

ארבעה צריכים חיוזק (ברכות לב:) – שיתחזק אדם בהם תמיד בכל כחו (רש”י)

From the *Sichos* of Maran Rosh HaYeshivah Rav Gershon Edelstein ztvk”l • Mikeitz 5786

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## Seudos on Chanukah — Mitzvah or Not?

The Mitzvah on Chanukah is lighting candles, as well as “*l’hodos u’lehallel*, to express thanks and to praise.” *Hoda’ah* is accomplished by saying “*Al HaNissim*,” and *Hallel*, through reciting the whole *Hallel*. These make up the three components of Chanukah: Lighting Chanukah candles, *Hoda’ah*, and *Hallel*. Regarding having a *seudah*, a festive meal, however, the *Shulchan Aruch* writes that there is no obligation (*Orach Chaim* 670:2): “The many meals people have are not obligatory, as those [days] were not instituted for *mishteh v’simchah*, festive meals and joy.” That is, there is no mitzvah to have a *seudah* on Chanukah; only on Purim do we have a mitzvah of *mishteh*, because the *pasuk* states, “Days of festive meals and joy.” (See the *Mishneh Berurah* ad loc. for a reason for this.) Therefore, the *seudahs* on Chanukah are voluntary; they are not a *seudas mitzvah*.

However, the Rema writes that there is a way to transform a meal into a *seudas mitzvah*: “It is customary to say songs and praise at these meals, and then it becomes a *seudas mitzvah*.” That is, if one sings songs and says praises at the meals, they become a *seudas mitzvah* through the *shiros v’tishbachos*. This requires an explanation: While singing songs and saying praises are a mitzvah, as they involve praise and thanks, which is a mitzvah of *avodah she’balev*, what does this have to do with having a meal? How does a *seudah* become transformed to a *seudas mitzvah* through singing and praising?

## Seudahs on Yom Tov — To Rejoice in the Mitzvah

We can explain this based on what Rabbeinu Yonah wrote in *Shaarei Teshuvah* (4:9) about the mitzvah of having Yom Tov seudahs: he writes that the meal on Yom Tov is “for the joy of the mitzvah.” Since there is a halachah of *simchas Yom Tov* and *simchas hamitzvah*, we eat special seudahs because of the joy of our mitzvah. *Lichorah*, we have just mentioned three matters: mitzvah, *simchas hamitzvah*, and *seudah*. We now must explain how a *seudah* is connected to joy and to the mitzvah. Additionally, where does *simchas hamitzvah* come in here?

The simple explanation is that there are *mitzvos* on Yom Tov, as the *pasuk* says, “*mikra Kodesh*” — every Yom Tov is a day of *kedushah*, sanctity, and there is the mitzvah of *mikra Kodesh* (see Rashi to *Vayikra* 23:45,

and the Ramban ad loc.). Furthermore, there are also special mitzvos for every Yom Tov, such as sukkah and lulav on Sukkos, and eating matzah on Pesach.

We are obligated to fulfill mitzvos with joy, as the *pasuk* states (*Tehillim* 2:11), “Serve Hashem with joy,” and (*Devarim* 28:47), “Since you did not serve Hashem your G-d with joy and a happy heart.” That is, the *tochachah* is the result of a lack of joy in *avodas Hashem*; we must make sure that all of our mitzvah fulfillment is with joy. That is, not just to be happy while we are doing the mitzvah — when the mitzvah is one entity and our joy is another — but we should be joyous as a result of doing the mitzvah; the mitzvah should make us happy.

## Being Joyous Because the Mitzvah Is So Special

How do we attain this level, that the mitzvah makes us happy? It happens when we are aware of the importance of the mitzvah, what a mitzvah is, and what Olam HaBa we will merit for doing the mitzvah. And all the more so, if we fulfill the mitzvah out of love, then we have the joy of *avodas Hashem*, and the actual action makes us happy. When one feels such *hergeishim* of *simchah* due to performing the mitzvah, this is a very great thing. Rabbeinu Yonah writes that the reward for this is greater than the reward for the mitzvah itself: “For the reward for performing mitzvos with joy increases and grows.”

This is similar to the fact that there is a special reward for *hiddur mitzvah*. Chazal tell us (*Bava Kama* 9b) that the obligation of *hiddur mitzvah* requires a person to pay an additional third of the mitzvah’s value. If a person spends more than he is obligated to on *hiddur mitzvah*, he merits a special reward from HaKadosh Baruch Hu, as he is given the dividends of his investment in this world, while the principal awaits him in Olam HaBa (see Rashi and Tosfos ad loc.). **When a person performs *hiddur mitzvah*, it is because he is acknowledging the importance of the mitzvah, he is showing that he ascribes such importance to the mitzvah that it makes him happy.** This is a great mitzvah and the reward for it is great.

## The Seudah Strengthens the Joy in the Mitzvah

On Yom Tov, there is a special obligation of *simchas hamitzvah*. The truth is, this applies to every mitzvah, but on Yom Tov, it is written explicitly, “And you shall

rejoice on your holiday,” that is be happy with HaKadosh Baruch Hu and His *mitzvos*, as we say in davening, “And Yisrael, who sanctifies Your name, shall rejoice ‘in You.’” Similarly, the Midrash says (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:32), “We will rejoice and be happy in You, in HaKadosh Baruch Hu, in Your Torah, and in fear of You...” And rejoicing in the *mitzvos* of the Yom Tov is a special *mitzvah*, “And Yisrael shall rejoice in You,” and it is a high *madreigah*.

Similarly, the *seudah* is in order to solidify the joy in the *mitzvah*, because eating a festive meal puts a person in a better mood, and then he’ll be able to rejoice even more in his *mitzvah*. Indeed, we find (*Shabbos* 30b), “The Shechinah only rests on a person when he is happy, as it states, ‘And it was when the musician played, Hashem’s spirit rested on him.’” That is, we need the “musician playing” in order to solidify one’s *simchah shel mitzvah*. This is also what a *seudah* does, because when a person is hungry, he is involved in his hunger and he forgets about the *simchah* of the *mitzvah*, but when he feels good after eating a *seudah*, it strengthens his joy of the *mitzvah*. And this is like Rabbeinu Yonah writes that we have a *seudah* on Yom Tov “for the joy of the *mitzvah*,” because a festive meal strengthens our joy in the *mitzvah*.

### Songs and Praise — Service of the Heart

Therefore, on Chanukah as well, even though there is no obligation or *mitzvah* to make a *seudah*, if one says songs and praise at the meal, it turns into a *seudas mitzvah*. The songs and praise are a *mitzvah* of “*avodah she’balev*,” service of the heart. *Avodah she’balev*, which is *tefillah*, involves three parts: praise, request, and thanks — and they are all parts of *avodah she’balev*. When a person says *shiros v’tishbachos* and pays attention to what he’s saying, when he hears what he’s saying, this is *avodah she’balev*, and if he does it with joy, that is a great thing. Then the *seudah* strengthens his *simchah shel mitzvah* of the *avodah she’balev* involved in his *shiros v’tishbachos*. And that is why it is called a *seudas mitzvah*.

### A Special Time for Success in Torah

The truth is, Chanukah is a time of strengthening one’s Torah and *mitzvos*, because the Chanukah candles hint to the Menorah’s lights, as the Ramban writes in *Parshas Behaalosecha*. And the Menorah hints to Torah, as Chazal say (*Bava Basra* 25b), “One who wants to have wisdom should face the south. And the hint for this is that the Shulchan is in the north, and the Menorah is in the south.” The Shelah HaKadosh already spoke at length about the *segulos* of these days, that they are a special time for success in Torah.

But *l’maaseh*, we see that for many, it is the opposite. They feel that Chanukah is a time for a lack of *hasmadah*, as if it’s hard to learn more, and they’re looking for some

other “*simchah*,” joy that is not *simchah shel mitzvah*. It’s not that not everyone acts like this, and there are many who use the days of Chanukah for *hasmadah* in Torah. They are engrossed and engaged in Torah just as they always are and they do not take their minds off Torah. *Adaraba*, Chanukah gives them increased *simchas hamitzvah*, and increased *simchas haTorah*. However, for other people, it is hard. Generally, the way a person’s Torah is on Chanukah depends on how they are *osek baTorah* throughout the year — does *esek haTorah* make them happy throughout the year, or it is hard for them.

### Are Stores Closed on Chanukah?

And the truth is, if a person has a business and he has to close up his business because he has to attend a family *simchah*, even though he’s definitely happy about the family *simchah*, at the same time, he feels bad that he won’t be earning money then and that he’s losing out on his business profits. He closes his store because he doesn’t have a choice, and he has to be happy, and it really is a happy time, but he’s not like a “child running away from school,” he’s not happy that he has to travel to the *simchah* and close up his business.

The same is true in Torah, for someone for whom Torah is like a business (*esek*). We say in “*Al HaNissim*”: “*Zeidim*, wanton sinners, in the hands of *oskei Torasecha*” — just as a business owner is upset about every minute that passes without making a sale, because he can be earning money all the time and every drop of profit makes him happy, because every small amount eventually joins together to a large sum, so too, someone who wants to know Shas, every single line of Gemara joins to a large amount! And as such, he must be happy, and how is it possible that learning would be difficult?!

After all, everyone wants to be proficient in Shas, everyone wants to understand Shas, and when a person learns in the right manner, in a way that fits his nature, he will have *hatzlachah* in his learning. And he’ll feel bad about every second that he isn’t learning, because he is constantly progressing and advancing further in Torah, more Torah and more Torah, and every second holds tremendous profit and it’s a shame to lose it. **And what difference does it make if it’s Chanukah now? Are the stores closed on Chanukah? People have to earn money on Chanukah too!** That’s why on Chanukah, we learn with as much *hasmadah* as we do during the rest of the year. And then, when we make a *seudah*, it really is a *seudas mitzvah*; it is for the joy of the *mitzvah*.

But those who, throughout the year, learn with a feeling of being forced, because societal norms force him to learn, and the framework he’s in forces him to learn. After all, “*תורתו אומנותו*, Torah is his trade,” and he does not have any other “business,” so it’s better to learn than not to do anything, but when he has a reason to not to

learn, then *adaraba*, he is happy about it. Those people experience a slacking off in Torah on Chanukah.

### Hasmadah Depends on Derech HaLimud

It all depends on how he learned Torah over the year. Was it in the manner of “*oskei*” *Torasecha*? It depends on whether his *derech halimud* fit his nature. Many people suffer from learning in a manner that’s an “imitation,” instead of learning in the way that fits their nature.

The truth is, everyone can be a *gadol Torah*. Even if someone isn’t a *baal kishron*, he can be a true *gadol*

*baTorah*, a *gadol* in Torah and a *gadol* in *yirah*, and a *gadol* in *chesed*, and a *gadol* in *sheleimus* in all the *maalos*. He just has to learn in the manner that fits his nature. Not every person is aware of the manner that befits him. If someone feels difficulties in learning, he must speak to someone about it. *Baruch Hashem*, there are solutions and there are people to seek advice from.

Now we are involved with *simchas hamitzvah* of *shiros v’tishbachos*, songs and praise — this is a *seudas mitzvah*. Let us hope that we merit continuing all the *esek haTorah* along with this proper *hanhagah* of *simchas haTorah*!

## שבת חנוכה – קודש קדשים

Many people call Shabbos Chanukah “Shabbos Rav Gershon.” What follows is testimony from his close *talmid*, Rav Shimon Margalios *shlita*, who is devoted to Rav Gershon’s mission and invests great efforts to strengthen Torah learning on Chanukah. Facts, *hadrachos*, and *hanhagos* — publicized for the first time:

Almost thirty years ago, Rabbeinu began speaking about the special *segulah* of Chanukah and the importance of using these days properly, in yeshivah. At first, people didn’t really accept this idea, because it was hard for *bachurim* not to go home, but he spoke about it over and over again, and his words slowly began to have an influence.

The main point he would emphasize is that Chanukah is a *kadosh*, auspicious time, because the Yevanim wanted to make us forget the Torah, and the miracle of Chanukah took place in the *zechus* of *mesirus nefesh* for Torah. That’s why he cared so deeply about this, and he would speak about it often saying that it does not make sense why everyone has “vacation” specifically during such a *kadosh*, auspicious time.

He specifically spoke about Shabbos. On a number of occasions, he said that Shabbos Chanukah is *Kodesh kadoshim*. He would do whatever he could so that the *bachurim* would stay in yeshivah and the *sedarim* would continue as usual. And the truth is, over the past twenty years, all the *batei medrash* are full on Chanukah, especially on Shabbos Chanukah. He would say that it’s a *kiddush Hashem*, and that Shabbos Chanukah in yeshivah should look like “Shavuot night.”

Very often, *bachurim* would come in and say that their families were having an extended family Chanukah party, and they’d ask permission to go home. He usually gave them permission to attend the family *mesibah*; he would tell them to come back as soon as it was over. But when *bachurim* would say that they’re having a “family Shabbos” with the entire family together, he would say: Tell your parents nicely about everything that I said, that it’s a very auspicious time and there are no exceptions. In the end, they’ll understand.

He would always tell the *bachurim* to go home the week before or the week after Chanukah. He emphasized this all the time: he’d say, Yes, go home! But not for Shabbos Chanukah. Over the years, it became more and more accepted, and now it’s a permanent part of yeshivah. During the *shiur klali* of the last year of his life, he said that this is a yeshivah *minhag*, and everyone is obligated to follow the *minhag*. The *shiurim* in yeshivah continued as usual over Chanukah. When he came into the *shiur* on the last day before Shabbos Chanukah, he said with satisfaction: “What a *kiddush Hashem*! That everyone is here in the *shiur*.”

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The *bachurim* call it “Shabbos Rav Gershon,” that’s what it’s called everywhere, even in *yeshivos* that learned from Ponevez Yeshivah and started following this practice as well. Because all the *yeshivos* know that by Rav Gershon you stay in yeshivah on Shabbos Chanukah.

Once, when he passed by the huge signs hanging up in yeshivah to encourage the *bachurim* to stay in yeshivah over Shabbos Chanukah, he was very happy. He said that there’s a *rifyon* in this area and we have to invest in it as much as possible. Even though he was always against publicity, he supported this and enjoyed the signs. When he got into the car, he told me: “There’s the Coca-Cola company, which is one of the biggest, most successful companies in the market, and even though it’s so successful and famous, it still puts full page advertisements in the newspapers and allocates a huge budget for advertising, because even something that is so popular and famous needs to continue advertising. How much more so do we have to publicize the great *zechus* of learning Torah on Chanukah and during times of *rifyon*.”

Throughout the years, there were always *bachurim* for whom staying in yeshivah was very hard. During Rav Gershon's last year, a rosh yeshivah came in and said that he had tried instituting it in his yeshivah over the past few years, and he saw that it was hard for the *bachurim*. Rabbeinu told him, Explain to them that it's "*l'fum tzaara agra*." The harder it is, the more *sechar* they will get. Because "*hazman gore*m" and there's a big *inyan* during these days to be engrossed in learning as much as possible, not the opposite.

One year, the *bachurim* in yeshivah went around getting signatures from each other that they'd strengthen and increase learning on Chanukah, but Rabbeinu did not like that. To him, making *bachurim* sign seemed like forcing them, and he wanted it to be done through gentle explanation, so that the *bachurim* would understand how important it was.

In his later years, *rabbanim*, *roshei yeshivos*, and *askanim* came to Rabbeinu and told him that he was the "*zekan hador*," and he'd just say that all *yeshivos* should not have an off-Shabbos on Shabbos Chanukah, everyone would listen right away. But in his *tzidkus* and humility, Rabbeinu replied: I don't tell other *roshei yeshivah* what to do and how to act in their yeshivahs. In his yeshivah, *Ponevez*, he could have prohibited going home for Shabbos Chanukah, but that was not his *derech*. His way was to explain everything nicely, pleasantly, so that the *bachurim* would want to stay. That's why he took the small details into consideration in order to see how to make learning pleasant for the *bachurim* over Chanukah.

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It was very important to him that the *bachurim* should feel good about this, so he did whatever he could to make a pleasant, happy atmosphere in yeshivah over Chanukah. He instructed that there should be special *mesibos* for every *shiur* in their *ram'im*'s homes. He had a *mesibah* in his house too, and made sure that they'd sing songs of *regesh* and *hisorerus*. He said that on Shabbos too, they should sing more than usual, so that the *bachurim* would enjoy staying in yeshivah.

One year, at the *mesibah* in his home, when all the rooms were full of *talmidim*, his brother Maran HaGaon Rav Yaakov *ztl*, who was in Bnei Brak for a family *simchah*, came to visit. Rabbeinu had him sit down at the head of the table next to him, and they both told the *talmidim* about the *derech halimud* when they were *bachurim* in *Ponevez*.

Obviously, the *talmidim* gained tremendously from this. For the next few years, I asked Rabbeinu if I could invite Rav Yaakov to come in special for the *mesibah*, and he said, "Definitely." He added, that Rav Yaakov is a *kadosh* man, and he had been a *rosh yeshivah* in Ramat HaSharon and had a great influence on the young people there through his *sichos*. Since then, every year, I would travel to Rav Yaakov to invite him, and he would make the trip, and he'd speak at the *mesibah*.

During Rabbeinu's last year, I told him, "The yeshivah is so big already, and *bli ayin hara*, there are almost 2000 *talmidim* in the yeshivah. I feel that I don't have the *kochos* anymore to manage this huge undertaking." Rabbeinu was shocked, and he said: "I don't understand. Do you want to lose such *zechuyos*?" Then he quoted the *Yerushalmi* at the end of *Brachos*, "If you see that people have despaired of Torah very much, stand up and strengthen it, and you will receive the reward of all of them." This shows how many *zechuyos* there are when someone upholds Torah at a time of difficulty and *rifyon*." His grandson tried telling him that there are many difficulties involved and that I had come to ask permission to stop, but Rabbeinu said: *Adaraba, l'fum tzaara agra*.

Once I dared to ask him, "Why does the Rosh Yeshivah make all this *chizuk* over Chanukah? Are you doing it for '*chizuk* in yeshivah,' so that all the *sedarim* will continue regularly, so that there won't be *bein hazmanim* in the middle of the winter?" And he was very upset at me and he said, "How can you even think about such things? **We're talking about a very serious, true matter — on Chanukah they wanted to 'make them forget Your Torah,' and just as they were *moser nefesh* for Torah, we have to continue the *mesirus nefesh* for Torah. How can you even think about turning Chanukah into *bein hazmanim*...**"

"And this year especially, when many want to disrupt the *bnei Torah* from their learning, we will not let this happen. We must increase *zechuyos* and increase more hours of learning on Chanukah. The *mosdos haTorah* will continue *esek haTorah* as is necessary, and the *yeshivos* and *batei medrash* in the *kehillos hakodesh* will strengthen *esek haTorah* and intensify their learning, and not the opposite, *chas v'shalom*, so that in their *zechus*, all the *gezeiros* will be annulled. **And as we know, Maran Rosh HaYeshivah HaGaon Rav Gershon Edelstein *zy"ta* invested a lot over the years to increase learning during Chanukah in the *yeshivos hakedoshos*, and he was *moser nefesh* for it."**

(Excerpted from a letter from *Gedolei Yisrael shlita*, erev Chanukah 5786/2025)

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