

You shall rejoice with all of the goodness that Hashem, your G-d, has given you. (26:11)

The **Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh** writes that *b'chol hatov*, “all of the goodness,” alludes to the Torah, for there is no greater “good” other than Torah. He adds that if people would sense the incredible unparalleled sweetness and pleasantness associated with the Torah, people would go out of their minds in pursuit of Torah. Money would have no value; nothing would have value, for the Torah includes within it everything – all of the goodness in the world.

In his *hakdamah*, preface, to his *Iglei Tal*, the **Sochatchover Rebbe, zl**, writes, “*Chazal's dictum, Mitzvos lav l'henos nitnu*, ‘The performance of *mitzvos* were not given for one to experience personal pleasure,’ does not apply to Torah study. The study of Torah should engender a heightened sense of joy within a person. The underlying principle of Torah study establishes the ideal that a person should envision the truth and be overwhelmed with joy by experiencing firsthand the depth and clarity of mind achieved through Torah study. The primary objective of the *mitzvah* of *limud haTorah* is the pleasure and satisfaction one derives when he understands a passage of his learning.” Anyone who has ever toiled in Torah and was *zocheh*, worthy, of penetrating its depth and capturing its meaning is uniquely aware of this feeling.

A Jew's *simchah*, joy, is derived from his sense of being at peace with himself, in complete harmony, without worry and in a calm state of affairs. *Chazal* teach, *Ein simchah k'hatoras ha'sefeikos*, “There is no sense of joy like (that which is the result of) resolving all doubts.” Finding resolution for the issues that plague one's life/mind is the greatest source of happiness. As long as one is beset with any form of disquiet, the questioning and lack of closure will continue to weigh him down, often destroying his sense of quiescence. In *Tefillas Arvis*, in the blessing of *Ahavas olam*, we entreat Hashem, *V'nismach b'divrei Torasecha, u'b'mitzvosecha l'olam vaed*, “And we will rejoice with the words of Your Torah, and with Your *mitzvos* for all eternity.” We immediately “explain” the reason for this sense of unimpeded joy: *Ki heim chayeinu v'orech yameinu*, “For they (the words of the Torah) are our lives and the length of our days.” We clearly underscore the Torah as our source of joy. It is only when a person comes to the internal realization that the study of Torah and *mitzvah* observance are the sources of eternal life, and that they are the only sources of longevity and quality of life, that one can achieve true joy. *V'nismach b'divrei Torasecha*, only then has one achieved peace of mind, total harmony – joy in the fullest and truest sense of the word.

This does not preclude “fun,” but one must remember that fun is not the essence of life. A life filled with fun may quite possibly be totally vacuous if it contains no eternal value. A life without value is not life. It is merely existence.

From the very onset, children should be inculcated with the notion that there is no true *simchah* like *simchah shel mitzvah*. There is no source of eternity like the Torah. It is our life, our future, and the joy of our hearts. One may surely enjoy the wonders and beauty of the world and nature. True joy,

however, is reserved for matters relating to the spiritual dimension. Only in that realm will one find joy in something of lasting value.

Throughout the generations, we have been blessed with Torah leadership who embodied the ideals of Torah standard. Their joy in studying Torah and in observing Hashem's *mitzvos* has been boundless and without parallel. Make no mistake; their joy has not been to their grasping a *chelek*, portion, of *Olam Habba*, the World to Come. Indeed, their joy is in *olam hazeah*, this world. While others enjoy the temporal pleasures which have little or no value or meaning, their *olam hazeah* is comprised of Torah and *mitzvos*.

Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, once remarked, "My *Olam Habba* I am already receiving in *olam hazeah* when I study Torah, for there is no greater joy in life than (that which is derived from) Torah study."

The story is told that a wealthy philanthropist, well-known for his generosity to *yeshivos*, once commented to **Horav Aharon Kotler, zl**, "My portion is even greater than that of the *Rosh Yeshivah*. The *Rosh Yeshivah* will certainly be the recipient of *Olam Habba* in the merit of his Torah study. The *Rosh Yeshivah*, however, has gained nothing from this world. I, however, will receive *Olam Habba* for my support of Torah. I am like Zevulun, who supports Yissachar. In addition (to my *Olam Habba*), I am presently enjoying the many pleasures that my wealth allows me to experience."

When *Rav Aharon* heard this, he immediately rose from his chair and exclaimed, "As far as my *Olam Habba* is concerned, I have no idea. Of one thing I am certain: I have *olam hazeah*. You, however, have none! For there is no greater pleasure in the world than Torah study and *mitzvah* performance!"

The last two stories are hardly a surprise, since both of these *gedolim*, Torah giants, were living embodiments of the Torah. Their unparalleled devotion to the Torah was their inspiration to distinction. It was truly the essence of their lives. What about the *amcha* Jew, the *Yid* who exemplifies *Mi k'amcha Yisrael?* "Who is like Your nation, *Yisrael?*" This refers to the Jew who is not a *gadol*. (Actually, I think such a person truly epitomizes Torah greatness.) Just an ordinary (or not so ordinary) Jew, whose commitment to Torah follows in consonance with that of faithful Jews throughout the millennia. I came across what I feel is a telling expression by a Jew who did not serve in the capacity of Torah education. He was very learned, a Holocaust survivor, who, if not for the war, perhaps might have become a Torah sage – but, now, he was a layman, a *baal ha'bayis*, deeply committed to *Yahadus*, Judaism.

While he never gave interviews, in his *The Unexpected Road*, Rabbi Hillel Goldberg relates a conversation that he had with Mr. Martin Tesler. It was the beginning of the war, 1939 or 1940, and Mr. Tesler's son, who was fourteen-years old the time, was taken from him. This was the last time he ever saw his precious son. Now, some sixty five years later, he was retelling the event. Rabbi

Goldberg wondered what he would remember: Would he remember? Would he even speak about it? What would stand out in his mind? How would he express his pain?

This is what Mr. Tesler remembered about his son: "He was already learning *Tosfos!*" An eternity of anguish came out with these five words. This was this father's ultimate condemnation of the heinous act perpetrated by the accursed Nazis. Beyond everything that these animals had done, beyond the atrocities and physical and emotional indignities, they were to be denounced for taking away a son who was already learning *Tosfos!* Sixty-five years after the tragedy, it still gnawed at him. He retained his deep pain. Why? Because his son had already begun to study the most sophisticated commentaries to the *Talmud*. He was already ascending the heights of the Torah – and the Nazis, *yimach shemam*, destroyed that escalation to the heights of Torah erudition. This is what pained him. *Ki heim chayeinu v'orech yameinu*. These are words that cannot be explained. They must be felt. They must be experienced.