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Who Celebrates?

Translated by Rabbi Shmuel Kesselman

General Editor: Rabbi Eliezer Robbins | Copy Editor: Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger
Content Editor: Rabbi Sholom Zirkind

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1.

EXTRA CELEBRATION

From the verse,¹ “You shall rejoice before Hashem, your L-rd, for seven days” (said regarding Sukkos), Rambam² infers that on the festival of Sukkos, a greater measure of rejoicing took place — more than on other festivals. In his words:

Although it is a mitzvah to rejoice on all the festivals, it was a day³ of additional celebration in the Temple on the festival of Sukkos, as the verse says: “You shall rejoice before Hashem, your L-rd, for seven days.” What was done? On the eve of the first day of the festival, for the women, they would set up a place above in the Temple, and for the men, a place below, so that the men and women would not mingle. The celebration would begin on the night after the first day of the festival. Similarly, on each day of Chol Hamoed...

Commentators⁴ note that Rambam cites the verse, “You shall rejoice before Hashem, your L-rd, for seven days,” as the proof text for the “day of additional celebration in the Temple on the festival of Sukkos.” Rambam also does not mention that the additional celebration had anything to do with the water libation — *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*.⁵ This shows that Rambam maintains that the “additional celebration” was unconnected with the water libation. Rather, there was a biblical obligation to rejoice in the Temple (“before Hashem, your L-rd”) on the festival of Sukkos, for the sake of the **festival**. This is aside from the rejoicing required on every festival (and also on Sukkos itself — outside of the Temple precinct).

Thus {according to Rambam}, the fact that the *mishnah*⁶ calls the celebration “*Simchas Beis HaShoeva*,” and the *Gemara*⁷ connects it with the

¹ *Vayikra* 23:40.

² *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Lulav*,” ch. 8, par. 12.

³ See the different versions of Rambam’s text in the Frankel ed. (Jerusalem, 1975).

⁴ Rav Yerucham Fishel Perla’s commentary on *Rav Saadia Gaon’s Sefer HaMitzvos*, part 3, addenda, sec. 5.

⁵ {Lit., “rejoicing of the water-drawing house.” On Sukkos, water was drawn from a pool called the *Shiloach Spring*, and was brought to the Temple to be used for a water libation on the Altar. The entire process was carried out with great joy and celebration, including all-night music and dancing.}

⁶ *Sukkah* ch. 5, *mishnah* 1.

⁷ *Sukkah* 50b.

verse,⁸ “You shall draw water with joy,” only teaches that in consequence of this verse, which is really only an *asmachta*,⁹ our Sages connected the additional celebration of the **festival of Sukkos** with the water libation.

For this reason, the celebration is not called “*Simchas HaShoeva*” {“Rejoicing of the Water-Drawing”} (which would imply that the water-drawing is the reason for the joy). Rather, it is called “*Simchas **Beis** HaShoeva*” {“Rejoicing at the Water-Drawing **house**”}, i.e., a celebration (on account of the festival of Sukkos) which took place in the *Beis HaShoeva*. *Beis HaShoeva* was “the **name of the place** that they set up for the celebration.”¹⁰

2.

WHY NOT CELEBRATE ON THE FESTIVAL?

But we need to clarify:

Seemingly, Rambam’s wording is self-contradictory: He begins by saying that we derive the obligation for the “additional celebration” from the verse, “You shall rejoice before Hashem, your L-rd, for **seven** days.” This shows that the time of this rejoicing also includes the first day of the festival because it is one of the seven days. But immediately afterward, in the same *halachah*, Rambam says, “The celebration would begin on the **night after** the first day of the festival.”

Rambam immediately offers the rationale for this: “This celebration supersedes neither the Shabbos nor the festival {prohibitions}.”¹¹ But this itself is difficult to understand. Had the obligation of the “additional celebration” not been biblically mandated but only been a Rabbinic ordinance, we could understand why the celebration did not take place on the first day of the festival.

⁸ *Yeshayahu* 12:3; see Rambam’s “*Commentary on Mishnah*,” on *Sukkah*, beg. of ch. 5.

⁹ {An *asmachta* is a support found in the Torah for Rabbinic enactments or *halachos*. It does not base the law on the cited verse, but uses the verse as a hint.}

¹⁰ Rambam’s “*Commentary on Mishnah*,” loc. cit.

¹¹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Lulav*,” ch. 8, par. 13 (from the *mishnah*, *Sukkah* 50a).

[This is because the manner of the celebration was that “the flute would be sounded and songs played on the harp, lute, and cymbals. In addition, each person would play the instrument he knew how to play.”]¹² For the rabbinic obligation to celebrate would not be strong enough to override the prohibition of using musical instruments on Shabbos and festivals,¹³ which is also rabbinic.

But {according to Rambam} having an additional celebration is a **biblical** command. This raises a question: Why would the biblical obligation not override the **rabbinic** prohibition of using musical instruments [especially considering that “in the Temple, rabbinic decrees are not in force,”¹⁴ and *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* took place exclusively within the Temple]?

3.

MORE QUESTIONS

Additionally, we need to clarify:

a) How does Rambam know that “you shall rejoice before Hashem, your L-rd, for seven days” refers to the “additional celebration”?

b) Furthermore: How **can** we derive the obligation to conduct an “additional celebration” in the Temple from this verse? Rambam himself says in an earlier *halachah*¹⁵ that this verse teaches us something else: “The *mitzvah* of *lulav*... and only in the Temple, the *lulav* is taken on each of the seven days of the festival, as the verse says: ‘You shall rejoice before Hashem, your L-rd....’”

¹² *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Lulav*,” ch. 8, par. 13; see *mishnah*, *Sukkah* 51b.

¹³ *Eruvin* 104a.

¹⁴ *Pesachim* 65a; *Beitzah* 11b.

¹⁵ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Lulav*,” ch. 7, par. 13; see *Sukkah* 43a.

4.

WHO WAS AT THE CELEBRATION

Further on, Rambam says:¹⁶

It is a mitzvah to maximize this celebration. The common people did not actively take part, nor did anyone who desired. Rather, the greatest of Israel's sages, the heads of the *Yeshivos*, the members of the *Sanhedrin*, the pious, the elders, and the men of stature would dance, clap their hands, sing, and rejoice in the Temple on the days of the festival of Sukkos. However, the entire nation — the men and the women — would all come to see and hear.

The source of this *halachah* is the *mishnah*:¹⁷ “The pious and men of stature would dance before them....”

We need to clarify:

a) On the above basis, according to Rambam, the celebration is a biblical **obligation**, as part of {the obligation of} rejoicing on Yom Tov (as opposed to being a rabbinic law related to the water libation). As such, why was it “**not** performed by the common people nor by anyone who desired... (and) the entire nation — the men and the women — would all come (only) to see and hear”?

(i) How could distinctions be made in performing a biblical mitzvah that the Torah gave without qualification?

(ii) What is the source of this?

b) The *mishnah* only mentions “the pious and men of stature.” Why does Rambam add that the celebrations were (also) conducted by “the greatest of Israel's sages, the heads of the *Yeshivos*, the members of the *Sanhedrin* (the pious), the elders (and the men of stature)”?

¹⁶ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Lulav*,” ch. 8, par. 14.

¹⁷ *Sukkah* 51a.

What's more, the *Gemara*¹⁸ quotes a *Beraisa* which recounts what “the pious and men of stature” and the penitents would say at the celebration. Meaning, there were three categories: the pious, men of stature, and penitents. Rambam, however, adds categories **not** mentioned by the *Beraisa*; on the other hand, he omits the category of the penitents which the *Beraisa* does mention.

5.

REJOICING IN MITZVOS IN GENERAL

Further on, Rambam says:¹⁹

The happiness with which a person should rejoice in **performing a mitzvah**, and **loving Hashem** who commanded them, is a great *avodah*....²⁰ Anyone who humbles himself and demeans his body... is a great person, worthy of honor, who serves {Hashem} out of love. Thus, David, King of Israel, said:²¹ “I would be demeaned even more than this, and become low in my own eyes....”

We need to clarify:

Why does Rambam first bring up this idea in the *Laws of Lulav* as a continuation of the subject of the “**additional** celebration” of the festival of Sukkos? Even if his intention is to associate this law about rejoicing to another law about rejoicing, he should have brought this up in the *Laws of Yom Tov*,²² which: (a) comes before the *Laws of Lulav*; (b) is a more generic form of rejoicing; and, (c) **most importantly**, in the *Laws of Yom Tov*, in its conclusion of the topic of rejoicing, discusses a person rejoicing when serving Hashem, in **general**, just as Rambam does here {regarding rejoicing when performing mitzvos}.

¹⁸ *Sukkah* 53a.

¹⁹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Lulav*,” ch. 8, par. 15.

²⁰ {Divine service.}

²¹ *Shmuel II* 6:22.

²² In continuation to his discussion in *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Yom Tov*,” ch. 6, par. 20.

This shows that rejoicing whenever performing a mitzvah, **in general**, relates specifically to the “**additional** celebration” of the festival of Sukkos.

6.

NO EXTRA MITZVAH

The explanation of all the above:

Rambam quotes the verse, “You shall rejoice before Hashem, your L-rd, for seven days” as the source of the “additional celebration” on the festival of Sukkos. In doing so, he does not mean that **Torah** imposes an **additional** obligation (on top of rejoicing of Yom Tov, the obligation) of “additional celebration” on the festival of Sukkos.

Rather, the Torah emphasizes the obligation to rejoice on Yom Tov in connection with Sukkos (in the Temple) more than it does regarding other festivals: “You shall rejoice before Hashem, your L-rd, for seven days” (although we are already obligated to rejoice on Yom Tov based on the verse, “You shall rejoice on your festival...”).²³ Therefore, “**there was** (they observed during these seven days) a day of additional celebration in the Temple.” Meaning, the people observed an “additional celebration” within the framework of the Yom Tov rejoicing itself. This was because of the emphasis on the (**general**) mitzvah of rejoicing on Yom Tov.

This is what Rambam means when he says (two *halachos* later), “It is a mitzvah to maximize **this** celebration.” He doesn’t mean that there is a distinct mitzvah or obligation to have an additional celebration. Rather, **within** the mitzvah of rejoicing on Yom Tov itself, there is an emphasis and addition.

On this basis, we can appreciate why *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* does not override Yom Tov: True, this celebration is connected with the verse, “You shall rejoice before Hashem, your L-rd, for **seven** days.” And by **increasing** the

²³ *Devarim* 16:14.

celebration, the people fulfilled the mitzvah of rejoicing on Yom Tov in general (as mentioned). Nevertheless, since there was no specific biblical **obligation** to conduct the “additional celebration” (and we can also fulfill the positive command to rejoice on Yom Tov without incorporating the “additional celebration”), the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* did not override the prohibition (albeit rabbinic) against playing musical instruments on Yom Tov.

[On this basis, we can also appreciate why Rambam maintains that “on the **eve** of the first day of the festival, they would set up a place in the Temple for women.” This is in contrast to the simple reading of the *mishnah*,²⁴ which implies that they set up this place “on the **night** after the first day of the festival.” Since there is no specific biblical **obligation** to observe the “additional celebration,” as mentioned, they could not override the prohibition of performing work on Chol Hamoed²⁵ for this purpose. Therefore, Rambam maintains they did it before the festival began.]

7.

DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES

On this basis, we can also appreciate how it was possible for there to have been differences between how Jews observed this mitzvah, although it was given equally to all.

The additional celebration was **not** an independent obligation. Rather, it was an addition to, and placed further emphasis on, the **affection** for the mitzvah of rejoicing on Sukkos. This is inferred from the verse emphasizing the celebration, as mentioned. Thus, the “additional celebration” depended completely on each person’s emotional attachment and feeling {toward the mitzvah}, i.e., how much **he felt** affection for the mitzvah. Therefore, those of a higher spiritual standing expressed their rejoicing in that “they would dance,

²⁴ *Sukkah* 51a.

²⁵ Discussed in *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Yom Tov*,” ch. 7.

clap their hands....” In contrast, “the entire nation — the men and the women —” celebrated by coming “to see and hear.”

Thus, the “additional celebration” is not a biblical obligation, but an addition to the mitzvah of rejoicing on Yom Tov that depends on a person’s feeling of affection for this mitzvah. On this basis, we can also appreciate:

- a) the reason all the different people (“the greatest of Israel’s sages... and the men of stature”) performed, since each group had an advantage over the others (and each group had a special affection {for the mitzvah}); and
- b) the source for all the above groups “performing” in the celebration:

The *Gemara* — the *Babylonian Talmud*²⁶ and the *Jerusalem Talmud*²⁷ — mentions the **names** of (only) a few *Tannaim*²⁸ and describes how they conducted themselves (or what they said) at the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*. Certainly, **all the** *Tannaim* in the Temple took part in the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* (and certainly many of them said a few words at the celebration). But the reason the *Gemara* singles out these few *Tannaim* and by name — no more and no less — is because they include **all the** categories of people who partook in the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*. And each category was unique from among all those who performed (in the “additional celebration”), for specifically **these** groups each experienced the preciousness of the mitzvah in a unique way.

²⁶ *Sukkah* 53a.

²⁷ *Sukkah* ch. 5, sec. 4.

²⁸ {A title given to Sages from the era of the *Mishnah*.}

8.

SAMPLES

The *Gemara*²⁹ says:

a) “**Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya** said, ‘When we would rejoice in the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*, we did not taste sleep, as we would doze on each other’s shoulders.’” What unique virtue did Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya exemplify (because of which the *Gemara* recounts what **he** said about his participation in the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*)?

The *Gemara*³⁰ relates that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya debated with the elders of Athens, who were outstanding intellectuals, and that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya emerged victorious. The *Gemara*³¹ also relates that before Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya’s passing, the **Sages** of the Jewish people inquired of him, “What will happen to **us** because of the threat of the heretics?” He answered them (by quoting the verse,³² “Counsel is lost from the sons, their wisdom has spoiled.”³³ Alternatively, he quoted the verse,³⁴ “And he said: Travel on and let us go, and I will go alongside you”). This demonstrates that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya was one of the **greatest** Sages of Israel.

Thus, from him, Rambam deduces that the “greatest of Israel’s Sages,” rejoiced in the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*.

b) “They said about **Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel** that when he would rejoice at the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*, he would take... {eight flaming torches and toss one and catch another, juggling them}.”

²⁹ {*Sukkah* 53a.}

³⁰ *Bechoros* 8b.

³¹ *Chagigah* 5b.

³² *Yirmiyahu* 49:7.

³³ {When wisdom is lost from the “sons,” i.e, the Jews, then the heretics will certainly also experience a similar loss in their wisdom (*Chiddushei Aggados Maharsha*).}

³⁴ *Bereishis* 33:12. {This verse alludes to the concept that the wisdom of the gentiles will always remain parallel to (“alongside”) the wisdom of the Jews.}

The *Gemara*³⁵ records that Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel was the *Nasi*³⁶ of the *Sanhedrin*. Rambam says:³⁷

The Great Sanhedrin — It is composed of 71 judges.... The wisest one of them is placed as the head over them. He acts as the head of the *Yeshivah*. He is called the *Nasi* by the Sages in all sources.

Thus, the *Nasi* is the head of the ***Sanhedrin***. From this, Rambam infers that the *Sanhedrin* partook in the celebration of the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*.

c) “They said about **Hillel the Elder** that when he was rejoicing at the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* he said....” The *Gemara* carefully calls him Hillel **the Elder**, in contrast to many sources where he is just called Hillel. This shows that there is a message here. He participated in the rejoicing of the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* because of his special virtue of being one of the Elders. From this, Rambam deduces that the Elders took part in the rejoicing of the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*.

9.

BEN YEHOZADAK

d) The *Jerusalem Talmud* mentions another Sage: “**Ben Yehotzadak** prided himself for his jumping.”

Since this story is recorded in order to teach us something, certainly not to be vague, the person in question must have been one of the Jewish personages who lived in the time of the Temple, and who is discussed in another source. In fact, in the lists of *Tannaim*, we find someone named Rabbi Shimon ben Yehotzadak. However, we do not find any source in which our Sages speak of any special quality of his. Therefore, we must conclude that the special quality is alluded to by his name, Rabbi Shimon.

³⁵ *Shabbos* 15a.

³⁶ {The head of the *Sanhedrin*.}

³⁷ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Sanhedrin*” ch. 1, par. 3.

Regarding the title, “Rabbi,” the *Tosefta*³⁸ says: “Whoever had disciples is called ‘Rabbi.’” Meaning, **Rabbi** Shimon ben Yehotzadak headed up a *yeshiva*. From this, Rambam infers that the heads of the *yeshivas* took part in the rejoicing of the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*.

Seemingly, we can question this reasoning: How can we suggest that the reason the *Jerusalem Talmud* mentions Rabbi Shimon ben Yehotzadak is on account of his title, “Rabbi,” whereas the *Jerusalem Talmud* **here**, in this context, calls him only “Ben Yehotzadak,” and **not** “**Rabbi** Shimon ben Yehotzadak”?

The answer: the *Gemara* relates that he “**prided** himself for his jumping,” and when a person speaks about their own qualities, they must speak in a way in which they will not be suspected of having, and not generate in themselves, feelings of haughtiness. Therefore, he referred to himself in a self-deprecatory way. We find³⁹ something similar regarding Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai. When he spoke about himself, he said, “Had **ben Zakkai** stuck his head between his knees...” He did not refer to himself using his own first name, but he identified himself (as nothing more than a son) as related to his father’s name.

10.

PENITENTS

The reason Rambam does not mention penitents:

Rambam understands that the *beraisa* {mentioned earlier in Section 4} is not **adding** to the *mishnah*. The *beraisa*, as it is wont to do, is merely **interpreting** and spelling out what the *mishnah* says succinctly: The category of “pious” that the *mishnah* mentions includes both pious people, in particular, and penitents.

³⁸ At the end of tractate *Eduyos*.

³⁹ *Brachos* 34b.

Rambam follows his consistent his line of reasoning in other places:

Rashi comments on the *Gemara*:⁴⁰ “**Every** pious person was pious to begin with.” Thus, he cannot interpret the category “the pious” as including penitents. However, in *Hilchos Deos*,⁴¹ Rambam, rules: “A person who is very exacting with himself, and veers slightly from the midpoint temperament to either side, is called pious.” Both someone who was always righteous and pious, and (in fact — primarily) a penitent,⁴² can conduct himself in this manner. Therefore, Rambam understands that “the pious” in our *mishnah* also refers to penitents. For this reason, Rambam does not mention penitents in their own category. Instead, he just says “the pious” for (in his book {*Mishneh Torah*},) this term refers to both those who were always righteous and to penitents.

11.

THE CHALLENGING PART

Based on all the above, we can also appreciate why, in his discussion of rejoicing at *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*, Rambam explains the virtue of rejoicing in mitzvos:

The celebration of *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* was an **addition** to the celebration of the festival itself. This extra celebration came because of the **affection for the mitzvah** to rejoice on Yom Tov. Thus, it is **substantively the same** as rejoicing in mitzvos (expanding the scope of the main joy, and adding to its main ingredient — performing the mitzvah): “The happiness with which a person should rejoice when performing a mitzvah and in loving Hashem who commanded them.”

However, there is more: Rejoicing in mitzvah performance, on the whole, is a much greater accomplishment than celebrating at the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*. During the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*, a person is already in a state of

⁴⁰ *Sukkah* 53a, s.v., “*Eilu chassidim*.”

⁴¹ Ch. 1, par. 5.

⁴² See *Bava Kama* 103b: “**later** became pious.” See, too, *Sefer Chassidim*, at the beginning.

joy regardless (and of course, to be sad is out of the question). Thus, it is not difficult for a person to engender within himself an **additional** measure of joy in such circumstances. But the Torah requires that a person rejoice in **every** mitzvah and **every** day, regardless of the situation. This is “a great *avodah*.”

Therefore, Rambam brings the example of King David, who “leapt and danced before Hashem.”⁴³ This illustrates the extent to which a person’s rejoicing in all mitzvos must reach, even if it is difficult for him.

On this basis, we can appreciate how Rambam discusses topics in an increasing order of magnitude. First, Rambam discusses the obligation to rejoice on Yom Tov in general (“It is a mitzvah to rejoice during all the festivals”). Subsequently, Rambam discusses rejoicing on the Yom Tov of Sukkos, which is a loftier *avodah*. For as mentioned above, this celebration stems from the feeling of **affection** for this mitzvah. Finally, Rambam discusses rejoicing in mitzvos, in general, which poses a significant challenge, “a great *avodah*.”

12.

THE DIRECTIVE

This is also a practical directive:

A Jew might entertain the following thought: “During these days of the ‘season of our rejoicing,’⁴⁴ I can bring myself to a state of joy. But how can I make myself joyful even after these special times (auspicious days) of celebration have passed?”

Says Rambam: The great *avodah* of rejoicing in performing mitzvos **first begins** only after the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* ends. Because always, even during the weekdays, every movement of a Jew is part of his *avodas Hashem*. Either he fulfills an actual mitzvah or he does something that fulfills {the directive that} “all your actions should be for the sake of Heaven,”⁴⁵ and, “know

⁴³ *Shmuel II* 6:16.

⁴⁴ {A reference to *Sukkos* in the Yom Tov *kiddush* and in *Musaf for Festivals*.}

⁴⁵ *Pirkei Avos*, ch. 2, *mishnah*. 12.

Him in all your ways.”⁴⁶ Therefore, it must all be done with joy, as it says, “serve Hashem with joy.”⁴⁷

Although our Rabbis teach:⁴⁸ “A person may not fill his mouth with rejoicing in this world,” rejoicing when fulfilling a mitzvah is, on the contrary, an obligation and something crucial. Specifically, this joy will engender laughter in Heaven,⁴⁹ until eventually, “The One who Sits in the Heavens will laugh....”⁵⁰ Meaning, He will laugh at all those who desire to oppress Jews, G-d forbid, until eventually, the promise, “Then, our mouths will be filled with laughter”⁵¹ will be fulfilled — with the imminent arrival of our righteous Moshiach.

— Based on talks delivered on *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* 5719 (1958) and 5720 (1959), and *Shabbos parshas Bereishis* (2nd farbrengen), 5731 (1970)

⁴⁶ *Mishlei* 3:6.

⁴⁷ *Tehillim* 100:2.

⁴⁸ *Berachos* 31a.

⁴⁹ See *Zohar* vol. 2, “*Tetzaveh*,” 184b; *Meah Shaarim*, 17b.

⁵⁰ *Tehillim* 2:4.

⁵¹ {*Tehillim* 126:2.}