

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to Moshe and Esther Preiser, who are sponsoring this *drasha* in memory of Moshe's father, Theodore Preiser, HaRav Chaim Tanchum ben Tzvi Yehuda, z'l, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 25th of Elul. May his *neshama* have an *aliya* and may they be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

The suicide bombings at the Kabul airport on Thursday, which killed over 100 people, including 13 United States service members, was horrific. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the victims, and we daven for peace in the region and the world.

I want to remind everyone that Selichos begins tonight in the main shul at 1:05 am with Chazzan Yaacov Cohen. It will be on Zoom for those who cannot attend in person. Also—seats for the yamim noraim are selling out—please get your reservations in as soon as possible.

Today's *parsha* introduces us to the important concept of שמחה, happiness.

דברים פרק כו פסוק יא: וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְּכָל־הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לָךְ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּלְבִיתְךָ אִתָּהּ וְהַלְוֵי וְהַגֵּר אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ:

The Torah commands us to be happy with all the *bracha* in our lives.

Later, in the *tochacha* section, we are told that curses will happen in part, if we did not serve Hashem with joy.

דברים פרק כח(מז) פְּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עֲבַדְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב מְרַב לָל:

In Tehillim 100, which we read daily, we are told to serve Hashem with joy...

תהלים פרק ק:(ב) עֲבַדְוּ אֶת ה' בְּשִׂמְחָה בְּאוֹר לְפָנָיו בְּרִנְנָה:

Among the 48 attributes necessary to acquire Torah, the Mishna in Avos lists two related to happiness—number 8, בשמחה, and number 26, והשמח בחלקו.

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ו:והתורה נקנית בארבעים דברים בתלמוד בשמיעת האוזן בעריכת שפתים בבינת הלב בשכלות הלב באימה ביראה בענוה בשמחה... והשמח בחלקו

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov said in *Likutei Mohara*’n (Part II:24:1:1)

מצוה גדולה להיות בשמחה תמיד ולהתגבר להרחיק העבדות והמרה שחורה בכל כחו

There is a great Mitzva to always be happy...

But is שמחה really within our control?

We tend to think of finding happiness, not choosing happiness. We tend to think that happiness is something that magically finds us. If only we would have X or be Y, then we would be happy. If we accumulated a certain amount of money, education, or prestige, then happiness would find us.

Chazal characterize this “if only” attitude as follows: *מי שיש לו מנה רוצה מאתים. If someone has one measure, he wants two measures.* Always imagining that happiness is found in what you do not yet have... always feeling unfulfilled.

When Yaakov and Esav meet after many years of separation, both were extremely wealthy but they had very different perspectives on their fortunes.

בראשית פרק לג פסוק ט:ט) וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו יְשִׁילִי רֶגֶב

Esav says “I have a lot.” This implies that he is not satisfied with what he has and wants even more.

בראשית פרק לג פסוק יא:כִּי־חַנְנִי אֱלֹהִים וְכִי יְשִׁילִי־כָל

But Yaakov expresses himself differently, saying “I have all that I need (to be happy).”

Yaakov shows an attitude of being happy with what he has, not looking for fulfillment in what he does not have. Similarly, the Torah, uses that word כל when in our parsha בכל הטוב

Chazal understood that, to enjoy what we have, we must make a conscious decision to appreciate everything. Otherwise, we will focus on what is lacking and see the world through a lens of negativity. Chazal understand that *simcha* is an active choice we must make...

We see this from a teaching of Ben Zoma that wisdom, strength, and honor require action...to learn, to conquer, to honor others...and similarly achieving wealth is the product of choosing happiness...

בן זומא אומר איזהו חכם הלומד מכל אדם...איזהו גבור הכובש את יצרו...איזהו עשיר השמה בחלקו

He teaches that if one wants to be a חכם he must go out and learn from everyone. If one wants to be a גבור he must conquer his *yetzer*, he must exercise self-control. Similarly, if one wants to be truly wealthy—not in a financial sense, but in a deeper sense of finding fulfillment—he must actively learn to be happy. Chazal understood that *simcha* is a choice—an attitude within our control.

And the Torah even teaches us how to develop the attitude and perspective necessary to achieve happiness. To do so, a person must learn to appreciate what he has, to focus on the blessings... to focus on how full his cup is, not how empty.

Dr. David Pelcovitz, in *Life in the Balance* (p. 26), writes that in the Jewish view, happiness is a perspective on life created through mindfulness. Dr. Pelcovitz writes that “*there are sharply contrasting views between the secular notions of happiness and the Jewish perspective regarding what leads to happiness. These differing views are indicated in the etymology of the English word happiness. The English word “happy” is derived from the root word “hap”--which is related to chance. Words such as haphazard, hapless, and happenstance all have a connotation of chance and randomness. In contrast, Dr. Pelcovitz notes, “[T]he underlying meaning of the word “simcha” is a conjugation of two words “sham” and “moach,” roughly translated, “where your thoughts are.”*”

How do we develop this attitude?

The **Radomsker Rebbe**, the Tiferes Shlomo writes—**ושמחת בכל הטוב אשר נתן לך ה' אלקיך**—*“Rejoice with all the good that Hashem, Your God, has given you...”*

We must focus on the fact that **אשר נתן לך ה' אלקיך**, that the blessing is coming from Hashem Himself...who provides us with our needs and is the source of all blessing.

תפארת שלמה א"י ושמחת בכל הטוב וגו' אשר נתן לך ד' אלקיך. ר"ל יהיה לך השמחה והכבוד מפאת הנותן משל למה"ד אם יותן לאיש איזה מתנה ממלך ב"ד. הנה מלבד ערך שיווי של המתנה במחצבה אם לכסף או לזהב. עוד נעלה היא בערכה לגודל החשיבות אשר הגיע לו מאת המלך. וכן הקדוש ברוך הוא כביכול בעצמו הוא הנותן לכל בשר והוא דבר יקר לך

The *Mitzva* of *bikkurim*, the first fruits, teaches us how to achieve this mindset of happiness. The first fruits of the *shivas ha-minim*, the seven species for which the Land of Israel is known, were transported with great ceremony to Yerushalayim, then taken by the *Kohanim* to the *Beis Hamikdash*.

The **Mishna** in **Bikkurim** describes the very dramatic scene

משנה מסכת ביכורים פרק ג משנה ב

כיצד מעלין את הבכורים כל העיירות שבמעמד מתכנסות לעיר של מעמד ולגין ברחובה של עיר ולא היו נכנסין לבתים ולמשכים היה הממונה אומר קומו ונעלה ציון אל בית ה' אלהינו:

משנה ג

[*] הקרובים מביאים התאנים והענבים והרחוקים מביאים גרוגרות וצמוקים והשור הולך לפניהם וקרניו מצופות זהב ועטרת של זית בראשו החליל מכה לפניהם עד שמגיעים קרוב לירושלם הגיעו קרוב לירושלם שלחו לפניהם ועטרו את בכוריהם הפחות הסגנים והגזברים יוצאים לקראתם לפי כבוד הנכנסים היו יוצאים וכל בעלי אומניות שבירושלם עומדים לפניהם ושואלין בשלומם אחינו אנשי המקום פלוני באתם לשלום:

משנה ד

[*] החליל מכה לפניהם עד שמגיעין להר הבית הגיעו להר הבית אפילו אגריפס המלך נוטל הסל על כתפו ונכנס עד שמגיע לעזרה הגיע לעזרה ודברו הלויים בשיר ארוממך ה' כי דליתני ולא שמחת אויבי לי (תהלים ל):

The shopkeepers of Yerushalayim would close their stores so that they could greet the farmers bringing *bikkurim*. There was music...and major fanfare...What a scene! What a spectacle! What excitement! What celebration! What joy!

But if you stop to think—why was there so much excitement on this particular occasion?

And why are we told to bring the *first* fruit? We would understand bringing the best fruit. We would understand bringing the largest fruit, or large quantities of fruit—but the fruit in *bikkurim* was distinctive only because it was the first fruit.

אלו דברים שאין להם שיעור הפאה והבכורים

The **Mishna in Peah** teaches that there was no minimum amount that needed to be brought. Even one fig was enough to participate in this festive and exciting party!

Imagine the scene—dancing and singing for someone bringing one fig—just because it was the first fruit?

The Torah sums up the purpose of this *mitzva*

דברים פרק כו פסוק יא: וְשִׂמְחַתְּ בְּכָל־הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּלְבִיִּתְךָ אֲתָה וְהַלְוֵי וְהַגֵּר אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ: ס

We are told that the whole function of *bikkurim* is to teach us the proper way to attain *simcha*--through gratitude and appreciation for **everything** one has.

This farmer is told that, from the very beginning—when even the smallest fruit has ripened—he should already start appreciating and enjoying it. He should not wait to celebrate until a certain amount of fruit has ripened. He should not compare his crop with other farmers' crops. He should work on the attitude of *יש לי כל*, finding joy in what one has.

This is because, if he doesn't develop this attitude and learn to find *simcha*, **from the very beginning**, then whatever success he eventually achieves will never be enough. He will never find happiness...

Once one piece of fruit has ripened, he must immediately recall everything it took to get him to this place. This trains us in the *midda* of *אלקיד* ה' אשר נתן לך ה' אלקיד, literally appreciating and enjoying every drop of *bracha* in our lives. *Simcha* depends how we look at things; our ability to appreciate the blessings we have.

The story is told that after World War II, two brothers from Poland went their separate ways. One went to England and the other went to Russia. They instituted a special code before parting so that the brother in Russia could speak his mind without fear of reprisal from the government. In order to pass the censor, it was agreed that if the brother in Russia wrote his letter with blue ink, then everything in the letter was reliably true. However, if he wrote in red ink, then everything in the letter could be discounted and probably the opposite was true.

After a period of time, the brother in England received a long-awaited letter from his brother in Russia. He tore open the envelope and there was a full page written in **blue ink**. He was very happy to read the glowing report, "Life here is so open and free. There is good food and plenty of it. People are happy and generous of spirit. The economy is booming and everyone is pleasantly engaged in productive activity. There is no lack of good or goods throughout the entire land." So glad was the tiding that the chap in England wondered if he hadn't made the wrong choice by settling in England. Perhaps he would be better off if he had joined his brother in the prosperous land of Russia. That's

how he had begun to feel as he was reading the letter, that is, until he reached the postscript after the final salutation. **“P.S. There’s only one thing you can’t get here...red ink.”**

Our attitude can change the entire way we see things.

If we see the world through blue ink—focusing on the blessings, appreciating all the good in our lives, we can achieve *simcha*. However, if we see the world through red ink, focusing on the challenges, failures, and curses, then happiness and *bracha* will elude us. It will always be one step away... יש לו מנה רוצ מאתים

Going back to Tehillim, before it says עבדו את ה' בשמחה בואו לפניו ברננה, it says מזמור לתודה, a song of thanks---highlighting this message that **appreciation and gratitude is what leads to happiness...**

As the **Baal Shem Tov** used to say every year on his birthday—18 Elul—a Jew should live in a constant state of *simcha*, appreciating that he was born an *eved Hashem*....

As we stand on the threshold of a new year, this is a powerful and important message to take into Rosh Hashana. As we evaluate the past year, for ourselves, our families, and our shul, we will remember how challenging a year it was in so many ways. However, let us also make sure we take time to be thankful of all our blessings, including all our accomplishments, all our positive growth, even what may seem small and insignificant. We should be thankful for what we have been blessed with, how far we have come and—at the same time--we should build on our accomplishments to chart a course for an even more success ahead. As we approach Rosh Hashana, may we take these lessons to heart. To remember the lesson of *bikkurim*, and appreciate all the blessing in our lives...and live life with *simcha*. May Hashem bless all of us with a כתיבה וחתימה טובה, a year of health and happiness and much *bracha*.