

"And all these curses shall come upon you and pursue you... because you did not serve Hashem with joy." (28:45-47)

We may note that the *Torah* reveals that the only sin which will effect these terrible curses is a deficiency in serving Hashem joyously. An insipid service of Hashem is not only wrong, but it also distorts the very essence of spirituality. As the *Nefesh Hachayim* points out, a service devoid of passion is comparable to the interaction characteristic of the relationship of a slave to his master or a prisoner to his captor.

Why does the *Torah* inflict such terrible punishment upon one who fails to achieve this spiritual apex? Individual personalities vary, and not all people are capable of expressing themselves with the same degree of exuberance. Perhaps we can shed some light on this problem by appreciating the *Torah's* perspective on the meaning of joy.

Joy, more than any other emotion, is a universal value. Every normal being strives to attain happiness. Spiritual joy, however, is not the superficial form of elation which we experience through secular pursuits. The ephemeral form of joy is nothing more than a shallow form of happiness. True joy is experienced when an inner feeling of ecstasy permeates one's whole essence. The joy of spirituality is especially befitting a mature, intelligent individual. When one comes to grips with the reality of life and its demands, and he is able to demonstrate a wholesome attitude by which to live, then one experiences true delight in life. When one employs pleasure only to escape the challenges of life's realities, he lives in contradistinction to *Torah* values.

Perhaps the loftiest form of joy is the joy which emanates from mitzvah performance, or "*simcha shel mitzvah*." This sense of inner glee, which permeates us is unlike any other form of joy. It is the product of the feelings of accomplishment, personal development, self-esteem, and meaningfulness. The fulfillment of the Divine wish adds meaning to life, thereby creating an enduring sense of happiness. When our *mitzvah* performance lacks this integral component, it becomes nothing more than an exercise in secular endeavor. A life devoid of spirituality is a life which lacks completeness. A person who lives such a life is pursuing a collision course which ends in self-destruction.

The *Kotzker Rebbe, Z"l*, offers a unique insight to answer our original question. He punctuates the

pasuk with a slight variance, by inserting a comma before the word *vjnac*, with joy. The sentence will now read, "*because you did not serve Hashem, with joy.*" This means that one joyfully rejected Hashem. If one is at least distressed by his lack of *mitzvah* performance, then there is hope that he will return faithfully to Hashem with proper contrition. One who is happy in the face of his dereliction of duty performs an unforgivable act, which is viewed by Hashem with contempt. This idea may be further advanced by analyzing the translation of the word "*vjnac*" - which is often translated as "instead of." Performing a sin, involvement in a spiritually offensive act, is a serious affront, even if one is later remorseful about his weakness. To demonstrate happiness regarding his impudence, however, is inexcusable.