

## **“What if the fifty righteous people should lack five? Would You destroy the entire city because of the five?” And He said, “I will not destroy if I find there forty-five. (18:28)**

*Simchah*, joy, plays a significant – almost critical role – in our *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty. Without *simchah*, we are unable to sustain a meaningful and enduring relationship. The ultimate goal of a Jew is to bond with Hashem. Without joy, this is impossible, since the *Shechina* cannot rest in a place of *atzvus* – loosely translated as sadness, but as the *Baal HaTanya* defines it, a total absence of feeling. A sad person has feelings. A person in *atzvus* is mute, without emotion. This is why *simchah* and sadness can coexist, such as on *Tishah B'Av*. They are both emotions which are realized at different stages. While we might view *simchah* as an added quality in *avodas Hashem*, it is actually much more. *Avodas Hashem* without *simchah* is lacking something integral. It is diminished and not inclusive or whole. It becomes a drag – something one must do – rather than something he wants to do and enjoys doing.

Two unrelated exegeses underscore the conclusive benefits of *simchah*. It is related that the daughter of *Horav Shmuel, zl, m'Kominka*, was childless for many years. She had prayed fervently to Hashem to be blessed with a child – to no avail. Once, when her father was out of town, *Horav Rafael, zl, m'Barshad*, visited the town of Kominka. The young woman asked to see the *tzaddik*, righteous person. After pouring out her heart to him, she petitioned his blessing for a child. *Rav Rafael* listened to the woman and replied, “A *segulah*, special remedy, for having children is *simchah*.” When *Rav Shmuel* returned home, his daughter related to him what *Rav Rafael* had said. He immediately replied that this idea may be derived from the three parts of *Tanach* – *Torah*, *Neviim* and *Kesuvim*.

The Torah tells us *Va'yitzchak Sarah*, “And Sarah laughed.” This may be interpreted as the catalyst for her blessing of having a child. Since she expressed herself joyfully, it served as a *segulah* for her. In the *Navi Yeshayah* 54:1, the *Navi* says, *Rani akarah lo yaladah*, “Sing out, O' barren one who has not given birth.” If the woman is barren, a solution to her problem would be *rani*, to “sing out” with joy, and Hashem will listen. Last, we find in *Kesuvim*, *Tehillim* 113:9, *Moshivi akeres ha'bayis – eim ha'banim s'meichah*, “He transforms the barren wife into a glad mother of children.” How is the barren woman transformed? By being glad, she will become a mother of children.

*Rav Shmuel's* daughter was herself a very erudite woman, quite well-versed in Torah. She asked her father, “If this is the case, why did Hashem question Sarah's laughter? Why was He bothered by her reaction? She was only expressing joy as a form of *segulah* for her predicament.” Her father replied, “A *segulah* is applicable under such circumstances as when a *tzaddik* issues a blessing. The *segulah* will support his blessing. When Hashem Himself renders the blessing, one does not need any other assurances. His blessing needs no support.”

The second exegesis focuses on Avraham *Avinu's* advocacy on behalf of the “righteous” of Sodom. He asked Hashem if there were only fifty minus five, or forty-five righteous individuals in Sodom, would Hashem annul His decree? Hashem replied in the affirmative. The *Imrei Chaim, zl, m'Vishnitz*, renders this *pasuk* homiletically. The word *chamishah*, five, has the same Hebrew letters as *simchah*. Avraham asked Hashem, “If there are fifty righteous people in Sodom, but they are lacking in *simchah/chamishah*, will You still destroy the city?” Hashem replied, “I am not *mivater*, yielding, concerning the attribute of *simchah*. Even if there are (only) forty *tzaddikim* (not fifty), but they are *b'simchah* – if joy is a part of their outlook and demeanor – I will repeal the decree.”