

## **The Place of Joy**

### **Rabbi Maury Grebenau**

In our parsha there is a jarring tone at a moment when we expect incredible joy. After much work collecting and building the Mishkan is complete. For the first time Aharon and his sons are dressed in the priestly garments so painstakingly made and they approach to bring the very first sacrifice. Can we imagine the excitement of the moment? The feelings of thankfulness, of joy, of connection with Hashem? We expect this will be quite the sacrifice to express what is going on. Perhaps a thanksgiving sacrifice? Maybe an Olah that is completely burned to Hashem to show our elevated level? None of the above. Surprisingly the first sacrifice is the Chatas – the sin offering (Vayikra 8:14).

The Chizkuni points out that this sacrifice is mentioned back in parshat Titzaveh but it is only called a sin offering here. What is the message of focusing on the fact that this sacrifice is a sin offering and why would this be the choice for inaugural korban of the Mishkan?

In some ways this type of pause is reminiscent of the moment under the Chuppah when a relationship between two people is being elevated to the next stage and we paradoxically break a glass. There too it seems anti-climactic to do such a thing when we should be experiencing great joy and gratitude. Tosfot (Brachot 31a) explains that this custom is rooted in two stories in the Gemara about rabbis who noticed the party getting out of hand at a wedding and shattered an expensive glass in order to make a point and reign people in. Perhaps the Chatas as inaugural korban is a similar reminder not to get carried away in our joy. But if we are not supposed to be joyful at a wedding or the inauguration of the Mishkan then when should we be happy? What is the deeper message about how we should relate to happiness.

I believe the deeper message is to understand that we should relate to joy as an avenue and not an end in and of itself. At a wedding there is tremendous joy and excitement over the future home we get to see beginning to flower. But what better message for this new couple than the fact that such joy is not the foundation of their relationship. They should certainly find joy in their partnership but that is not the goal. They should use their joyous union to be better and do better in the world than the sum of what either of them could do alone. In the case of the Mishkan as well, it is a happy occasion to celebrate Hashem in our midst and our hopes for a close relationship. But the joy of our the Mishkan is not the goal. We must be ready to use that joy as a way to deepen our relationship with Hashem and bring us to even higher levels of connection.

There is a bewildering Aggadatah (narrative portion of the Talmud) that tells the story of two apostates named Sason and Simcha who argue which of them is superior. Rav Avahu (Sukka 48b) answers them both by quoting verses from TaNaCh to show that Sason is a coat to go out in and Simcha is a receptacle to draw water so neither of them are important. I once heard that the message of this Gemara is exactly the point we are making here. Simcha and Sason are different types of happiness and we could become very focused on deciding what exact type of happiness is best to pursue. However, this

misses the point which is that happiness is a means and not an end. Simcha and Sason are coats that allow us to go out into the world and make a difference and receptacles that allow us to hold important matters. Neither of them is “important” as a goal. When we are missing the joy in our life we are not functioning at full capacity and are not able to bring our unique gifts and abilities into the world or appreciate the great blessings that are bestowed upon us. May we all be blessed to be able to find joy in life and harness it properly in order to do real and meaningful work in this world.