*. And if one eats and drinks because he is obligated, that’s also *simchas Yom Tov*, and he is considered an *oved Hashem*, a servant of God.

Up until now, we were discussing one’s personal obligations, and his obligations to his family. A man should provide his wife with what she needs to make her happy, and he should give his other family members and his small children what’s appropriate for them. And when meeting other people on the street, greet them with a smile! This is another way to fulfill the mitzvah of rejoicing on Yom Tov, and one who does so will be called an *oved Hashem* for greeting each and every person cheerfully.

The mitzvah of *simchas Yom Tov* is one of the 613 mitzvos, and it is only applicable during the upcoming days. Once Yom Tov is over, we will not have this mitzvah, and one’s intent while doing mitzvos will be different. But now, on Yom Tov, this is a full-fledged time-bound mitzvah.

We have learned that being called “a servant of Hashem” is an attainable title. As long as one fills his physical needs because it is a mitzvah to do so, even if he hasn’t reached the level of feeling joy due to mitzvah fulfillment, he is called “a servant of Hashem.” On Sukkos, when we enjoy ourselves as we fulfill our physical needs, we have in mind that we are doing so for the sake of the mitzvah. This joy turns into the joy of mitzvah observance, which is an offshoot of loving God. Through this trait of loving God, we can be certain that we were found innocent in judgment on Yom Kippur, since repentance from love turns one’s intentional sins into merits. And the judgment is changed retroactively, as we explained.

And we have the opportunity to attain all this very easily, but a one-time discussion about this is not enough — one must accept this conduct upon himself in the future as well. Rabbeinu Yonah mentions this as the “third way” (2:10), and says that all it takes is one moment, and a person can extricate himself from thick darkness to a great light. How is this? By accepting upon himself to listen to our Sages’ *mussar* daily, for through this he merits receiving reward — right now — for all the good deeds he will do and will influence others to do in the future.

This is do-able. A person should designate a set time for a daily *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, spiritual accounting, whether by listening to a *mussar schmuess*, or by learning *mussar* books. There are *baruch Hashem* many to choose from, and more and more constantly being published, which offer guidance and *mussar* applicable to the present generation. Everyone can easily find the *mussar* book that’s right for him, and that speaks to him.

In our generation, we merited many good influences and much Heavenly assistance for increasing merits. Last year, a yeshivah man told me that he started thinking three *mussar* thoughts daily: one thought about his state in Torah learning, one thought about his state of prayer, and one about his state of good *middos*. He ponders these thoughts calmly, at a time when he is relaxed. And he told me that since he began doing so, he felt like a changed person. He was so happy.

I know him personally and I can tell that since he started thinking these thoughts, he has reached new heights in his Torah understanding and in his good *middos*. He comes to me from time to time with questions and to clarify subtle doubts in matters of duties of the heart; the questions he asks are on very high spiritual levels, and I don’t know what to answer him.

We should be aware of what the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes at the end of his *sefer*, that every person, no matter what situation he is in — whether he’s a shoemaker or a sanitation worker — can be the greatest *tzaddik* based on his abilities: “He can be a completely pious person, someone who never stops learning Torah — such as someone who out of necessity became a menial worker.” How can he become so great? If he does whatever he can do, no more and no less. If he exerts himself more than he is capable of, he harms himself and is called a “*chassid shoteh* — a foolish righteous man.” If he does exactly what he can do, he is a complete *tzaddik*, and this is quite easy to accomplish.

I am sure that many people want to act this way, but there are those who don’t know how to go about doing it. *Baruch Hashem*, there are plenty of people in our generation who are experts in these matters — but be aware that not everyone is. Even if someone’s a *talmid chacham*, it doesn’t mean that he is proficient in these matters. This specialty has to do with the wisdom of the soul, which is very profound, indeed. There are people who aren’t such great *talmidei chachamim*, but they are experts in wisdom of the soul.

We have an abundance of Divine assistance in our days — like we’ve never seen before — for success in Torah, fear of Heaven, and good *middos*. For many generations back, there hasn’t been such great Divine assistance. May Hashem help us that we all merit much success!

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