

Dancing and Mourning

By Rabba Sara Hurwitz

Today is a true celebration: 20 hostages, now called returnees, have come home. This year, we will celebrate Simchat Torah not just with relief, but with dancing and joy. And yet, I still hold angst and trepidation, even as my heart is full. Not all the deceased have been returned. And, those heroes who just returned must begin the long journey towards healing. Holding just one emotion is not the Jewish way.

Kohelet, Ecclesiastes, teaches: "There's a season for everything," and then says:

“עַתָּה סְפֹד וְעַתָּה רִקְדָּה” — *“A time to mourn, and a time to dance”* (Kohelet 3:4).

Ancient rabbinic commentators read these as two distinct, sequential emotions, as it says in Kohelet Rabbah:

“עַתָּה סְפֹד, בְּשִׁעַת הָאֵבֶל; וְעַתָּה רִקְדָּה, אַחֲרֵי הָאֵבֶל.”

“A time to mourn — in a time of mourning; a time to dance — after mourning.”

Most of Kohelet's pairs work this way: one action excludes the other. You cannot scatter and gather stones at the same time or embrace and refrain simultaneously. And yet, mourning and dancing are different.

Grammatically, Kohelet even shifts here: unlike the other pairs, it does not say *לְעַתָּה...* (“a time to...”) but uses nouns — *סְפֹד* and *רִקְדָּה* — as if to suggest these are not strictly opposites, but two dimensions of one human moment.

Not only *can* they coexist — sometimes they *must*. Jewish law itself acknowledges that a parent in mourning must still dance at a child's wedding. Life does not wait for us to be in a single, tidy emotional state.

Yehuda Amichai understood this. He looked at Kohelet's categories and said simply: “A man doesn't have time in his life to have time for everything. He doesn't have seasons enough to have a season for every purpose. Ecclesiastes was wrong about that” (*Man In His Life*, Yehuda Amichai).

Amichai is reading Kohelet through lived experience. Life is rarely divided into seasons. Mourning bleeds into joy. Grief sits next to laughter. Simchat Torah can arrive in a year of pain.

On Simchat Torah, I will dance with abandon. But even in that moment, I will also be holding:

- the stories of those who endured unimaginable trauma,



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- the faces of those who will not return,
- the fears and hopes of a people who still worry for Israel's future.

I will mourn as I remember, and truly I cannot wait to dance.