



## The Hidden Simcha of Pesach

The Torah doesn't explicitly command us to be *beSimcha* on Pesach. There are three mentions of *simcha* on Sukkot, one for Shavuot, but Pesach? Nothing.

Rabbeinu Bechaye suggests an explanation. As opposed to Sukkot, when the storehouses are overflowing with the year's crops, and to Shavuot, following the harvest, Pesach is a tense time. The Mishnah lists it as Judgment Day for the crops. It's a time of year when the fields are full but the storehouses are still empty. A point in the agricultural year when it is difficult to fill the holiday tables with good, and it is even more difficult to share the sparse food with guests from outside – those without whom there is no holiday: the Levite, the convert, the orphan and the widow. The Torah understands that people may not invite these guests, and since these guests will not be present, the abundance of blessing which only appears due to the *simcha* of these guests will not appear at that home, and thus there is no *simcha* since there is no blessing. Therefore, the Torah does not mention *simcha* on Pesach.

But this is a description of reality, not the ideal. Practically, there is an obligation of *simcha* on Pesach as well.

Jewish *simcha* does not have only one form. The joy of Purim is not like the joy of Yom Tov, the joy of *bikkurim* is not like that of *ma'aser sheini*, but all of them are enveloped in the call to serve G-d *beSimcha*.

When Rav Soloveitchik compares the *simcha* of Purim to the *simcha* of Pesach, he notes that on Pesach, like on the other holidays, there was real, unalterable change. We were freed, we became a nation, we received the Torah. The sense of *simcha* is one of deep and true elation. On Purim, there was a

temporary salvation, the kind that only emphasized our vulnerability in the face of the ruler's whimsical and capricious nature. It is an external *simcha*, not an expression of inner content.

Armed with Rav Soloveitchik's description, on the one hand we feel the greatness of the holiday upon us, the deep and dramatic change – the kind that influences the entire history of mankind, and the radical transformation worthy of celebrating with the *simcha* of Yom Tov. On the other hand, we also desire to redeem the honor of the partial redemptions, the joy of the day-to-day, even if it is incomplete and temporal and sometimes very vulnerable and fragile. Perhaps the message of Purim is specifically on the flip side of the life-changing *shalosh regalim* – to know how to be happy in the "small" days, in the moments and gifts of the mundane.

And as happens to many of us when we are at a loss for words, I found these wondrous words of Rabbi Sacks *zt"l*:

"Happiness is something you can feel alone, but joy, in Tanach, is something you share with others. Happiness is about a lifetime, but joy lives in the moment. Happiness tends to be a cool emotion, but joy makes you want to dance and sing. It's hard to feel happy in the midst of uncertainty. But you can still feel joy..."

Every day we begin our morning prayers with a litany of thanks, that we are here, with a world to live in, family and friends to love and be loved by, about to start a day full of possibilities, in which, by acts of loving kindness, we allow G-d's presence to flow through us into the lives of others. Joy helps heal some of the wounds of our injured, troubled world."

I write these words between Purim and Pesach, and they lead me to think of the intriguing possibility of grasping both types of joy: 1) to strive for deep and lasting meaning and happiness, the type we merited on a national scale on Pesach, and from which we draw inspiration to create freedom and meaning in our personal our lives. And 2) to recognize and appreciate the joy within us this moment, even before the great problems of life are solved. The happiness of Yom Tov tells us there are summits worth climbing towards, and the joy of Purim tells us that the path is paved with gratitude and goodness. We can still be joyful even if we are not yet happy.

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