

“And you shall rejoice before Hashem, your G-d, for a seven-day period.” (23:40)

The mitzvah of joy on the festival of Succos is intrinsic to the chag. It is an integral aspect of the festival's identity. It occurred on one of the days of Succos that the daughter of Horav Meir, z.l., m'Premishlan became gravely ill. On Simchas Torah, the situation had deteriorated to the point that the young woman was at death's door. Yet, Rav Meir Premishlaner danced the hakafo, traditional Simchas Torah dance with the Torah, with his usual joy and devotion. His chassidim were aghast at the Rebbe's behavior. How could he exhibit such jubilation at a time like this? They cried out to him, “Rebbe, do something for your daughter!”

Rav Meir went into his daughter's room, observed her laying comatose, near death, and walked out. He turned his eyes Heavenward and exclaimed, “Ribono Shel Olam, You commanded us to blow Shofar on Rosh Hashanah, and Meirel did as You asked. You commanded us to fast on Yom Kippur, and Meirel listened and fasted. You commanded us to be joyous and dance on Simchas Torah, and Meirel listened and danced. You made my daughter ill, and You commanded that we should accept even a harsh decree with joy. One is obligated to bless (Hashem) for a misfortune just as he blesses (Hashem) for a good occurrence. Chazal interpret this to mean that one should accept the raah, misfortune, with joy. But, Ribono Shel Olam, there is a halachah that states, ‘Ein mearvin simchah besimchah,’ ‘One may not mix one simchah with another.’ How can I serve You properly in both of these circumstances at the same time?” Immediately, when he said this, his daughter's fever broke, indicating that she was on the road to recovery.

This story illustrates the profound sincerity this great tzaddik demonstrated in fulfilling mitzvos and adhering to Chazal's words. He understood that misfortune is from Hashem, oriented towards a specific purpose. Our lack of understanding the ways of the Almighty neither precludes nor changes their inherent value, meaning, or purpose. Chazal say that one must bless Hashem for misfortune in the same manner that one blesses Him for a happy occasion. Rav Meir did just that, to the point that he equated blessing Hashem regarding his daughter's illness with dancing on Simchas Torah. How far we are from the spiritual plateau of our ancestors!