

Sukkot: A Commanding Joy

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Devarim 16:13-15

וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בַּחֲגֹךְ אֶתֶּךָ וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמָּתְךָ וְהַלְוִי
וְהַגֵּר וְהִיתוּם וְהָאֵלֶּמְנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the [family of the] Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities.

1. Can You Command Joy?

Toseftah Sukkah 2:1

שְׁלוּחֵי מִצְוָה פְּטוּרִין מִן הַסֵּכָה אַע"פ שֶׁאָמְרוּ אֵין שְׂבָחוּ
שֶׁל אָדָם לְהֵנִיחַ [אֶת] בֵּיתוֹ בְּרֹגֶל מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרַבִּי אֱלֵעִי
שֶׁהָלַךְ [אֶצֶּל ר"א לִלְדָּה] אָמַר לוֹ [מִה זֶה] אֱלֵעִי [אֵי אֶתֶּה
מִשּׁוֹבְתֵי הָרֹגֶל לֹא אָמְרוּ אֵין שְׂבָחוּ שֶׁל אָדָם לְהֵנִיחַ
בֵּיתוֹ] בְּרֹגֶל מִשּׁוּם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דְּבָרִים טז) וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בַּחֲגֹךְ.

Those out on a religious mission are exempt from [the mitzvah of living in] the sukkah, however it is said: "It is no praise for a man to leave his house during the festival." There is a story of Rabbi Ilai, that he went to visit Rabbi Elieser in Lud. He said to him, What does this mean, Ilai? Are you not one of those who rest on the festival? Is it not said, It is no praise for man to leave his house during the festival since it is said, And thou shalt rejoice, thou and thy house?

Sefer HaHinukh 488:1

אָבֵל מַעֲלָה יִתְּרָה – לְהִתְאַמֵּץ לְרֹדֶף אַחֵר הַמָּרָה שְׁחֹרָה
דְּיוֹקָא, לְהַכְנִיס אוֹתָהּ גַּם-כֵּן בְּתוֹךְ הַשְּׂמִיחָה, בְּאֶפֶן
שֶׁהַמָּרָה שְׁחֹרָה בַּעֲצָמָה תִּתְּהַפֵּךְ לְשִׂמְחָה. שִׁיְהִי
הַמָּרָה שְׁחֹרָה וְכָל הַיִּסּוּרִין לְשִׂמְחָה, כְּדֶרֶךְ הַבָּא לְתוֹךְ
הַשְּׂמִיחָה, שֶׁאֵזָז מִגִּדּוֹל הַשְּׂמִיחָה וְהַחֲדוּדָה מִהִפֹּךְ כָּל
הַדְּאָגוֹת וְהַעֲצָבוֹת וְהַמָּרָה שְׁחֹרָה שֶׁלּוֹ לְשִׂמְחָה. נִמְצָא
שֶׁחֻטֵּף הַמָּרָה שְׁחֹרָה וּמִכְנִיס אוֹתָהּ בְּעַל-כֶּרְחָה לְתוֹךְ
הַשְּׂמִיחָה, כְּמִשְׁלַל הַנִּ"ל.

Yet greater still is to gather courage to actually pursue gloom, and to introduce it into the joy, such that the gloom itself turns into joy. A person should transform gloom and all suffering into joy. It is like a person who comes to a celebration. The abundant joy and happiness then, transforms all his worries, depression and gloom into joy. We find that he has grabbed the gloom and introduced it, against its will, into the joy, as in the aforementioned analogy.

Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed 3:46

עֲלִייה לְרֹגֶל: הַתַּחֲדָּשׁוֹת הַתּוֹרָה מֵתוֹךְ הָאֲחוּוָּה אֲשֶׁר
לְתוֹעֲלָתָהּ שֶׁל הָעֲלִייה לְרֹגֶל – טַעְמָה יָדוּעַ,
(חֲדוּשׁ הַבְּרִית) בְּשֶׁל הַתַּחֲדָּשׁוֹת הַתּוֹרָה הַמוֹשְׁגַת מִן
הַהִתְכַּנְּסוּת הַזֹּאת עַל יְדֵי אוֹתָהּ הַיַּפְעֻלוֹת, וְהָאֲחוּוָּה בֵּין

The use of keeping festivals is plain. Man derives benefit from such assemblies: the emotions produced renew the attachment to religion; they lead to friendly and social intercourse among the people. This is especially the object of the commandment to gather the

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

<p>בְּנֵי הָאָדָם. וּבִפְרֹט מִצּוֹת "הַקֹּהֶל" שֶׁטַעֲמָה הַתְּבָאָר: "לִמְעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ [וְלִמְעַן יִלְמְדוּ וְיִרְאוּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, וְשִׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת]" (דְּבָרִים לא, יב). (זְמִינוֹת הַמֶּאֱכָל) דְּמִי מַעֲשֶׂר שְׁנִי נֹעֵדוּ לְהוֹצֵאָה שָׁם, כְּמוֹ שְׂבִיאָרְנוּ, וְכֵן נִטַּע רִבְעִי וּמַעֲשֶׂר בְּהֶמָּה, וְכֵן יִהְיוּ שָׁם בְּשָׂר הַמַּעֲשֶׂר וְיִין נִטַּע רִבְעִי וּמַעֲשֶׂר שְׁנִי וְיָרְבוּ שָׁם הַמְּזֻנוֹת. וְאַסּוּר לְמַכֵּר מֵהֶם דָּבָר וְלֹא לְאַחֵר מִמּוֹעֵד לְמוֹעֵד, אֲלֹא כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר יְתַעֲלֶה: "[לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ תֹאכְלֶנּוּ] שְׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה [בְּמִקּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה', אֹתָהּ וּבֵיתָךְ]" (דְּבָרִים טו, כ), (צִדְקָה) וְכֵן בְּהִכָּרֵחַ יִיתֵנוּ מִמֶּנּוּ צִדְקָה. הוּא זִירָז לְתֵת צִדְקָה בַּחֲגִים וְאָמַר: "וְשִׂמְחָתְךָ בְּחֶגְךָ אֹתָהּ וּבְנֶךָ וּבִתְּךָ [וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ] וְהָלֹאִי וְהַגֵּר וְהַיִּתּוֹם וְהָאֵלְמָנָה" (שָׁם טז, יד). חֲתִימָה הִרִי סִימָנוּ אֶת הַמִּצְוֹת מִקְבּוּצָה זוֹ, וּפְרָטִים רַבִּים מִכֵּן.</p>	<p>people together on the Feast of Tabernacles, as is plainly stated: "that they may hear, and that they may learn and fear the Lord" (Deut. 31:12). The same is the object of the rule that the money for the second tithe must be spent by all in one place (ibid. 14:22-26), as we have explained (chap. xxxix. p. 184). The fruit of trees in their fourth year, and the tithe of the cattle, had to be brought to Jerusalem. There would therefore be in Jerusalem the meat of the tithes, the wine of the fruit of the fourth year, and the money of the second tithe. Plenty of food would always be found there. Nothing of the above things could be sold; nothing could be set aside for another year; the Law orders that they should be brought "year by year" (Deut. 14:22); the owner was thus compelled to spend part of them in charity. As regards the Festivals it is especially enjoined: "And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy man-servant, and thy maid-servant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow" (ibid. 16:14). We have thus explained the reason of every law belonging to this class, and even many details of the laws.</p>
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Hizkuni on Devarim 16:14	
<p>וְשִׂמְחָתְךָ בְּחֶגְךָ הַזֶּה לִמְעַלָּה בְּשִׁבּוּעוֹת שְׂמִיחָה לְפִי שֶׁהוּא זְמַן קִצְרִי וְזְמַן שְׂמִיחָה כִּדְכָתִיב שְׂמִיחוּ לִפְנֵיךָ כְּשִׂמְחָת בְּקִצְרִי, וְכִ"ש עֲקֹשׂוּ בְּסוּכוֹת שְׂאֲסָפוּ הַכֹּל מִן הַשָּׂדֶה אֲבָל בְּפֶסַח לֹא הַזְכִּיר שְׂמִיחָה לְפִי שֶׁעָקְרוּ שָׁל חַג לְהַזְכֵּר הַנֶּסֶךְ שֶׁל יִצְיָאֵת מִצְרַיִם הוּא וְעַדִּין אֵין עָקַר שְׂמִיחָה לְקִנּוּת תְּבוּאָה, וְעוֹד שְׁנֵינוּ בְּדִּ פִּרְקִים הַעוֹלָם נִדּוֹן בְּפֶסַח עַל הַתְּבוּאָה וְשִׂמְחָה יָבֵא בְּרָד אוֹ אֲרֶבֶה חֲסִיל שֶׁדָּפוּן יִרְקוֹן וְיִלְקֶה אוֹתָן.</p>	<p>"And you shall rejoice on your festival." Above, in connection with Shavuot, he mentioned rejoicing, because it is the time of the harvest and a time of joy, as it is written, "They rejoiced before You as at the joy of the harvest." How much more so now, with regard to Sukkot, when everything has been gathered in from the field. But with regard to Passover, he did not mention rejoicing, because the primary purpose of that festival is to recall the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt, and there is not yet any primary cause for rejoicing over the acquisition of grain. Furthermore, we learned: "At four times the world is judged"—on Passover, concerning the grain. For perhaps hail, locusts, grasshoppers, blight, or mildew will come and destroy it.</p>

2. Back to Ourselves, Anew

Kate Bowler, <i>Joyful, Anyway</i> , 5-6	
<p>When a loss of any kind—breakup, breakdown, or any terrible undoing—descends upon your life, joy seems to vanish. The vibrancy that once filled your days fades, leaving the world colorless and cold. This sudden shift doesn't simply numb; it transforms everything around you. Laughter feels strange and a sense of ease is a distant memory. In this new reality, even the smallest spark of joy seems impossible to ignite.</p>	
<p>And even worse, suggested the nineteenth-century philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, joy becomes the source of suffering. Its memory stokes the fires of hurt. The joy we once had, the joy we remember, becomes our ruin. It is not so much lost as missed, he wrote. When you are in the deep abyss of grief, sadness, or, worst of all, despair, joy feels like an insult...</p>	
<p>...but I believe in joy. We can't mistake it for anything less than what it is: one of the most powerful ways we experience the deepest and most healing forms of gratitude, delight, and hope. It is a kind of transcendence; joy is a glimmer of love and forgiveness and wholeness that lifts us out of reality for a moment and gives us back to ourselves, anew.</p>	