

Simcha and Connection

By: Batya Neppe

What is Simcha

The heavens and the earth, the soul and the body – all these are opposites. However, they do not need to remain opposites forever. Anytime there is a connection between opposites there is *Simcha*. This is *Simcha's* place and essence. And, furthermore, anyplace that we find *Simcha*, we find connection or unification.

Simcha, therefore, is not an automatic state, arising out of a sudden subjective emotional experience, but rather there must be a connection made, and this occurs through *daas* (thought). The Torah speaks about two kinds of *Simcha*:

- *Simcha* with one's portion
- *Simcha* of doing *mitzvos*

It is through developing these two kinds of *Simcha* that a person reaches true "happiness" and contentment within himself, his possessions, situations around him, and he strengthens his connection with *Hashem*.

Happy with One's Portion

Rabbi Chaim Vital¹ concerning a statement of Chazal in *Tikkunei Zohar*² says that: "*Love of the Lord (ahava) and Awe of the Lord (yirah) are the two wings that carry one to the heavens. Yirah is clothed in the midah of histapkus (contentment) and ahava is clothed in a person's joy in his portion.*"

Yirah is the capacity to limit. One who is content with what he has limits himself to not want more. *Ahava* is the capacity to expand. When a person enjoys the fruits of his labor, joy expands into what he has.

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1. Rabbi Chaim ben Yosef Vital (1543 in Safed - 23 April 1620 in Damascus) was one of the most famous exponents of Kabbalah.
 2. The Zohar is a mystical commentary on the Torah (the five books of Moses), written in medieval Aramaic.

By means of *histapkus* alone, bad *midos* (character traits) such as jealousy (*kinah*) and lust (*taavah*) are obliterated. Indeed, *histapkus* is not a *midah* that is *bidieved* (after the fact) as if to say, “Alas, what can I do? I have to be content with what I have.” It is a *l’chatchila* (before the fact) *midah*, that it does not occur to a person to want more, a viewpoint that is expressed by “I have 100; I don’t want 200.” To reach this level of being content with one’s lot and not wanting more that is unattainable, requires constant work in order to strengthen the good *midos*. This can only be done through thought, appreciation, and actions that will reinforce and connect us to good *midos*.

Simcha of Doing Mitzvos

Simcha in one’s portion is based on natural acquisitions. *Simcha* in *mitzvah* performance is happiness with spiritual acquisitions. It is the *Simcha* of a person connecting with his Creator through a commandment.

As the *Mesillas Yesharim* suggests, let’s not plunge into doing a *mitzvah*; instead we will just stop and meditate that *Hashem* Himself commanded us to do this *mitzvah*, and by means of performing the *mitzvah*, we connect to Him.

In this article, I will be concentrating on the *Simcha* of doing *mitzvos*. This will be done through showing instances in the *Torah* where:

- Our forefathers, through having *daas* and performing *mitzvos*, created connections with *Hashem* that affected the Jewish people for all time (see Section: Eternal Connections by Our Forefathers).
- *Mitzvos* that we do on a daily basis connect us to *Hashem* and help us to build our good *midos* (see Section: Connection Through Our Mitzvos).

Note: The essence of this article and many of the quotes are from the writings of HaRav Shlomo Wolbe Zts"l³ (May his memory be blessed).

3. HaRav Shlomo Wolbe Zts"l was the "Mashgiach" the spiritual advisor, who was the last close Talmid of Rav Yerucham Levovitz of Mir (a talmid of R. Simchah Zissel, a talmid of R. Yisrael Salanter) and represented the bridge between the great students of Mussar (ethics) in Europe, the disciples of Rav Yisrael Salanter and our generation.

Eternal Connections by Our Forefathers

- Creation of Chava
- Avraham Bris bain HaBesarim (Covenant between the Parts)
- Trumos for the Mishkan (Donations for the Tabernacle)

Creation of Chava

In the second account of creation (Chapter 2) in *Breishis* (Genesis), all the other creations were automatically given helpmates, except Adam. The *Midrash*⁴ says that Chava was only created when Adam realized that there was no creation suitable to be his mate and verbalized this to *Hashem*. Realizing that he was lacking and asking for a mate was the first step in filling his need. He needed a helpmate that he could make a connection with, and as we find in Chapter 2, verse 20: *“And man named all the cattle and the fowl of the heavens and all the beasts of the field, but for man, he did not find a helpmate opposite him.”*

Hashem did not create Chava out of nothing; she was created out of an actual part of Adam, as we find in Chapter 2, verses 21 to 23: *“And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon man, and he slept, and He took one of his sides, and He closed the flesh in its place. And the Lord God built the side that He had taken from man into a woman, and He brought her to man.”*

And man said, “This time, it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called ishah (woman) because this one was taken from ish (man).”

We see that from this physical connection, there is an eternal connection for all generations between man and woman and our blessing to every Jewish couple when they stand under the wedding canopy is that they attain the sanctity and state of happiness granted to Adam and Chava in Gan Eden. Thus, we tie our prospective happiness to the happiness of Adam and Chava.

4. Midrash is a Hebrew term referring to a compilation of homiletic teachings (commentaries) on the Tanach (Hebrew Bible), in the form of legal and ritual (Halakha) and legendary, moralizing, folkloristic, and anecdotal (Haggadah) parts. The Midrash is mostly derived from, and based upon, the teachings of the Tannaim.

Avraham and the Bris bain HaBesarim

In the book of Genesis, in the chapter of the covenant between *Hashem* and Avraham (Chapter 15, Verses 7-18), we find the giving of Eretz Yisroel as an inheritance for all time.

In previous chapters, *Hashem* promised this to Avraham, but it was not until Avraham actually performed the physical act of preparing the sacrifices, that the covenant became a reality with specifically defined borders. Thereafter, the connection was solidified for all generations with the Jewish people.

“And He said to him, “I am the Lord, Who brought you forth from Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it. And he said, “O Lord God, how will I know that I will inherit it?” And He said to him, “Take for Me three heifers and three goats and three rams, and a turtle dove and a young bird.” And he took for Him all these, and he divided them in the middle, and he placed each part opposite its mate, but he did not divide the birds. And the birds of prey descended upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away....

Now it came to pass that the sun had set, and it was dark, and behold, a smoking furnace and a fire brand, which passed between these parts. On that day, the Lord formed a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your seed I have given this land, from the river of Egypt until the great river, the Euphrates river.”

This physical act of performing the *korbanos* (sacrifices) completed the connection and established unification, i.e., *Simcha*, between Avraham and his future descendents for all time.

Trumos for the Mishkan

In the *Trumos* of the *Mishkan* (donations for the Tabernacle), we see another level of connection. Rav Wolbe explains in his writings: There is the level of doing a *mitzvah* according to *Hashem's* command, which is *yirah*. This

creates a connection with *Hashem*, but there is another level, even higher, and creates a stronger connection, which is feeling *Simcha* for doing what is asked, which is *ahava*.

We learn this from the building of the *Mishkan*.

In *Parshas Pikudei*, the Torah repeats several times the phrase, “as *Hashem* commanded Moshe” in connection with the production of the vessels of the *Mishkan*. When all of the vessels were constructed according to their commands and halachic guidelines, they reached a state where the *Shechina* (Divine essence) could settle on them. If something would have been lacking in the square shape of the altar or some similar parameter, the *Mishkan* would not have been worthy of the *Shechina* dwelling in it, because it wouldn’t be up to specification and therefore, there would be no vehicle for connection.

In *Parshas Vayakhel*, we see that another characteristic of the *Mishkan* was that it was built entirely from voluntary contributions from every Jew. *Hashem* could have commanded a donation of 10 shekels weight of silver or its equivalent in money for building the *Mishkan*, just as He commanded the half-shekel donation for *korbanos*. *Hashem* desired that each person give as his heart moved him, voluntarily.

The Ramban⁵ reveals a great thought on the verse: *Take for yourselves a contribution for Hashem everyone who is generous of heart shall bring it with the contribution for Hashem: gold and silver and copper.*

These are the words of the Ramban [on the above verse]. “Truly, the Torah is saying, ‘... Everyone ... shall bring **it with** the gift for *Hashem*...’ In other words, that everyone will bring it, i.e., the exalted contribution [along with the physical donation]. And our rabbis bring a *midrash* [relating to the verse concerning Pharaoh’s daughter, *Shemos* 2:6]. ‘And she opened [the basket] and she saw **it with** the child,’ that she saw the *Shechina* with him.” Likewise, the

5. Ramban, is the name for Moshe ben Nahman Gerondi; He is also commonly known as Ramban (רמב"ן) (after the initials of his name) and as Nachmanides, (Greek for "son of Nachman"). He was a halachist, commentator, philosopher. He also studied medicine, which he practiced professionally, languages, and physics.

meaning of the Ramban's words, "it with" is also the *Shechina*. In light of this interpretation, the meaning of the verse would be: Everyone who is generous of heart shall bring the *Shechina* together with his contribution of silver, gold, and copper. These words are amazing: How and from where will a Jew bring the *Shechina* to the *Mishkan*? There is a deep concept here: "R'Chiya Bar Abba said, 'Where do we find that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is called the heart of the Jews? In a *pasuk*, Hashem is called, 'Rock of my heart and my portion forever.' [Tehilim 73:26] (*Shir HaShirim Rabba*, Chapter 5, Verse 2.) Thus the *Shechina* dwells in the hearts of the Jews! When a Jew is aroused in his heart to bring a donation, he awakens the *Shechina* to be palpably felt in his heart; and when he brings the donation, the *Shechina* accompanies the donation. This is what Hashem wanted, and in this manner the *Bnei Yisroel* (children of Israel) imbued the *Shechina* in the *Mishkan* – each person brought a "piece" of the *Shechina* to the *Mishkan*!

Producing the vessels of the *Mishkan* "like Hashem commanded" – this is *yirah*; the generous free-will contribution of every Jew – this is *ahava*. By means of the two together, the *Shechina* came to dwell in the *Mishkan*.

Connection Through Our Mitzvos

Our Forefathers built eternal connections for *Am Yisroel* for all generations through their actions performed with *yirah* and *ahava*. We can continue and build on these connections for ourselves and future generations through our performance of *mitzvos* with *yirah* and *ahava*.

Rav Wolbe in his writings explains that a thinking person will not find it difficult to be happy with his lot. He needs only to take an honest look at himself in order to attain it. It is more difficult to attain *Simcha* in the performance of *mitzvos*.

The Rambam⁶ writes on this subject at the end of *Hilchos Lulav*: "The *Simcha* that a person experiences in doing the *mitzvos* and in loving Hashem who commanded them – this is a tremendous *avodah*."

6. The Rambam, Maimonides' full Hebrew name was Moshe ben Maimon (Hebrew: משה בן מימון), he was a medieval Jewish philosopher. Most Jewish works refer to him by the Hebrew acronym of his title and name – Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon – calling him the RaMBaM or the Rambam (רמב"ם).

The Kuzari⁷ (Chapter 2) similarly states, “Just as prayer requires thought and intention, so too *Simcha* in one’s *mitzvos* and Torah learning requires thought and intention in order to experience joy in the fulfillment of the commandment itself through your love of the One who commanded it, so that you will appreciate how He has benefited you with the *mitzvah* as though He has invited you to stay at His home and eat at His table.”

“In this vein, the greater Sages commanded their wiser students not to be like a servant who serves his master solely for payment, but to be like a servant whose attitude is that because his master is the master it is fitting to serve him, i.e., to serve purely out of love” (Rambam - *Mishna Torah, Hilchos Teshuvah* Chapter 10, paragraph 4).

Indeed, when we do a *mitzvah* by rote, there is no *daas*, no love, and no *Simcha*. The Arizal⁸ revealed to his student (Chaim Vital) that he merited all his awesome achievements by being very joyful in every *mitzvah* that he performed. But we – how shall we feel this tremendous *Simcha* while we do *mitzvos*?

Each of us has a taste for a particular *mitzvah* whether it be Gemara learning, prayer, Shabbos, or *chesed*. At least, in doing that *mitzvah*, let us try to arouse true *Simcha*. As the *Mesillas Yesharim* (Path of the Just) suggests, let’s not plunge into doing that *mitzvah*; instead we will just stop and meditate that *Hashem* Himself commanded us to do this *mitzvah*, and by means of it, we connect to Him.

In our times, as we do not have a *Mishkan* or make sacrifices, our *tefillot* and our *mitzvos* have become the heart of our connection with *Hashem* and are subsequently called *Avodat Ha Lev* or Duties of the Heart.

This⁹ is why prayer is called throughout the Psalms "an outpouring of the soul." That which lies within pours outward, with no dam to obstruct it, no mud to taint it, nothing to change it along the way. The entire world may be

7. The Kuzari, R. Yehuda HaLevy, a Spanish Jewish philosopher c. 1075-1141.

8. The Arizal, Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534 – July 25, 1572) was a Jewish mystic in Safed.

9. The following thoughts/ideas were taken from separate articles written by Tzvi Freeman in Chabad.org, and Mrs. Leah Kohn in an article called Women in Judaism, Copyright (c) 1999.

ripping apart at the seams, but the beseecher's heart and mouth are at peace as one. And then that peace spreads outward into all things.

There are many things we learn from the prayer of Chana (recounted in Samuel I, Chapter 1 and read as the *Haftorah* for the 1st day of *Rosh Hashanah*). We learn that our lips must move in prayer, and that we must be able to hear our own prayer but no one else should. We learn that prayer is to be said standing. But most important, we learn how to pour out our soul.

Eli thought Chana was drunk with wine. He was the High Priest, considered the holiest person of the Jewish nation. The Divine Spirit rested upon him and he was able to see within the hearts of men and women. Yet, he saw Chana as a drunkard – drunk with a worldly desire, a desire for a child so she would no longer suffer the shame and ridicule afforded her by Penina.

And Chana answered and said: 'No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I poured out my soul before the *Hashem*. Count not thy handmaid for a wicked woman: for out of the abundance of my complaint and my vexation have I spoken hitherto.'

It is written that Chana spoke from her heart (Samuel I, 1:13), and from this we learn of our obligation to pray with focus and intention. In addition, when Chana prayed, her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. From this, our sages tell us, comes our obligation to articulate our prayers, pronouncing each word clearly, but not too loudly. As an aside, we also learn from Chana, that we are not allowed to pray when intoxicated.

Beyond Chana's influence on the *halachos* (Jewish laws) related to prayer, we attribute to her the foundation of the eighteen separate blessings in the *Shemoneh Esrei* (the silent prayer for morning, afternoon, and evening). Chana forged such a unique connection to *Hashem* through prayer that she became a role model for future generations.

Chana teaches us that devotion to *Hashem* helps us to rise above perceived limitations in life. Certainly, we come into the world with parents, talents, resources, and life circumstances, but if we are sincere in our divine service, we may well receive the tools necessary to accomplish our most meaningful goals. Through prayer, we access our deepest needs and through this experience we become profoundly connected to *Hashem*. Chana gives us the formula for this spiritual journey. She inspires us with the courage to inventory every aspect of ourselves in order to maximize our potential.

The mission of every human being is to bring the many things of this chaotic world into harmony with their inner purpose and the oneness that underlies them. To do this, each of us must have those things related to our mission: our family, our health, our homes, and our income. We pray for these things from the innermost of our hearts; our soul pours out for them – because our soul knows that without them our mission in this world cannot be fulfilled.

And *Hashem* listens, because He wishes to dwell within our mundane world and in our hearts, and be connected to each and every Jew.

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