

Which man shall carry out and by which he shall live. (18:5)

V'chai bahem – “By which he shall live (by them)” is an enjoinder to us that *mitzvos*, commandments, are not to come in contradistinction to life. Thus, if performing a *mitzvah* endangers one’s well-being, his life supersedes the *mitzvah*, except for the three cardinal sins of idolatry, murder and forbidden relationships. Furthermore, if violating a *mitzvah* is under such circumstances which would bring about a *chillul*, desecration, of Hashem’s Name, his life takes second place to the *mitzvah*. The *Chiddushei HaRim* views the words, *v'chai bahem*, as setting the standard for *mitzvah* performance. We are exhorted to perform *mitzvos* in such a manner that we demonstrate that their performance is our primary source of joy, enthusiasm and *chiyus*, life. We all know special people for whom *mitzvah* observance is the essence of their lives. What about those who otherwise are confronted with difficult challenges – financial, emotional, physical, children, etc.? How are they to accept the challenge of *v'chai bahem*?

Once again, I can cite countless stories of righteous people whose lives of devotion to Hashem transcended the pain and privation of their lives, but how did they do it? How were they able to rationalize the joy of serving Hashem taking center stage to an otherwise life of misery? What about the fellow who is not a *tzaddik*, righteous individuals, who just happens to be a simple, believing, G-d-fearing Jew (obviously such a person is far from “simple”)? How do we explain to him that his life of misery is to just “disappear” when he serves Hashem?

Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita, observes that one of the materials used to build the *Mishkan* was *oros techashim*, hides from the *tachash*. *Rashi* explains that the *tachash* was an animal that is no longer extant, having existed only for a short period of time. The *tachash* was a multicolored animal which was – *sass u'misp'aer b'gavnim shelo*, “rejoiced and was proud of its colors.”

The *Rebbe* notes that the *Mishkan* was a microcosm of the human being (actually of the entire world). Each material represented a different aspect of the human psyche. For instance, the gold metal, which was used in the *Mishkan*, is also found in the human soul. Gold represents fear of Heaven, while silver, which was also used in the *Mishkan*, signifies one’s love of Hashem. Thus, if a *tachash* was incorporated in the edifice of the *Mishkan*, a *tachash* element must be in the soul of every Jew. What is it?

In *Pirkei Avos* 4:1, *Chazal* teach: “Who is wealthy? *ha'same'ach b'chelko*, he who rejoices with his lot in life.” *Rashi* explains, “Regardless of the portion that Hashem gave him, whether it is good or bad, a lot or a little – he accepts everything with a good eye.” The *Divrei Yisrael*, quoting a *sefer* that is no longer extant, observes that the letters which comprise *chelko*, comprise *roshei teivos*: *ches* – *cham*, hot; *lamed* – *lach*, wet; *kuf* – *kar*, cold; *v'yaveish*, and dry. A person should be happy with his portion – regardless of what it is.

The *tachash* is within every Jew. It “rejoiced and was proud of its colors.” It was happy with its lot. Every Jew has the unique potential to be happy with his lot, because an aspect of the *tachash*

resides in every Jew. In way of an anecdotal vignette, a young man, a *chasid* of *Horav Shalom Kaminka, zl*, was complaining about the overwhelming *tzaros*, troubles, which seemed to be his lot in life. The *Rebbe* said to him, “As you know, whiskey at first has a bitter, burning taste. Anyone who imbibes, however, is acutely aware of the joy that whiskey makes him feel good and actually increases his level of happiness. I understand that you are living a bitter life, but, if you know how to (learn to) accept life properly, you can find happiness even within life’s vicissitudes.”

At the end of the day, outlook and attitude are primary. Does it remove the pain? For some, it actually does. For others, the pain remains, but acceptance sets in because we know it is part of Hashem’s Divine plan, and, as such, it becomes tolerable – and, after a while, it becomes acceptable – even something in which we take pride.

The *Rebbe* relates a story which demonstrates a believer’s rationalization of Hashem’s decree. *Rav Berel Cohen*, a resident of *Kiryas Sanz*, *Netanya*, once bought a lottery ticket and won, indicating that an enormous sum of money would be his. He was far from a rich man, and the newly-acquired funds were a lifesaver for his family. Alas, his good fortune lasted but a few days, since the lottery officials discovered that there had been an error, and they had declared the wrong winner. The money was to go to someone else. It is one thing not to win – but to win and be forced to give it up is very difficult. As a result, his wife was heartbroken. She could not stop crying. *Rav Berel* remained stoic, calm and filled with his usual sense of joy – a true *same’ach b’chelko*. One of his children found it difficult to understand how his father could maintain his present demeanor, despite the ups and downs of his win/loss experience. “How can you remain happy at a time like this?” he asked his father.

In his typical calm and collected manner, *Rav Berel* answered, “Our sages teach us that, when one incurs the penalty of death, Hashem will, at times, relieve that person of his wealth and leave him poor in exchange for his life. The Talmud says, *Ani chashuv k’meis*, “A poor person is like a dead man.” While this may be a workable solution for a rich man, what about one who is poor to begin with? What can he do? He really has nothing to lose. What about me? I have nothing. If I – Heaven-forbid – am destined to die, I have no way out! Hashem was well aware of my “problem.” He, therefore, provided me with an enormous sum of money – for a short time; after which, I lost it all. Now I can live.”

What a meaningful and inspirational way of looking at troubling aspects of life. Shame is a powerful purifying agent. It purges one’s sins. He might be miserable, but he is alive to talk about it.

Returning to our original question: How does one live *v’chai bahem*, live a life of joy? It is all in his mind. He understands that Hashem runs the world a certain way. He is not beholden to us. We are beholden to Him. If we maintain a proper frame of mind, our *emunah*, faith in Hashem, will be solid and unshakable. Once we have achieved that plateau, the joy of serving Hashem will be natural.