



Yizkor: Zecher LaMikdash - Zecher LaChurban

Yizkor is coming up. It's emotional, even heavy. How does that fit with the joy of Yom Tov?

The Problem

We're about to say Yizkor—a prayer that reminds us of the loved ones we've lost and still long for. Naturally, it can stir up deep emotions and even sadness.

But hold on—Yom Tov is supposed to be all about joy! In fact, it's an even bigger mitzvah to be happy on Yom Tov than on Shabbos. On Shabbos, we're told to enjoy, but on Yom Tov there's an actual commandment to rejoice! That's why it's customary to buy jewelry for your wife, treats for the kids, and for yourself? Wine. Every day. It's all part of the mitzvah to celebrate.

It goes even further: unlike Shabbos, you're allowed to cook and carry things on Yom Tov. Why? To increase your simchah. Let's be real—fresh food is just better than leftovers from three days ago, especially back in the day when “refrigerator” was not yet a household word. And carrying stuff? Also allowed—so you don't feel like your hands are tied and you can bring whatever you need to truly enjoy the holiday.

And get this—when it comes to mourning, Yom Tov overrides it completely. Why? Because the Torah says, “*You shall rejoice on your holiday.*” If someone began sitting shivah before Yom Tov started, the moment the holiday kicks in, the shivah ends. The same with the thirty-day mourning period—if it started before the chag, the chag cuts it short. Joy takes priority.

On the flip side, if—G-d forbid—someone passes away during the holiday, the funeral is held, but the mourning doesn't begin until the festival ends. Yom Tov won't allow even fresh grief to push aside its

command to be joyful.

All of this just highlights how completely mourning is pushed aside on Yom Tov. So here's the big question: why do we say Yizkor at all during the holiday? Isn't it the exact opposite of joy?

The Two Types of Remembrance

When it comes to something the Jewish people have lost—the Beis HaMikdash—we actually have a number of customs to help us remember it. For example, we break a glass under the chuppah. Some even place ashes on the groom's head before the wedding. There's a halachah to leave a small part of the wall in your home unpainted—a symbolic, visible reminder of the destruction.

Similarly, when setting a festive table, something should be left imperfect. And of course, the most central expression of this is Tisha B'Av itself. All of these customs are called *zecher l'churban*—acts that help us remember the destruction of the Temple.

But there's another way we commemorate the Temple—and that's called *zecher l'mikdash*, remembering the actual practices that were done in the Mikdash itself. Take Pesach, for example. According to the Torah, the mitzvah to eat maror (bitter herbs) only applies when the Temple is standing. Still, the sages instituted that we continue eating maror even today—purely as a remembrance of what was once done in the Mikdash.

Or take Sukkos: back in Temple times, only people in Yerushalayim would take the lulav all seven days. Everyone else, including your average Jew in the diaspora, would only make the blessing on the first day. After the churban, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai instituted that we take the lulav all seven days everywhere—again, as a *zecher l'mikdash*.

Another example is Sefiras HaOmer. The Rambam holds that counting the Omer is a biblical mitzvah even today. But Rashi says it was only a Torah obligation when the Beis HaMikdash stood—now it's just a remembrance. There are many such examples.

So we see there are two separate ideas: *zecher l'churban* and *zecher l'mikdash*. What's the difference? *Zecher l'mikdash* is about remembering the beauty and the glory of the Temple—the way it enhanced our holidays and our lives. It's a positive kind of memory. *Zecher l'churban*, on the other hand, reminds us of the loss, the pain, and the tragedy of the destruction.

The Yom Tov Route

On Yom Tov, we don't go the *zecher l'churban* route. We're not trying to make people cry or recall tragedy. Instead, we remember the beauty of Temple times—the joy, the celebrations, the holiness. The idea is to long for those good days, not to dwell on the pain.

The Rebbe once visited Camp Gan Israel in the Catskills and walked room to room until he came to one door with a sign that said “Zecher l'churban.” Why? Because the room was a complete mess! With a smile, the Rebbe asked—why not call it *zecher l'mikdash* instead? In that small comment, the Rebbe gave us a big life lesson: Why get stuck in the negative? Why focus on the loss? Why not focus on the beauty and light of what once was—and what can be again?

Every year around this time, we observe Holocaust Remembrance Day. And again, there are two approaches. One approach is to create Holocaust museums, showcase the horrors, and hold memorial services that recount the suffering—classic *zecher l'churban*.

But then there's another approach. Instead of remembering the destruction, let's remember what came before it. Let's remember the vibrant Jewish life of prewar Poland—and rebuild it! Open day schools, build shuls, revive Jewish communities. That's *zecher l'mikdash* in action. And that, by the way, is the Chassidic approach: Focus on the positive, on growth, not on pain.

Yizkor vs. Yahrzeit

The same concept applies to Yizkor. There's *yahrzeit*, and there's *Yizkor*. On a *yahrzeit*, a person remembers the exact day their loved one passed away. They think back to the last moments, maybe even holding their hand at the end. It's a somber, emotional reflection—a kind of personal *Tisha B'Av*, a private *zecher l'churban*.

But on Yom Tov, it's different. A person doesn't reflect on the pain of loss—he remembers how he celebrated that very holiday *with* his loved ones. If it's Pesach, maybe he recalls making the Seder with his parents. Or another chag, and the way they used to spend time together. These are warm, happy memories. *Sweet memories*. That's what's meant to surface.

Just like we focus on *zecher l'mikdash* on Yom Tov—not *zecher l'churban*—the same applies in our personal lives. Yom Tov is not the time to dwell on personal loss. That's what a *yahrzeit* is for. Yizkor on Yom Tov is about remembering the good days, the beautiful moments.

A personal zecher *l'mikdash*.