



Likkutei Sichos

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Joyful Eating

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1.

SHAVUOS AND EATING

Among all festivals, Shavuos is unique: “All are in agreement that *Atzeres* {Shavuos} is also ‘for you’ {celebrated for our pleasure}.¹ Why? Because on this day, the Torah was given.”²

There is a dispute³ about other festivals whether one may act in a manner “entirely for Hashem” or if there must also be “half for you.” In contrast, concerning the festival of Shavuos, everyone agrees: “*We need to ensure it is also ‘for you’* — a person must rejoice on this day with food and drink to show that this day, when the Torah was given, is accepted and beloved by the Jews.”⁴

And even according to the final ruling⁵ that **all** festivals must be “half for you” (and the festival must be celebrated with food and drink), there is a difference between Shavuos and the other festivals:

On “other festivals and *Shabbasos*,”⁶ the rule is that it is permitted to fast a *taanis chalom*.⁷ Although a person is obliged to enjoy Shabbos and festivals, for him, a *taanis chalom* is a **pleasure**,⁸ since otherwise, he would remain distressed by his dream.

Conversely, on the festival of Shavuos, since “one must eat and rejoice on it to show that this day when the Torah was given, is accepted and beloved by the

¹ {*Bamidbar* 29:36.}

² *Pesachim* 68b.

³ *Pesachim*, *ibid.*; *Beitzah* 15b.

⁴ Rashi on *Pesachim* *ibid.*; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 494, par. 18.

⁵ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Yom Tov*,” ch. 6, par. 19 (and in *Maggid Mishneh*, there); *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” beg. of ch. 529; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 529, par. 10.

⁶ Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 494, *ibid.*

⁷ {A fast that a person takes upon himself because of a disturbing dream.}

⁸ *Tur*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 288; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, sec. 288, par. 3; and in *Kuntres Acharon* on sec. 498, par. 5 (regarding festivals, even though {in addition to the obligation to have pleasure} there is also an obligation to **rejoice during them**. Similarly, in *Darkei Moshe* on *Tur*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 529; but this is not the place for a lengthy discussion); based on *Rashba* on *Berachos* 31b; and similarly in *Baal Hamaor* on *Pesachim*, *ibid.*; et al.

Jews,”⁹ one **may not** fast a *taanis chalom*.¹⁰ Meaning, on the festival of Shavuos, not only is there an obligation to have **pleasure in general**, which can also be experienced through the pleasure of a “*taanis chalom*”; instead, there is an obligation **to eat**.¹¹ “One must **eat**... to show that this day... is accepted and beloved by the Jews.”

At first glance, this is puzzling:

The festivals of Pesach and Sukkos commemorate (primarily) **physical** acts of kindness — the freedom from (subjugation in) Egypt (on Pesach) and “that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths {“*sukkos*”} when I took them from the land of Egypt”¹² (the Clouds of Glory “that encompassed them and gave them shade so that they would not be smitten by scorching heat and sun”).¹³ Nevertheless, there may be situations where the obligation to enjoy the festival can be fulfilled through fasting and not eating.

Only on the festival of Shavuos, “the day on which the Torah was given” — a completely **spiritual** act of kindness — delighting in, and rejoicing on, the festival must **always** be connected specifically with **physical eating**. It is thus forbidden to fast a *taanis chalom*! And this {distinction} is {incredulously} a direct result of it being “{the day on which} the Torah was given”!

⁹ The wording of the Alter Rebbe in sec. 49, referenced above, based on the wording of Rashi on *Pesachim*, *ibid.* (the difference being that Rashi is discussing the rule of “for you,” which **doesn’t** negate fasting a *taanis chalom*. This is not the place for a lengthy discussion).

¹⁰ Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, *ibid.*, based on *Maharil* cited in *Chok Yaakov* on *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 494, par. 8 (and it is explained similarly in *Magen Avraham*, sec. 494, par. 1. However, see *Eliyahu Rabbah*, sec. 529, par. 7)

¹¹ See *Chiddushei Rabbeinu Dovid Bonfid* and *Chiddushei Sfas Emes* on *Pesachim*, *ibid.*

¹² *Vayikra* 23:43.

¹³ Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 625, based on the *Tur* there.

2.

FOOD OR FASTING?

To better understand this, we must first clarify the general classification of the obligation to have pleasure on Shabbos and festivals:

The primary obligation of having pleasure on Shabbos and festivals specifically concerns eating and drinking. Therefore, the halachah is¹⁴ that although a *taanis chalom* is permitted on Shabbos or festivals (as discussed above), a person who fasted must later “fast one additional day during the week as atonement,”¹⁵ because through his *taanis chalom* on Shabbos, he “**subverted the primary expression of Shabbos delight.**”¹⁶

Furthermore:, the allowance to fast on Shabbos and festivals is specifically for a *taanis chalom* (for someone “for whom eating on Shabbos is painful”).¹⁷ However, if someone wants to fast for a different reason, “even for the purposes of repentance or piety” and “**he takes pleasure** in this fast,” it is **forbidden**. Regardless of these virtuous motives, “he may not exchange the pleasure mandated by our Sages – the three {Shabbos} meals – for another type of pleasure that need not necessarily be observed on Shabbos.”¹⁸

This needs further clarification: Since the obligation to have pleasure is not about the eating itself, but rather, for the pleasurable aspect within it (“for it is only a mitzvah to eat on Shabbos because of the pleasure {he derives from it}”)¹⁹ – to the extent that the pleasure on Shabbos and festivals is considered a mitzvah that is “dependant on the person’s mindset”²⁰ (as indicated from the fact

¹⁴ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Taaniyos*,” ch. 1, par. 12; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch* (and Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*) “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 288, par. 4 (in Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch* – par. 3); *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 568, par. 5.

¹⁵ The wording of the Alter Rebbe in sec. 288, *ibid.*

¹⁶ The wording of the *Tur* (and Alter Rebbe), *ibid.*; and in *Meiri* on *Beitzah* 15b.: there is the trace of sin on his hands.

¹⁷ Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, *ibid.*, par. 2, based on *Shulchan Aruch*, *ibid.* (par. 2-3); and see later on in Section 4.

¹⁸ Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, *ibid.* (unlike *Kol Bo* cited by *Beis Yosef* on *Tur*, sec. 288, *ibid.*; *Chiddushei HaMeiri* and *Beis HaBechirah* on *Beitzah* 15b.; *Shitah Mekubetzes* on *Berachos* 31b; et al.).

¹⁹ Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, *ibid.*; also see Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” end of sec. 167.

²⁰ The wording of the Alter Rebbe in *Kuntres Acharon* of sec. 498, *ibid.*

that one may undertake a *taanis chalom* “since this fast brings him pleasure”) — why was the obligation to have pleasure originally established specifically in the context of eating and drinking? (Why **can’t** we exchange the “pleasure ordained by our Sages... for another type of pleasure”?) There should have never been any specific condition or definition imposed on everyone. Instead, every person should have been permitted to fulfill the mitzvah of having pleasure in a way that **he** personally enjoys!²¹

[True, the **majority** of people derive pleasure from eating and drinking (typically from eating meat and drinking wine).²² However, that shouldn’t mean that for some people, an alternative mode of pleasure (for example — those who take pleasure from fasting for repentance) should **not** be considered “pleasure.”]

3.

BODY VERSUS SOUL

The explanation:

Torah and mitzvos were given to the Jewish people, specifically as souls in **corporeal bodies** (people born by “a father and mother”).²³ The rationale for this is that mitzvos refine a person (as our Sages teach, “The mitzvos were given only to **refine** people through them”).²⁴ This refinement isn’t for the soul’s sake (for “the soul itself does not need rectification”).²⁵ Rather, it is for the body. The **body** of a Jew should (also) become refined and permeated with the sanctity of mitzvos.

²¹ Interesting to note the distinction between men, women, and children, in regards to the mitzvah of rejoicing on Yom Tov (*Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Yom Tov*,” ch. 6, par. 17-18; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 529 (par. 2-3); Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, *ibid.*, par. 7).

²² Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 242, par. 2; also see *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Shabbos*,” ch. 30, par. 10 (and *Maggid Mishneh*, there).

²³ *Shabbos* 89a.

²⁴ *Bereishis Rabbah*, beg. of ch. 44; et al.

²⁵ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 37 (p. 48b — citing *Eitz Chaim*, “*Shaar 26*”; and see *Likkut Pirushim... L’Tanya* there); *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” beg. of ch. 38 (p. 51a — “{the soul does not need to} perfect itself **through mitzvos**”).

On this basis, we can understand the Torah's intent when it tells us that Shabbos (or festivals) must be a time of delight for the Jewish people (“**for you**”).²⁶ This does not mean that (only) the soul should experience (spiritual) pleasure from the day of Shabbos (or festival). Rather, the **body** (also) should enjoy the day being Shabbos (or a festival).²⁷ Moreover, the *primary* intent of the mitzvah is specifically (to refine) the body.

Since the body's natural pleasure comes from eating and drinking, the Torah tells us that we have an obligation to have pleasure, specifically through eating. The pleasure of Shabbos will refine and affect the body itself precisely in this manner.

Conversely, fasting, as part of the repentance process (or so forth), is neither physically beneficial nor pleasurable. (Only for the soul is such fasting spiritually pleasurable.) And even if someone has disciplined his body not to experience discomfort from fasting, or if his body has been trained to feel good from his soul's pleasure — just as hearing good **news** can literally distend a person's bones²⁸ — nevertheless, this is not the **body's own** pleasure. (The **body** does not experience pleasure from the **news** or the fast.) This pleasure is only a result of the soul's **control** (either innate or acquired) over the body, **contrary** to the body's nature — even if it is the body of a refined or holy person.

Therefore, this type of fast (for repentance) is forbidden on Shabbos or festivals, even if “he takes pleasure in this fast.” Rather, a person must enjoy the Shabbos or festival by eating and drinking — something physically pleasurable. This is also the reason for the ruling that even when it comes to a *taanis chalom* on Shabbos (and festivals) — although this fast is indeed **permitted** — we must still atone for having fasted. For by fasting on Shabbos, we have “subverted the primary expression of Shabbos delight.”

²⁶ For regarding Shabbos, there is also a consensus that “we require that it {also} be ‘for you’” (*Pesachim*, loc cit.; *Tur Shulchan Aruch*, beg. of “*Hilchos Shabbos*”).

²⁷ See *maamar* “*Zohar... v'korosa l'Shabbos oneg*” in *Sefer HaMaamarim* (of the Alter Rebbe) 5568 (p. 111); *Or HaTorah* — *Yeshaya*, on the verse (58:13) par. 11 (end of p. 280); and see *Likkutei Torah*, *parshas Tzav* (15b) and *Sefer HaMaamarim* (of the Alter Rebbe) 5568, discourse “*vayehi h'anan*” (pp. 171, 178) on the topic of “there is no joy other than with meat.”

²⁸ *Gittin* 56b.

4.

A DREAM STATE

Tentatively, this is also why (according to the approach of *remez*)²⁹ the **Gemara**³⁰ mentions explicitly only the allowance on Shabbos for a *taanis chalom*. In contrast, *Shulchan Aruch*³¹ cites (in addition to a *taanis chalom*) other instances when it is permitted to minimize eating or to fast on Shabbos (because, for the person, it is pleasurable). For example, “someone who becomes ill by eating, for whom not eating is pleasurable,” or someone accustomed to fasting “every day, for whom eating on Shabbos involves discomfort since it deviates from his routine.”³²

This indicates that the allowance to fast in all other cases is **based on** the ruling of *taanis chalom*: From here, we derive that the mitzvah of enjoying Shabbos (and festivals) is not an obligation necessitating a person to eat, per se: The obligation to eat and drink is only contingent on the pleasure experienced by eating. Therefore, when a person gets pleasure by **not** eating, fasting is then permitted.³³

We can suggest that our Sages chose to convey this principle specifically through the case of *taanis chalom* to hint that the entire possibility of allowing someone to fast on Shabbos (for whatever reason) — a scenario that deprives a Jewish person of enjoying the day with food and drink — is a result of being in a (spiritual) dream-like state — “*chalom*” — the slumber, concealment, and exile of the soul in a physical body. Moreover, the slumber and concealment are a consequence of the actual exile.

²⁹ {*Remez* is a method of commentary based on textual hints and allusions, sometimes based on the numerical value of letters.}

³⁰ *Shabbos* 11a; *Taanis* 12b — and even the teaching of our Sages in *Berachos* (31b) “Anyone who sits in fast on Shabbos...” is discussing a *taanis chalom* (*Tosafos* there in the name of *Rabbeinu Chananel*; *Rif* and *Rosh* on *Shabbos*, *ibid.*; et al.).

³¹ *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 288, par. 2-3.

³² The wording of the Alter Rebbe, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 288, par. 2; from *Shulchan Aruch*, *ibid.*, par. 2-3.

³³ They did not permit fasting for the sake of *teshuvah* because it is a “pleasure... **that is unnecessary** to carry out on Shabbos” (whereas a *taanis chalom* can nullify the Heavenly decree only if the person fasts on the same day that he had his nightmare).

[As *Torah Or*³⁴ explains the verse, “We were as dreamers”:³⁵ Just as a dream-state can allow a person to weave together opposites in the same scenario (because during sleep, the {conscious} intellect departs, and only “the power of imagination” lingers), so, too, during exile. The darkness of exile allows Jews to entertain the co-existence of contradictory elements. During prayer, when **genuinely** inspired, we make positive resolutions, and so forth. But shortly after our prayers are concluded, this inspiration completely fades. In fact, we can act totally opposite to our earlier prayerful resolutions.]

How is it possible that on Shabbos or a festival, when it is a **mitzvah** to enjoy the day through **eating and drinking**, a person’s body can **restrain him** from having this pleasure?

— And we aren’t talking about someone who, G-d forbid, acts contrary to the Torah. We are talking about someone who endeavors to live according to the Torah. Yet, his body isn’t receptive to experiencing this pleasure. —

This situation can be caused only by being in a “dream” state (the concealment of exile): He is indeed a Jew who lives according to the Torah, but at the same time, something conceals the delight of Shabbos, preventing the delight from fully permeating him so that even his **body** senses (properly) that it is Shabbos.

If not for this concealment, the Shabbos (or festival) — the day that “**He made holy**”³⁶ within time — would have influenced his body so that **now, he** too would take pleasure in eating (even though the rest of the year eating would have an opposite effect), for Shabbos is a day that brings pleasure in *all* areas.

However, since the Torah aims to address and counsel even those in a dream state and, as the Torah states, it is meant “to separate the impure from the pure”³⁷ —

³⁴ *Parshas Vayeshev* (28c); *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5565 (vol. 1) p. 184.

³⁵ *Tehillim* 126:1.

³⁶ *Shemos* 20:11.

³⁷ End of *parshah Shemini* {*Vayikra* 11:47}.

[Seemingly, pure and impure are opposites. Why does the Torah need to separate them? This is because the Torah also offers guidance and assistance to someone asleep or in a dream state. Consequently, integrating opposites, like pure and impure, is not impossible for him. Even for this person, the Torah descends,³⁸ separating the pure from the impure.]

— therefore, the Torah also provides guidance for a person whose body — because of this concealment — prevents him from partaking of Shabbos and festival meals. The Torah allows him to fast since, in his current situation, **this** abstinence is his pleasure.

5.

THE POWER OF THE TORAH

Based on the above, we can now also understand the difference between Shavuos and “other festivals and *Shabbasos*”:

The G-dliness revealed at the time of the Giving of the Torah³⁹ was unique. Unlike the revelation that transpired on all other festivals or special occasions, at the Giving of the Torah, G-dliness penetrated all of creation. As it says,⁴⁰ the sound of the Giving of the Torah could be heard from all four directions above and below. In fact, divinity permeated the world} to the extent that “a bird did not chirp... an ox did not bellow... the entire world was quiet and silent.”⁴¹ Furthermore, all inanimate objects worldwide absorbed the sound of the Ten Commandments. (As elaborated elsewhere,⁴² this is why no echo was produced by the Divine proclamation of the Ten Commandments.)⁴³

³⁸ Note *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” beg. of ch. 5: “...that if, for example, Reuven would claim thus and Shimon thus” — that one of the claims is invariably false.

³⁹ {The Giving of the Torah.}

⁴⁰ *Tikkunei Zohar*, *Tikkun* 22 (64b); *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 36; also see *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Shemos* 25; *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 5, par.9.

⁴¹ *Shemos Rabbah*, end of ch. 29.

⁴² *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, *sichah* on *parshas Vaeschanan* {pp. 1092 ff.}.

⁴³ *Shemos Rabbah*, end of ch. 28.

This is all because, at the Giving of the Torah, the revelation was of Hashem's very Essence,⁴⁴ which was, so to speak, “invested” into the Torah.⁴⁵ As our Sages tell us,⁴⁶ the word “אָנֹכִי, I” (the **beginning** of the Ten Commandments — the Giving of the Torah) is an acronym for “אָנֹכִי נִפְשִׁי כְּתִבִית יְהִיבִית — I have written and given, Myself” — {referring to the level of} “אָנֹכִי מִי שְׁאָנֹכִי — I am Who I am”⁴⁷ — G-d's Essence Itself tells us that He put (inscribed and gave) His Essence (Myself) into the Torah.

And since Hashem is the true Infinite One, His revelation can reach everywhere. Therefore, the Giving of the Torah permeated **all** creation.

This also explains why we are not allowed to fast {even} a *taanis chalom* on Shavuos since it is “the day on which the **Torah** was **given**”:⁴⁸

Since the festival of Shavuos is “the day on which the Torah was given” — an event that suffused all creation without limits — the joy associated with Shavuos must also be unlimited, to the extent that there is no part of a person which the joy of the Giving of the Torah doesn't reach.

Regarding other festivals, since they are connected with⁴⁹ “lights and revelations,”⁵⁰ they leave room for the concealment of a “dream,” which can obstruct and stymie the joy of the festival.

However, no concealment affects the joy associated with the Torah.⁵¹ It permeates all planes. Everywhere, even on the lowest plane, one can appreciate that “this day, when the Torah was given, is accepted and beloved by the Jews.”

⁴⁴ For this reason, Pesach and Sukkos are both seven days (seven alludes to the created continuum of creation) and the festival of Shavuos, when the Torah was given, is **one** day (the level of *kesser*, transcending division) as explained in the addendum to *Torah Or* (109d, ff.).

⁴⁵ See *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 47.

⁴⁶ *Shabbos* 105a (following the version of *Ein Yaakov*); and see *Likkutei Torah*, parshas *Shelach*, 48d.

⁴⁷ *Likkutei Torah*, beg. of parshas *Bamidbar* and parshas *Pinchas*, 80b; **et al.**

⁴⁸ And one who gives a gift, gives it generously (*Bava Basra* 53a).

⁴⁹ Note *Tifferes Yisrael* (by the *Maharal*), end of ch. 25.

⁵⁰ {In other words — only an emanation or glimmer from Hashem's Essence, but not the Essence Itself.}

⁵¹ Note — *Shabbos* 89a, *Tosafos* s.v., “Torah”; *Hayom Yom*, p. 59 (the third and fourth of Sivan).

Consequently, also in “the world of dreams,” when it comes to eating, even if a person dreamt of something that would normally prevent him from enjoying any food the following day, the joy of Shavuos ensures that even that person is joyful because he welcomes and cherishes the day the Torah was given.

— From the talk delivered on the second day of Shavuos, 5724 (1964)