



Finding Happiness in Corona Times

THE MOMENTS BETWEEN THE MILESTONES

Milestones and *smachot* have looked very different in recent months. Leading up to these special occasions, many people are disappointed the event will look very different to how it looked in their dreams. And yet after the event, many have shared that it didn't dampen their *simcha* at all. I believe that an ancient ritual commemorated on Sukkot can help us appreciate not just these more modest milestones, but perhaps even the quieter moments we have been experiencing in between.

The Talmud (Sukkah 51a) states: 'whoever did not see the joyous water-drawing celebrations, never saw joy in his life.' While there were elaborate festivities, the essence of this celebration revolved around a ceremony which involved drawing 'from the wells of salvation' (Isaiah 12:3) in the heart of the City of David and bringing these waters to appeal for a bountiful season of rain. While this ceremony appears strange, the question begs as to why it is the ultimate symbol of joy? Surely there are other milestones in one's life where joy is experienced on a deeper level than the libations of the plainest liquid

– water? Moreover, if libations are to be celebrated, surely there are more precious liquids such as: 'wine that gladdens the heart of man' or 'oil that makes his face shine...' (Psalms 104:15) Other liquids such as these were used many times in Temple offerings – why is the essence of joy associated with the most basic of liquids?

Life is filled with many milestones. Signposted by events such as birthdays, *bar/bat mitzvahs*, engagements, weddings, graduations, reunions and other festivities, we always celebrate the big moments and are excited by the irregular excitement of such events. However, if our joy is only acknowledged at these times, the humdrum regularity of the majority of life becomes but an intermission between the highlights. The oft-unnoticed periods between are where we spend most of our life and it would be sad to allow these intervals to remain out of focus. Whereas oil and wine are luxuries, water is a necessity. The former are artificial stimuli usually reserved for special occasions, while the latter is part and parcel of every liquid for every living being. Corona has brought this message into greater focus.

The celebration of water during the festival of Sukkot is the 'extraordinarification' of the ordinary – the celebration of the moments between the milestones, slowing down the periods in our life that we often fast-forward. Giving birth is incredible, but this pales in comparison with the potential life to be lived – we should rejoice at a wedding, but even more in the resulting marriage. Perhaps Sukkot is the 'time of our rejoicing' because after the inspiration of the High Holidays it celebrates the simplicity of nature through the Four Species and *sukkot*.

This idea is highlighted in the ultimate collective celebration of the year revolving around the most elementary liquid. Thus perhaps the statement of the Mishnah that: 'whoever did not see the joyous water-drawing celebrations, never saw joy in his life' is to be taken literally. If one only experiences joy on the islands of happy occasions and special events, one will never experience true joy in the mundane yet miraculous ocean of life.

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