



# REDEFINING SIMCHA DURING ADAR

Every Jew is required to be *b'simcha* throughout the year, as we find in the Torah:

“And you shall rejoice (*vesamachta*) in every good thing which the L-rd your G-d has given to you” (Devarim 26:11).

Significantly, this verse describes a situation when someone has every reason to be happy – namely when they are blessed with a good harvest.

However, the Gemara (Ta'anit 29a) teaches us about fostering a more sophisticated level of *simcha* in the month of Adar, and it states that we should choose Adar as the month in which we confront any challenging situations that we are facing.

“”

**We are encouraged to use Adar to develop a deeper, more sophisticated, approach to life**

Reflecting on this teaching, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach explained: “The statement of מְרַבֵּין בְּשִׂמְחָה, “we increase *simcha* [in Adar]” does not mean that we should necessarily increase positive activities [in the month of Adar]. Instead... during [the month of Adar], we should remove all worry and sadness from our hearts” (Halichot Shlomo, Purim p. 328).

What this teaches us is that our *avodah* in Adar should not involve over-the-top behavior. Instead, we are encouraged to use Adar to develop a deeper, more sophisticated, approach to life where we learn to confront the things that worry us and somehow find the good in the

challenges that we face. Adar isn't about running away from stress. Instead, it is the month in which we are taught to face up to the things that are causing us stress, while finding the positive even in the negative.

## Reading the Megillah at Nighttime

Why do we read the Megillah twice, in the night and the morning? Basing himself on the Gemara (Megillah 4a), the Ktav Sofer explains that night is analogous to times of distress, while day is analogous to good times. Furthermore, he also reminds us of the teaching (Brachot 54a) that just as a person must recite a *bracha* on a positive moment, so too must they recite a *bracha* on a negative experience. Given all this, the reason offered by the Ktav Sofer as to why we read the Megillah both at night and during the day is because the first reading at night is meant to express how we should see the good in how we were threatened, while the reading in the daytime should express our joy from our salvation.

What this means is that in contrast to many other holidays when we celebrate just the good times, Purim forces us to find *simcha* in the tough times too.

## Getting “Drunk” on Purim

One of the most oft-cited statements concerning Purim is the teaching of Rava that:

“It is the duty of a man to intoxicate himself (לְבַסְמֵי) on Purim until he cannot tell the difference between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai’” (Megillah 7b).

But what does this phrase actually mean? And does the Gemara actually

teach us to reach a state of drunkenness on Purim?

The simple answer to this question is: No!

Rav Chaim Friedlander (in his *Sifte Chaim*, Moadim Vol. 2 p. 230) points out that the word לְבַסְמֵי – which is generally translated as ‘to intoxicate’ - is actually used just a few lines above this statement to refer to the sweet dessert that we eat at the end of a meal (רְוּחָא לְבַסְמֵי שְׂבִיבָה – there is always room for sweet things), and in light of this observation, he interprets Rava's teaching to mean that, “the sweetening of the bad is achieved by the deeper understanding that bad itself enables us to reach the good.”

According to this explanation, just like the Ktav Sofer's insight, what Rava is teaching us is that we should endeavour to reach an emotional and intellectual state on Purim whereby we cannot distinguish between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai’, meaning a state where we see good in the ‘bad’ and not just in the ‘good’.

Ultimately, while many people interpret the word *simcha* to defend practices that lead to over-the-top behavior and drunken stupor on Purim, the message of the month of Adar, and specifically of Purim itself, is that we should try and see good in the bad, make peace with the stresses and challenges we confront in our lives, and where possible, remove all worry and sadness from our heart.

Rabbi Johnny Solomon is a teacher, writer, editor and spiritual coach.



A member of the Mizrahi Speakers Bureau  
[mizrachi.org/speakers](http://mizrachi.org/speakers)