

Address at post-Yom Tov shivah for the late David Landau Shivah
3rd October 2010

Anomaly of having to wait until after Yom Tov before commencing Shivah (in the case of a Chol HaMoed funeral)

The question on everyone's mind at this time is, how can Judaism expect the family to bury their beloved on Chol HaMoed and then celebrate the joy of the festival before commencing their shivah? Is it not anomalous, if not callous?

We have to understand the definition of *chag*, religious celebration, in our religion (and of Succot, in particular, as the *Zeman Simchatenu*, 'Season of our Joy'). For us, *simchah* is not a matter of 'having a good time', of revelry and inebriation, but rather of a profound inner sense of spiritual well-being. This is achieved particularly through the rejoicing and celebration together with our families. The home celebrations are just as important as those of the synagogue, and, especially in the case of Pesach and Succot, far more dramatic, intense and colourful.

This aspect of spiritual joy underpins the husband-wife relationship, to the extent that the marriage *Sheva Berachot* lay inordinate emphasis of the term *simchah*, the spiritual joy that characterises the marital bond: *Sameach tesamach, Sos tasis, asher bara sason v'simchah, mesameach chatan im ha-kallah*, etc. This phraseology alludes to the joy inherent in the spiritual union which, in turn, is transmuted into the spirit that subsequently inheres within the family life, expressive of Judaism's finest values.

When we delay a shivah to celebrate a *chag*, this is not, therefore, an extraneous interruption. It is rather a veritable tribute to the religious family life of which the departed was an essential celebratory participant, if not its principal generator. For the mourners, the festival now partakes of the nature of a tribute to the spiritual and family joy that he or she radiated and transmitted. As such, the celebration of the festival may be seen to be active on two levels, the religious and the family. For the latter, it becomes, therefore, a veritable extension of the (Chol HaMoed) eulogy, an unarticulated tribute to the spirit, the joy and the values that his or her presence bestowed, and his or her relationship provided.

Rashi (end of Sidrah Bereishit) indirectly addresses and rebuts the suggestion of any anomaly between the juxtaposition of joy and mourning. On the verse 'God had remorse for having made man on earth, and it grieved his heart' (Gen. 6:6), *Rashi* quotes the case of a heretic who challenged R. Joshua ben Karcha:

'Do you not accept that your God knows the future?' asked the heretic. 'Of course we do,' replied the Rabbi. 'But does it not state that God had remorse for having made man?' The Rabbi retorted, 'Do you have a child?' 'I do' replied the heretic. 'And what did you do at his birth?' 'I rejoiced and involved others in my joy,' the heretic replied. 'But did you not know that he was ultimately destined to die?' 'I did,' replied the man, 'but at a time of joy we rejoice, and at a time of mourning we mourn!' 'That was precisely God's philosophy,' said R. Joshua. 'Even though He knew that man would ultimately sin and be destroyed, He still allowed him to be created for the sake of the righteous that would emanate from him (and provide Him with joy).

If we apply this to our problem, we now understand that , as Kohelet expressed it, 'For everything there is a time, and a season for each undertaking under the heavens.' And, as that heretic even more pithily expressed it, 'at a time of joy we celebrate the joy of life, and at the time for mourning we mourn'.