

## Happy to High Heaven

The joyous times are here. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are also joyous: “Keen joy in God is your fortitude” (Nechemia 8:10) on Rosh Hashanah and the joy of forgiveness for our sins on Yom Kippur. Nonetheless, full-fledged joy is still concealed during these days behind a curtain of awe and seriousness. On Sukkot, however, the spring that was pulled all the way back during the Days of Awe is released and joy bursts forth: “And you shall rejoice on your festivals and you shall be exclusively joyful.”

### Three-Pronged Joy

On the surface, the general directive to “rejoice on your festivals” should be enough. But we can delve deeper and examine the special joy of Sukkot and the pinnacle of joy on Shmini Atzeret – Simchat Torah. According to Jewish law, we are directed to rejoice on all three festivals of pilgrimage (Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot). But the verses highlight the different levels of joy. In the verses on Pesach, there is no explicit directive to rejoice. In the verses on Shavuot, joyousness is written only once. In the verses on Sukkot, by contrast, joyousness appears three times: “And you shall take for you on the first day the fruit of a citron tree, date palms, and the bough of a thick tree and willows of the brook, **and you shall rejoice** before Hashem your God, seven days” (Leviticus 23:40). “And **you shall rejoice** on your festivals...seven days you shall celebrate unto Hashem your God...**and you shall be exclusively joyful**” (Deuteronomy 16:15).

What is the meaning of these different levels of joyousness? The Sages explain in the Midrash: On Pesach, we are judged on grain “and a person does not know if he will produce grain this year.” On Shavuot, the grain harvest is already behind us, but we are still judged on the fruits of the trees. On Sukkot, however, we have already passed the days of judgement - in which we were sealed for a good life – and the produce has already been harvested. Thus, the joy is complete.

In a deeper dimension, the Ba'al Shem Tov teaches that every rectified process consists of three stages: **submission, separation and sweetening**. The same is also true of joy. On Pesach, we are relatively in a state of **submission** of the soul. We burn our leavening (and with it, our pride and ego) and feel self-nullification before God, Who comes to redeem us from the lowly state in which we are imprisoned. We are in a state of uncertainty, expressed by the fact that we do not know what will be the fate of the grain. Thus, our joy is not yet explicit and externalized. On Shavuot, our main feeling is one of **separation**: The revelation of the Torah, which is separate in its essence, and which separates between Israel and the nations of the world. At this point, we can already see tangible good, similar to the grain that has already been harvested. Thus, the joy is palpable and explicit. On Sukkot, we achieve a state of sweetening. Our transgressions have been forgiven on

Yom Kippur – and even our intentional sins have been transformed into merits. All the bitterness has been sweetened, and the joy is complete and all-encompassing.

### Joy in Fourth Gear

What happens on Shemini Atzeret? We may think that it is simply a continuation of the Sukkot festival. But in truth, this day is a separate festival. Thus, the sages explain that the words of the verse, “and you shall be exclusively joyous” come to include “the final day of the festival.” There is even a precise numerical allusion to this thought: “And you shall be **exclusively** (ךא = 21) joyous.” After 21 (ךא) days of the month of Tishrei, Shemini Atzeret is the day on which one should be “exclusively (ךא =21) joyous.”

What is the meaning of this unique phrase “exclusively joyous” (ךא שמח)? Additionally, the word “**exclusively**” is just that – exclusive - and here the sages explain that it teaches us to **include** the eighth day in our joyfulness.

The simple explanation is that “exclusively joyous” means with no sadness at all. On the festival of Sukkot, we are still a bit concerned and call out to God in our prayers, “*Hoshah na*” (“Please save us”). We also read the scroll of Ecclesiastes, which reminds us that not everything is rosy. On the eighth day, however, we put Ecclesiastes back on the bookshelf and dance with endless joy.

There is a wondrous explanation brought in the name of the Vilna Gaon (and other commentaries): Generally, joy is enfolded in a practical mitzvah. On Pesach, we have the mitzvah of matzah and special sacrificial offerings. On Shavuot there is a unique offering. Sukkot is replete with mitzvot: We rejoice in the *sukkah* and in the four species and in the time of the Temple - in the joy of drawing the water. On Shemini Atzeret, however, there is pure joy – just the joy, itself, “exclusively.” While we project that joy onto the Torah scroll, with which we dance on Shemini Atzeret, this is not the mitzvah of Torah study. It is simply the joy in the essential holiness of the Torah. The entire nation of Israel is part of this joy, which connects us to God. (Because the verse **excludes** joy that is connected to a particular mitzvah, it must necessarily **include** the eighth day, on which there is no special mitzvah). This type of joy is from the fountain of the world to come. This world is the world of service of God and performance of the mitzvot. The world to come, however, is the world of heavenly reward and the feeling of closeness to God.

Is there another stage in the process of submission, separation and sweetening taught to us by the Ba'al Shem Tov? The Ba'al Shem Tov says that these three stages are steps in the rectification of the soul. After those steps, we are rewarded with the merit to reach the Promised Land. Ultimately, we reach a state in which there is no longer a differentiation between defined stages of rectification. Instead, all is encompassed by Divine inspiration, like



**Gal Einai**

*Revealing the Torah's  
Inner Dimension*

the circles in which we dance on Simchat Torah – with no beginning and no end...