

Reeh- No Melancholy on Yom Tov
Shehecheyanu In Baghdad [From the Ben Ish Chai]
By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Devarim 16:15 we read, ‘seven days you shall celebrate for Hashem in the place in the place Hashem will choose because Hashem will bless you in all that you do.’ The Ben Ish Chai, Zt”l, points out that the Torah singles out Yomim Tovim as a time that rejoicing is a mitzvah. This is because for many, the prohibition of work on a Yom Tov is a source of sadness or worry. Unlike Shabbat which comes at the end of every week, the Yomim Tovim are almost always in the middle of the workweek and people tend to be worried about being away from their jobs or businesses at that time. Furthermore, the very celebration of Yomim Tovim calls for spending more than they are accustomed to for foods, wine and other delicacies during the week.[We even see this in our times where many observant Jews have to use vacation time for Yomim tovim or take the days as non-paid vacation days.] Because of these considerations, the Torah commands us to be happy. As for financial losses or other adjustments that we have to make, we are to trust in Hakadosh Baruch Hu alone, do what he commands, and we will receive *brachot* in all that we do. While all of this was easier to do in the days of the Beit Hamikdash because we were all in Yerushalayim and celebrating anyway, the Torah is eternal and the mitzvah of simcha, rejoicing on Yom Tov is just as binding on us as it was in those times even though we sadly, do not have the Beit Hamikdash. Furthermore, we have to try to be on guard against the *yetzer hara* in this area more than usual will work harder to sadden us because of the above-mentioned issues. Therefore, the Torah then repeats in verse 15 ‘*Vehayeeta ach sameach*, and you shall be but happy.’ It is well known how sadness leads to depression and going away from Hashem. Therefore, on Yom Tov especially, we are only to rejoice and trust in Hashem the source for all prosperity and brachot.

From here, the Ben Ish Chai leads into his weekly *Halacha* shiur, this time on the *halachot* of the *bracha* of *Shehecheyanu*. *Shehecheyanu*, among other times is recited at the candle-light and at the Kiddush of the first night of every *chag*. [This applies to the first two nights of every Yom Tov outside of Eretz Yisroel.] It is also recited on many other special occasions as well. The Ben Ish Chai brings an interesting minhag that was practiced in the city of Baghdad. When one reached sixty or seventy years of age, he/she would take a new fruit or wear a new garment which clearly required the recitation of *Shehecheyanu* by halacha but mentally include in their recitation thanks to Hashem for the age they have attained. The milestone could be the fact the person reached sixty and is past receiving *karet*, divine punishment for had he/she been liable to *karet*, this age would not have been reached. Seventy could be an expression of thanks to Hashem for longevity in general. Since Chazal did not institute this bracha for age, on this occasion, if one wishes to recite the *bracha*, it must be combined with an occasion that surely requires a *shehecheyanu*.

The Ben Ish Chai concludes this week’s *halacha* shiur with a discussion of the practice of making a special meal on the day one received his *brit milah*. He states that this is

indeed, a beautiful and commendable minhag but since it was not practiced in his household, he did not do it. Nevertheless, he reveals to us that on the anniversary of his *brit milah* he would recite special *tefillot* thanking Hashem for having been born a Ben-Yisroel and bringing him into the covenant of Avraham. He would also pray to Hashem at this time that he would dedicate all of his days on this earth to serving Hashem and living up to the covenant of Avraham.

[See Ben Ish Chai Volume I , end of Parshat Reeh for full text of his personal tefilla.]