

Succot 5780

The Essence of Yom Tov

שמות: 15:2 states: ואנבהו: זה "This is my G-d I will build him a sanctuary." The Gemora in קלג דף שבת דף קלג gives 2 explanations as to what this means:

1. I will make this world beautiful before G-d with Mitzvot. I.e.: I will do all the Mitzvot in the most beautiful way I can. עשה לפניו סוכה נאה, ולולב נאה, ושופר נאה, "Make a nice Succah, lulav, shofer, tzizit etc..."
2. I will emulate G-d. Just like he is merciful and compassionate so will I be merciful and compassionate.

Why do I need a second answer? Is אבא שאול arguing or just adding depth to the first answer? Rav Sholom Eizen ztl was an expert in checking Arba Minim. People would travel to him to check if their Lulav or Etrog was מהודר (beautiful.) Once, a young man came with a beautiful, expensive Etrog. The Rav said to him: "It is definitely a beautiful Etrog, but purchase a cheaper Etrog and buy a present for your wife for Yom Tov."

Maybe what אבא שאול is trying to emphasise, is that doing Mitzvot objectively without thinking about the purpose & rationale underlying the Mitzvah can result in overlooking the reason why G-d gave us the Mitzvah in the first place. Rav Dovi Fischer suggests that when we spend too much time focused on the objectivity of a Mitzvah then we can sometimes miss the point. The Gemora in קט דף פסחים states:

תנו רבנן: חייב אדם לשמח בניו ובני ברגל, שנאמר ושמחת בחגך, במה משמחם - ביין. רבי יהודה אומר: אנשים בראוי להם, ונשים בראוי להן. אנשים בראוי להם - ביין, ונשים במאי? תני רב יוסף: בכבל - בבגדי צבעונין, בארץ ישראל - בבגדי פשתן מגוהצין. תניא, רבי יהודה בן בתירא אומר: בזמן שבית המקדש קיים - אין שמחה אלא בבשר, שנאמר וזבחת שלמים ואכלת שם ושמחת לפני ה' אלהיך. ועכשיו שאין בית המקדש קיים - אין שמחה אלא ביין, שנאמר ויין ישמח לבב אנוש

The Gemora explains that a man is obligated to make his family enjoy Yom Tov. Fundamentally, every person enjoys something different about Yom Tov. The Gemora states that on Yom Tov men enjoy drinking wine, women enjoy wearing nice clothes and that in the times of the Beit Hamikdash eating meat was a fundamental part of the Chag.

The man in the above story wanted to do the Mitzvah of Etrog correctly. That was part of his simchat Yom Tov. However, it wasn't necessarily part of his wife's simchat Yom Tov.

This approach can be applied to all areas of Yiddishkeit. Rav Dovi Fischer quotes the phrase: Don't by frum at someone else's expense.

The Torah Reading for Shabbos Chol Hamoed is from קהלת. In the 3rd Perek, the Pesukim list different emotions and actions whilst emphasizing that each of them has their own time and place. Eg: עת לקרוג ועת לרפוא ועת לפרוץ ועת לבנות. All the עת words are preceded by a lamed: לקרוג. However, the words: עת ספוד ועת רקוד: "To eulogise and To Dance", are an exception to this rule; they do not have a lamed preceding them. Why is this?

תנו רבנן: מבטלין תלמוד תורה להוצאת המת כתובות דף יז. The גרא quotes a Gemora in יז. ולהכנסת כלה

There are few occasions where it is suitable to stop learning Torah. להוצאת המת are two of these occasions.

This portion of קהלת teaches us that there is a time for everything. A time to make war, a time to make peace, a time to love and a time to hate. There is a time to learn Torah. There is also a time to dance at a wedding and a time to mourn at funeral.

Rav Dovi Fischer requests of Yeshiva students returning home during Bein Haazmanim to occasionally take their heads out of their Gemora and to spend quality time with family.

To conclude, what is the raison d'être behind our Yom Tov? Is it an opportunity to spend time with family? Is it a time to learn some Torah? Is it a time to relax and sleep? As the Gemora in פסחים implies, every person enjoys something different about Yom Tov. Be'Ezrat Hashem may we be able to enjoy our Yom Tov whilst being respectful of contrasting ways others take pleasure in it.

(Adapted from a Shiur by Rav Dovi Fischer)