R’ Joseph B. Soloveitchik frames his Jewish thought and his perspective on mitzvos as tensions between various dialectics inherent in the human condition. Conflicting truths about man that are somehow both true. For example, people construct a society in order to better serve their needs. And yet, man’s highest calling is to serve the society, rather than himself.

Perhaps the most classical such dialectic is the distinction Rabbi Soloveitchik draws between Adam as he is portrayed in the creation story in Bereishis 1 and Adam as portrayed in Bereishis 2. Adam I is at the culmination of creation. All builds up to him. He is charged to “be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth and master it.” Man the engineer and technologist, forming the world to serve his needs. Majestic Man.

In Bereishis 2, we are given a different view. From the time of his creation, Adam is in communication with G-d. “It is not good for man to be alone”, so Hashem creates a woman “therefore man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife.” This is a person relying on his relationships and bringing value to his life and the world through them. Adam II is Covenantal Man, who seeks redemption.

Sukkos is very much Adam II’s holiday. The farmer, having just brought in his crop, has a propensity to credit himself for his success. Succos calls on him to re-address that, reminding him that it is not his mastery alone that brings food to the table. The succah teaches that it is not his fine house and the engineering it represents that bring security to his life.

There is a dispute between R’ Eliezer and R’ Akiva as to the nature of the succah in the desert that the mitzvah actually commemorates.1 According to R’ Eliezer, the original succah were clouds of glory. According to R’ Akiva, they were actual huts.2

Perhaps they are basing themselves on different ideas about the significance of the succah. In R’ Eliezer’s opinion, the succah is commemorating Hashem’s gifts to us. It is to remind us that there is a Covenantal Partner in our efforts. R’ Akiva has the original succah being the product of a partnership. Man builds, but it is Hashem who insure the success of that building. R’ Eliezer focuses on our Partner; R’ Akiva on our willingness to join the Covenantal relationship.3

Simchas beis hasho’eivah is patterned after the step of our original creation because it is a celebration of man’s ability to recreate himself.

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In his work Pachad Yitzchak, R’ Yitzchak Hutner notes the steps of creation of man, according to the second opinion given by Rashi. First, G-d adds water to the earth to make clay and then He forms man and breathes a soul into him.

“And a mist came up from the ground, and gave moisture to the whole face of the earth.” (Bereishis 2:6)

“And a mist came up from the ground: For the purpose of creating man. [Hashem] raised the tehom and gave moisture to clouds to wet the earth and to make man. Like someone who kneads bread, who adds water and after that kneads the dough. So too here, ‘He gave moisture’ and then ‘He formed’.” (Rashi ad loc.)

“And Hashem E-lokim formed the man, dust from the ground, and He breathed in his nose a living soul; and the man was a living spirit.” (Bereishis, ibid v. 7)

1 Succah 11b
2 This opinion is shared by Onkelos, Vayikra 23:42, as well as the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 625"1, Gr’a ad loc
3 See Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chaim 625
‘an altar of earth you shall make for Me.’ He said, ‘If only the dirt would be an atonement for him, and he would be able to stand.’” (Rashi ad loc)

R’ Hutner writes that this is exactly what we recreate during the nisuch hamayim (water libation on the altar). The kohen pours water on the very spot Hashem did. This is accompanied by the simchas beis hasho’eivah, celebration and singing. Music is the most spiritual of the seven wisdoms. It speaks and moves the soul on a fundamental level. Through the simchas beis hasho’eivah we imitate G-d’s breathing a soul into Adam.

We just came from Yom Kippur and reshuvah, when Hashem fulfills His promise “And I will give you a new heart, and place a new spirit within you” (Yechezkel 36:26). Simchas beis hahosh’eivah is patterned after the step of our original creation because it is a celebration of man’s ability to recreate himself.

To continue R’ Hutner’s thought with my own additions, in light of the above: Repentance too can be seen in both R’ Eliezer’s and R’ Akiva’s perspectives. One can seek atonement from Hashem, and thereby realize the need to have a partnership with Him. Or, one can seek atonement from the partnership itself. As the same R’ Akiva says, “Praised are you Israel. Before Whom do you atone, and Who atones you?” Atonement is both done by man through the Divine Presence, and is a gift from Him. A dialectic.

I would like to suggest one additional point. This description is from the second chapter of Bereishis; it is the telling of the creation of Adam II. Simchas beis hahosh’eivah is not merely the celebration of our recent re-creation, it is the celebration of our creation as beings in a covenantal partnership with the A-lmighty. And therefore, it is not only on Succos as a postscript to Yom Kippur; it is a fundamental part of the message of the holiday.

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“...and you shall be happy on your holiday.”

“...and you shall only be happy.” Besides dwelling in a succah and taking the arba minim, another mitzvah that the Yom Tov of Succos has is the obligation to be happy (Simchas Yom Tov, shared with the other holidays as well). This mitzvah is separate and distinct from the obligation to honor and “enjoy” the day (oneg yom tov), as evidenced by the former applying to all the days of Succos, while the latter is only on the first day of Succos.

In addition, Oneg Yom Tov refers to having premium foods, while “Simchas Yom Tov” is limited (for men) to eating meat and drinking wine.

Eating meat and drinking wine are not supposed to create the happiness, but assuage those detractors that prevent the already existing happiness from enveloping us.

While we can understand how serving higher-quality foods can add to one’s enjoyment, why is “happiness” limited to consuming meat and wine? And why are we commanded to “only” be happy? There are other mitzvos, so being happy isn’t the “only” one. What is the Torah implying be excluded when we fulfill this commandment of “only being happy,” but nothing else? The notion of happiness coming through hedonism (meat and wine) itself seems strange. The Jewish concept of happiness usually refers to being happy that one is close to G-d, or that one can fulfill His commandments (simchah shel mitzvah). How can the mitzvah of Simchas Yom Tov refer to physical self-indulgence rather than spiritual satisfaction?

The Gemara tells us that the Divine Presence only rests on a person who is experiencing simchah shel mitzvah – happiness attained through the observance of a mitzvah or through spiritual achievement. To prove this point, a verse is quoted in which Elisha, in order to receive prophecy, has a musician play for him. A similar question can be asked here; namely, if the point is attaining happiness through spiritual accomplishment(s), what relevance does hearing music (no matter how enjoyable) have? The prerequisite for experiencing the Divine Presence is not the happiness that music brings, but the happiness that should have already been achieved by being attached to G-d!

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1 Devarim 16:14
2 Ibid, 16:15
3 See Mishnah Berurah 529:15
4 See Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 30:7, referenced as applying to Yom Tov by the Rambam in his Hilchos Yom Tov 6:16
5 Ibid, Hilchos Yom Tov 6:18
6 Shabbos 30b
7 See Rashi on Shabbos 30b
8 See Rashi on Berachos 31a
9 Melachim II 3:15
Mesukim Midevash

The commentators on Melachim explain that the purpose of the music was not to bring about happiness, but to remove an obstacle that was affecting his simchah shel mitzvah. Rashi (and others) say that Elisha was angry (at the evil kings) and needed the music to calm his anger. Radak adds that Elisha was still mourning for his teacher and mentor, Eliyahu, and needed music to lift his spirits. The simchah shel mitzvah was already there, but was subdued by other factors. After the music removed those other factors, the latent simchah resurfaced, allowing Elisha to experience prophecy again.

This may be the purpose of the meat and wine as well.10 We should always be in a state of simchah shel mitzvah, but there are usually external factors that keep us from experiencing it. On Yom Tov, however, we are commanded to bring that simchah to the forefront. Eating meat and drinking wine are not supposed to create the happiness, but assuage those detractors that prevent the already existing happiness from enveloping us. The Gemara11 learns about this quality of meat and wine from explicit verses, thereby limiting the “prescription” to just those things that can remove “happiness inhibitors”. We are told to “only be happy,” i.e. to remove all the negative emotions that hide this happiness.

10 And why women, and children, have a different “prescription.”
11 Pesachim 109a

Hallel is recited on numerous occasions: on holidays and Rosh Chodesh, during the sacrifice of a korban pesach, during the wine libations of regular sacrifices, and when Jerusalem or the Temple was expanded. What is the source for Hallel, and can differences be drawn between its various forms?

The Gemara in Arachin derives the obligation of singing Hallel while offering holiday sacrifices from several different verses. It is unquestionable that this form of Hallel is de’oraisa (of biblical authority). The Rambam, however, rules that saying Hallel on holidays outside the context of sacrifices is only a rabbinic obligation. Support for this position may be found in a Gemara in Berachos (14a), which explores the issue of interrupting the performance of different mitzvot by talking. The Gemara wonders whether an interruption (hefsek) would invalidate the recitation Hallel and megillah - each of which is only a mitzvah derabanan (of rabbinic authority). Furthermore, as King David authored the psalms that comprise the Hallel, it would be difficult to envision them as de’oraisa. The Rambam asserts this position in Mishneh Torah, and in his Sefer HaMitzvos he contests the Behag’s ruling that Hallel is indeed de’oraisa.

In truth, the issue he raises - that Hallel cannot be de’oraisa since King David authored these texts – can be easily resolved. As the Ramban notes, it is quite possible that the concept of saying Hallel is a mitzvah de’oraisa, while the sages instituted the precise texts and timing of the mitzvah. After all, the Rambam follows this strategy regarding the mitzvah of prayer, which he believes to be de’oraisa in origin (ironically, against the position of the Ramban), but concedes that the sages added the precise liturgy and timing only later. With regard to Hallel, however, the Rambam refuses to apply this reasoning and views the entire mitzvah as purely rabbinic.

The Ramban defends the position of the Behag that Hallel is de’oraisa. However, he lacks any direct verse obligating the recitation of Hallel. The only direct reference to such a practice is found in a verse in Yishayahu that predicts the victory over Sancheiriv by declaring, “The song [after the victory] will be equivalent to the type sung on a night sanctified as a holiday [presumably a reference to yom tov].” In fact, the Gemara in Arachin employs this verse to distinguish between days on which Hallel is recited and days which do not require Hallel because they have no

1 Pesachim 64a
2 Arachin 11a
3 Shevuos 14b
4 Hilchos Chamukah 3:6
5 Shorosh 1
6 6 In his hasagos to the Rambam’s Sefer HaMitzvos

RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN
Sefasai Tiftach

Because the effect can be overdone, the mitzvah to become happy by eating meat and drinking wine is immediately followed by a warning to limit their amounts.12 In the appropriate dosage, though, and with the proper intent, this slight physical indulgence can help bring out the spiritual contentment that is within us.

May this Succos be a happy and joyous one, and may the Source of all happiness remove all of our external worries, so that we can soon sit, b’simchah, in His succas shalom.

12 Rambam, Hilchos Yom Tov 6:19-20, and Tur/Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 529
sanctity (such as Rosh Chodesh which features no prohibition of work and hence does require a complete Hallel or no status as a “festival” (such as Shabbos). In fact, the Ra’avad cites this verse in suggesting that Hallel is not a standard de-rabanan, and should be classified instead under the category of “divrei sofrim” (mitzvot which have a reference in Tanakh). The Ramban, however, cites no verse in the Torah to serve as the basis for the Biblical obligation of reciting Hallel.

The Ramban therefore claims that Hallel might indeed be a “halakha le-moshe miSinai” - a mitzvah which has de’oraisa status even though no specific verse refers to it. Subsequently, the Ramban generates an source for Hallel. Every festival obligates us in the mitzvah of simchah (rejoicing), based on the verse, “Vesamachta bechagecha, You shall rejoice in your festival.” Generally, this simchah is actualized through sacrificial offerings, meat and wine, and, according to the Ramban, any other personal enjoyment. According to the Ramban, an additional expression of simchah is the recitation of Hallel. After all, the Gemara in Arachin had already determined that Hallel is the epitome of an “avodah” (service) which causes joy. If so, it stands to reason that this expression of joy should be incorporated into every Yom Tov.

We should note that the Gemara in Arachin that the Ramban adopts as his source merely establishes Hallel as a form of avodah which causes joy. Hence, when sacrifices are offered on a festival, Hallel is required (as stated above). The Ramban extrapolates from here that all forms of Hallel - even those recited outside the Temple and the context of sacrifices - constitute an expression of joy and are obligatory on festivals. This is not necessarily the implication of the Gemara.

Another possible source appears in the Gemara in Pesachim, which suggests that Moshe and the Jewish people actually recited Hallel (in addition to the “Song of the Sea”) when they crossed the Red Sea. This would support the Ramban’s contention that Hallel traces back to Moshe Rabbeinu. An additional Gemara which supports the Ramban’s position is found in Ta’anis, claiming that Hallel on Rosh Chodesh (on which there is no prohibition of labor) is only of rabbinic origin. This would imply that other forms of Hallel - namely, its recitation on sacred days of festivals - may be viewed as de’oraisa.

There is another form of Hallel that might have earlier roots, even according to the Rambam. The Gemara in Pesachim claims that during the Exodus, the prophets instituted the practice of reciting Hallel any time a grave danger facing the Jewish People was relieved. Thus, during the performance of a miracle (perhaps only a national one), we have an obligation to recite Hallel. In fact, the Brisker Rav claimed that the annual Hallel recited Pesach night stems from this requirement. Since the mitzvah of sippur yetziat Mitzrayim (recounting the Exodus) requires us to envision ourselves as if we are currently departing Egypt, we actually relive a miracle and must therefore recite Hallel.

The Brisker Rav assigns a different nature to the Hallel recitation of Pesach night. Whereas normally the mitzvah entails reading (keri’ah), in this instance it has the quality of song or poetry – “shirah.” Women would therefore be obligated in this specific Hallel, even though they might not be obligated in classic Hallel, as it is a time-bound mitzvah. Since this special Hallel involves a direct and immediate response to the miracle, we would apply the principle of “af hein hayu be’oso hanes,” they too were part of the same miracle. No blessing would be recited, and an interruption might be tolerated (as we actually allow during Hallel on Pesach night). Clearly, this form of Hallel would constitute a mitzvah de’oraisa. Whether the sages can legislate this type of Hallel beyond the immediate moment in which the miracle was performed is itself debatable, and would greatly impact the status of Hallel on Chanukah, which is neither a festival (as defined by the Torah) nor sanctified by a prohibition on labor, yet obligates one to recite Hallel because of the miracle that occurred.

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7 In his hasagos to the Rambam, Hilchos Chanukah 3:6
8 Devarim 16:14
9 See Hilchos Yom Tov, ch. 6
10 11a
11 117a
12 28b
13 117a

14 See Tosafos Sukka 38a s.v. “mi”
15 See the Ran in his comments to Arvei Pesachim