

FROM THE EDITOR

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If we look at the way we talk about simchas, we'll notice something interesting. It's almost a given that if a person says he's making or attending a simcha that he's speaking about some sort of religious occasion. No one makes a party for the Oscars or the World Cup and calls it a simcha. And there's a reason for this. Although simply translated as "joy", the feeling of simcha (as well as the occasions that we call by that name) is so much more than that. At its heart, simcha is really, as Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsh expresses it: the "pure and true joy of living before G-d and through G-d".¹ Simcha is a religious experience. So it should be no surprise that such an occasion is marked by a celebration that's directed towards G-d² and that, at a time of simcha – be it a birth, a bris, a bar/bas mitzvah, or a wedding – we're meant to be focused on giving thanks to G-d, recognising the very source of our simcha.

And it's no coincidence that most of these occasions involve an obligatory celebratory meal, aka a seudah, which must be shared with others. The aim of having a seudah at a time of simcha is to create love and brotherhood between the participants and the host of the simcha.³ Put simply: we need each other for simcha. As Rav Hirsch expresses it, "the sense of community is the essence of simcha."⁴ Simcha is the "only mood which widens our human sympathies, makes us capable of fusing our own feelings with those of the community of Israel, and of calling strangers, and orphans, widows and the poor to join in our gladness."⁵ Simcha – both the feeling and the associated celebration – has the amazing ability to make us better people, to help us move beyond our normal, limited sphere of interaction, and touch others in the extended orbit around us who we wouldn't normally reach out to, and share our joy, while at the same time adding to that joy by doing so. It's almost like the answer to a riddle: what grows the more you share it? No one struggles to bulk up his guest list for a simcha. On the contrary, one of the biggest stresses associated with making a simcha is keeping the number of guests within the budget, and, but for the budget (and perhaps the number of seats at the venue), there probably wouldn't be any limit on the number of guests at all!

An essential part of the simcha of Purim (and one of the mitzvos) is having a seudah. Our focus, however, is not meant to be on our own personal seudah, but on the seudah of our brothers, both those we consider our friends, as well as those who are less fortunate and, generally, less well-known to us. Of the four mitzvos connected to Purim, half of them require us to enhance the seudah of others: mishloach manos (sending gifts of food to a friend) and matanos le'evyonim (giving gifts to the poor). Our Sages teach that anyone who increases his gifts to a friend beyond the basic mitzvah (of giving two ready-to-eat foods to one friend) is praiseworthy.⁶ But they also provide some essential perspective on things, noting that it's better to increase our gifts to the poor than to either make a larger seudah for ourselves or increase the gifts we send to our friends.⁷ Why? Because by giving to the poor, we emulate Hashem, and there is no greater simcha than lifting the spirit of someone who is downtrodden, bringing a little joy to his life.

Imagine for a moment if we would bring this same approach into our everyday lives, applying it to every simcha we experience. What if we focused on enhancing our friends' celebrations, as well as making a special effort to make sure that those who weren't financially in a position to celebrate their own simchas were given the means to do so? Just think of how much more simcha there would be!

May there be, as the Megilla says, "light, joy, and gladness" for all of us here in South Africa and for our brothers throughout the world. A Freilichen Purim to everyone!

ROBERT SUSSMAN, EDITOR

¹Horeb 99

²See Shulchan Aruch O.C. 529

³Sifsei Chaim in sicha: Shemini Atzeres – Simcha M'Toch Deveikus

⁴Horeb 211

⁵Id. 99

⁶Shulchan Aruch O.C. 695:4

⁷Mishna Berurah 694:3

ON THE COVER: A MODERN TAKE ON THE GRAGGER (MADE IN ISRAEL), AKA NOISEMAKER, CUSTOMARILY USED DURING THE MEGILLAH READING TO MAKE NOISE WHEN THE WICKED HAMAN'S NAME IS READ. OUR SAGES SEE IN THE GRAGGER THE EMBODIMENT OF THE MIRACLE OF PURIM: JUST AS OUR REPENTANCE HERE ON EARTH CAUSED HASHEM ABOVE TO RESPOND AND SAVE US, SO TOO THE GRAGGER IS TURNED FROM BELOW (IN CONTRAST, FOR EXAMPLE, TO THE DREIDEL PLAYED WITH ON CHANUKAH), CAUSING THE TOP TO RESPOND AND MOVE. PHOTO BY ABE KUGELSKY COURTESY OF J. GREENSTEIN & CO, INC., WWW.JGREENSTEIN.COM.



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