True Simcha

Rav Soloveitchik was fond of discussing a comment of the Ramban in his Hasagot to Sefer HaMitzvot (shoresh rishon, s.v. vehaplitaḥ). The Ramban believes that the recitation of Hallel is a d’oraita obligation. This is in contrast to the Rambam, who did not count the recitation of Hallel on Yom Tov in the count of taryag mitzvot because he held that it is only a mitzvah deRabbanan. The Ramban cites the pasuk in reference to the shira of the Levi'im: “On a day of your gladness, and on your Festivals, and on your New Moons, you shall sound the trumpets over your olah-offerings and over your shelamim-offerings” (Bamidbar 10:10).

This pasuk describes that during the nisuch haYayin (wine libation) of korbanot tzibbur (communal offerings), the Levi'im engaged in shira through singing and musical accompaniment (on weekdays), which included the use of chatzotzrot. The Ramban suggests that Hallel is a similar obligation to the shira sung during the avodah – both of them are manifestations of the mitzvah of simcha.

Indeed, one of the sources in the Gemara (Arachin 11a) for the shira of the Levi'im is the pasuk found in the tochecha, דומת א筷 אל שבת את – “Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d [a reference to avodah in the Beit HaMikdash] with joy and goodness of heart” (Devarim 28:47). Rashi adds, “One sings shira only out of a feeling of joy and goodness of heart.”

Thus, the mitzvah of simchat Yom Tov includes more than the offering of a Korban Shelamim and the partaking of its meat and of wine. According to the Ramban, one of the manifestations of this mitzvah is the singing of praises to Hashem in the form of Hallel. Simcha also includes the obligation to provide colored or pressed linen garments for one’s wife and to distribute nuts and almonds to one’s children (Pesachim 109a; Yerushalmi Pesachim 10:1).

The Rambam (Hilchot Yom Tov 6:18; Hilchot Chagigah 2:14) writes that simcha on Yom Tov requires not only that we ourselves eat, drink, and be in a joyous mood. The Rambam terms such enjoyment as simchat kreiso (joy of one’s stomach), instead of simchat mitzvah. Rather, on Yom Tov, there is also a mitzvah to provide for the poor and those who are less fortunate, to enable them to have food and drink for Yom Tov. In other words, an important part of the mitzvah of simcha is to be mesameach others.

That is why there is a minhag to make a tzedaka appeal every Yom Tov, as an expression of simchat Yom Tov. In fact, it is because we pledge tzedaka on Yom Tov that the Yizkor prayer was introduced (Levush, Orach Chaim 490:9). The pledge of tzedaka should be considered as a zechut for one’s parent(s) who raised a child with proper attitudes and values regarding sharing their assets with others. Thus, the recitation of Yizkor is not at all a form of aveilut, but rather a fulfillment of the mitzvah of simcha.1

The notion of sharing one’s simcha with others may be relevant to a chatan during his seven days of Sheva Berachot. The Rama (Orach Chaim 135:1) records that a chatan should be given an aliyaḥ since it is like a Yom Tov for him. What is the halachic basis for this minhag?

The Rav explained that a chatan has a mitzvah of simcha. Since Talmud Torah is a form of simcha, as evidenced by the restrictions to learning that apply to an aveil and on Tisha B’Av, it follows that teaching Torah is a further fulfillment of the mitzvah of simcha. Through teaching others, one causes them to experience simcha. For this reason as well, the minhag is for the chatan to deliver divrei Torah at the chatan’s tish. The chatan receives an aliyaḥ in which he is melaime Torah to the tzibbur that listens to the kriya, essentially the function of every olah laTorah, in order to enhance his mitzvah of simcha by being mesameach others.

According to this explanation, it would seem one should endeavor to be called up for an aliyaḥ on every Yom Tov, not only on the Yamim Noraim (as mentioned by the Mateh Efrayim 584:17). This way, one adds to the joy of others by teaching them Torah, and by so doing, he fulfills the mitzvah of simchat Yom Tov.2

1 See TorahWeb.org, Pesach, 2006, “True Simcha.”

2 See B’Ikvei HaTzon, pp. 94-95.

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