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Sechok - Holy Laughter

The *halachah* is that “when the month of Adar enters, we increase our happiness”.

Each month of the year has its own unique *avodah* (way of serving the Creator) which is the special spiritual power of that month. The month of Adar is a time of *simchah*/happiness; the holy *sefarim* say that it is the type of *simchah* known as “*sechok*” - “laughter”. Thus, our *avodah* in the month of Adar is to have “*sechok*” - “laughter.”

Sechok is not the regular kind of happiness which we identify as simply “*simcha*”; we will explain the difference between them.

The meaning of *simchah* is: “happiness that comes from heart”. We find *simchah* associated with song (*shirah*), which is a really an inner expression of happiness, as *Chazal* say that “There is no song except over wine.” Wine is also associated with happiness, because it is written, “*And wine gladdens the heart of man.*” Thus, *simchah* is an internal kind of happiness, an inner “song”, which is not expressed outwardly.

When a person laughs, though, he is revealing his happiness outward. When a person is happy inside but he doesn’t laugh, he has *simchah*; his happiness remains in his heart, and it isn’t expressed outwardly. When a person laughs, he has an outward expression of happiness – he brings up the happiness from inside his heart to his mouth, where he laughs from. This is “*sechok*” - when our happiness is revealed outward.

Sechok is when the happiness is revealed outward, through the mouth. We find this in the statement of *Chazal*, “It is prohibited for one to fill his mouth with *sechok* (laughter) on this world.”^[1]

The increase of happiness during the month of Adar is meant for us to reveal the happiness outward from our heart. This is the meaning behind *sechok*/laughter, which is to have an open revelation of our happiness.

What exactly is our power of *sechok*? How do we serve the Creator using laughter? Usually it is only foolish and immature people who we can see laughing all the time. But laughter can also be used for holiness, as we will see.

Making Fun of Idols and Heresy

What is the holy kind of laughter? An example of this is what the *Gemara* says that it is permissible to make fun of idol worship.

On a simple level, it appears that when we are supposed to make fun of something, such as scoffing at idol worship and heresy, we are using the same laughter we all know of, but that we are just using it for a holy purpose. But on a deeper understanding, the holy kind of laughter is a whole different kind of laughter than the one we know of.

There is holy laughter, and there is the laughter of fools. In the future, the non-Jews will want to keep the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*, but they will kick it over; Hashem will laugh at them. This is the root of the holy kind of laughter – Hashem Himself laughs.

Evil Laughter

The foolish kind of laughter is a base kind of laughter, in which a person just laughs in order to nullify someone else. This is because “*sechok*” comes from the word *soichek*, “grinding”. When a person grinds something, he is trying to nullify it and erase its existence.

People who laugh at others for the wrong reasons are laughing at them in order to nullify them. This is the evil kind of laughter, which is the laughter of fools. The *Gemara* also states that the “spleen laughs.” The base kind of laughter which is used to hurt other people is rooted in the spleen inside the body; the holy kind of laughter does not come from this.

Laughing Upon Seeing The Future In The Present

What is the depth of holy laughter, *sechok d'kedushah*?

There is a story in the *Gemara*^[2] that Rebbi Akiva and his colleagues were walking on the site of the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. Everyone cried, except for Rebbi Akiva, who was laughing! They asked him why he is laughing. He said that he is laughing because just as the prophecy of the destruction was fulfilled, so will the end of the prophecy be fulfilled – that the *Beis HaMikdash* will be rebuilt.

This is actually the holy use of the power of “*sechok*”, laughter. It is laughter upon being content, specifically because a person sees the future good already in the present moment, and he thus has no reason to be sad. Here we see what holy *sechok* is. Laughter/*sechok* can be identified with seeing the future in the present. This causes a reason to laugh – when one sees the future right now, he sees that there’s nothing to be sad about because it will turn out good anyway, so he just laughs.

Since Rebbi Akiva saw how the future was being fulfilled, he was able to be happy now even in the present moment – and thus he laughed. This is really the depth behind the laughter – it is to feel the future in the present, which makes a person content and laugh off the problems.

Purim: Redemption Now

This is also the happiness of Purim and the month of Adar: It is recognize that the future Redemption is already taking place in the present. When the Jewish people thought it was their end, it was a really

a continuation of their survival. This is the holy “laughter” of the month of Adar and the celebration of Purim: What we think is the worst thing possible, can actually be our very salvation. Haman tried to destroy us using the evil kind of *sechok*, because he was trying to nullify our existence. On Purim, we use the holy kind of *sechok*, and we laugh at this, at his ruined plans; at how the tables turned on him instead.

The depth behind the happiness in the month of Adar, and on Purim, is that the future good which we will have in the future is really happening *right now*. During the rest of the year, we are within the bounds of time - there is a past, present and future. But in the month of Adar, there is a unique revelation taking place: there is no time! It’s all happening now - the past, the present and future are all contained in the moment of right now.

Purim is essentially a reason to celebrate the future Redemption even now, before the Redemption has actually come. Purim is a taste of the future Redemption, and thus Purim is to essentially experience the future Redemption even now, causing reason for happiness. Now, we can really understand the depth behind *sechok*, the power of holy “laughter” in our soul.

The *Gemara*^[3] [3] states that “we are still slaves of Achashveirosh.” What, then, is the whole redemption of Purim, if we were still considered enslaved to Achashveirosh?! The answer to this is the following deep point. On Purim, we experienced a whole different kind of redemption than the redemption we experienced from Egypt. On Pesach, we left Egypt. On Purim, though we left the present moment - even though the redemption wasn’t here yet. We experienced the redemption even in the present. On Purim, there is a redemption taking place in the present moment. Therefore, we have *sechok* on Purim - that even though it appears to us that we are not yet redeemed, we really are. There is a *netzach netzachim*, an eternity, which we can experience right now, in the present moment - on Purim.

Drinking On Purim - Outwardly Showing the Happiness

Sechok/laughter is for a person to become so elated that he wants to express the happiness outward. When a person laughs, he is so happy to the point that he reveals it outward. This is the happiness we reach on Purim - *sechok*, an open kind of happiness, which we express.

On Purim, we accepted the Torah again, and this time it was willingly. As the Sages say, “They kept and accepted what they already accepted.” Purim is a time to make a new commitment to the Torah, to accept it out of love - which is an example of an outward expression of our happiness.

A very famous aspect of Purim is that we are commanded to get drunk on Purim, until the point of “*ad d’lo yoda*” - until one does not have any *da’as* anymore. The question that is asked on this is: How do we come to a new acceptance of Torah on Purim, if we are drunk and we have no *da’as*? The answer is that because we are so happy, we want to express it outwardly, in the form of *sechok*. This is why *Chazal* required that one drink on Purim. It is so that we should openly express our happiness, and reveal it outward. And in this way, by outwardly revealing our happiness, we can reach a new acceptance of the Torah on Purim.

[1] [4] Berachos 30a

[2] [5] Makkos 24a

[3] [6] Megillah 14a

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