

Hilkhot Lulav

Chapter 8:12-15

12 Although a commandment prescribes rejoicing on all festivals, there was a day of special rejoicing in the Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles, in accordance with the verse, “And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days” (Lev. 23:40). What was the procedure? On the eve of the first day of the festival, a raised section for women and a lower section for men were set up in the Temple—to ensure that the sexes did not mix. Rejoicing began at the termination of the first day of the festival; on each of the intermediate days it began after the regular afternoon sacrifice had been offered, and went on for the rest of the day and the whole of the following night.

13 What form did this rejoicing take? Fifes sounded, and harps, lyres, and cymbals were played. Whoever could play a musical instrument did so, and whoever could sing, sang. Others stamped their feet, slapped their thighs, clapped their hands, leaped, or danced, each one to the best of his ability, while songs and hymns of praise were being recited. However, this rejoicing did not take place on the Sabbath or on the first day of the festival.

14 It was a religious duty to make this rejoicing as great as possible, but participation in it was not open to non-scholars or anyone else who wished to take part. Only the great scholars in Israel, heads of academies, members of the Sanhedrin, elders, and men distinguished for their piety and good deeds—these only danced and clapped, made music, and rejoiced in the Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. Everyone else, men and women, came to watch and listen.

15 Rejoicing in the fulfillment of the commandment and in love for God who had prescribed the commandment is a supreme act of divine worship. One who refrains from participation in such rejoicing deserves to be punished, as it is said, “Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart” (Deut. 28:47). If one is arrogant and stands on his own dignity, and thinks only of self-aggrandizement on such occasions, he is both a sinner and a fool. It was this that Solomon had in mind when he uttered the warning, “Glorify not yourself in the presence of the King” (Prov. 25:6). Contrariwise, one who humbles and makes light of himself on such occasions achieves greatness and honor, for he serves the Lord out of sheer love. This is the sentiment expressed by David, king of Israel, when he said, “And I will be yet more vile than this, and will be base in mine own sight” (II Sam. 6:22). True greatness and honor are achieved only by rejoicing before the Lord, as it is said, “King David leaping and dancing before the Lord,” etc. (*ibid.* 6:16).