

Maintaining *Simcha* within Painful Difficulties – JewishClarity.com

The final *mishnah* in *Brachot* says — “*Chayav ha'adam levareich al hara'ah k'sheim she'mevareich al hatova* — One is obligated to make a *bracha* (blessing) on the *ra'ah* (difficult and painful) **just like** one makes a *bracha* on the *tov* (clearly beneficial).” It learns this from the mitzvah of *ahavat Hashem*, to love Hashem, “*b'chol m'odecha*” — with every single *middah* (attribute) which one is given from Hashem — whether *middah tova* (the positive attribute) or *middah puranut* (the attribute of retribution). The *Gemara Brachot* 60b explains that the word “*k'sheim*” (“just like”), which equates how one should respond to both positive and difficult news, can not mean that the very same *bracha* is said. Previously, the *Gemara (Brachot 54b)* spelled out that when something *tov* occurs to us, we say the *bracha* — “*HaTov v'HaMeitiv*” (“The One Who is good and does good”), and when something *ra'ah* occurs to us we say the *bracha* — “*Dayan HaEmet*” (“The true Judge”). Although these two very different *brachot* are said, depending on how the situation appears to us, the *Gemara* answers that both of them equally must be said with “*simcha*” — usually translated as “joy.”

The obvious question is, first — **why** *Chazal* (the Sages of blessed memory) would want us to do this, and more pointedly — **how** they could expect us to be able to do this.

***Kabalat yissurim b'simcha ub'ahavah* — Accepting *yissurim* with *simcha* and love**

Rashi (*Brachot* 60b) explained that accepting difficult challenges with *simcha* means —

To make a *bracha* on *midat puranut* (the attribute of retribution) *b'leivav shaleim* (with a full heart).

Many others, however, understood this obligation more broadly — in terms of the overall attitude that one should have when dealing with difficult challenges in life. One should have the same *simcha*, settled mind and positive attitude, for difficulties as one has for clearly beneficial occurrences.

Rambam (*Peirush l'Mishnah* — *Brachot* 9:5) wrote:

This approach is completely rational for all intelligent people, even if the Torah hadn't mandated it, since many things are considered to be positive at the beginning and in the end are very negative [and vice versa]. It is, therefore, not proper for an intelligent person to be overwhelmed [even] if something very difficult occurs to him, since he doesn't know how it will ultimately end... One should focus one's thoughts and pray to Hashem that everything which happens to him in this world, whether [it appears to be] *tov* or *ra'ah*, should [simply] help him to acquire true success.

The ***Bach*** (based on the ***Tur*** and ***Shulchan Aruch #222:3***) explained:

Since it is impossible for one to feel [actual] **joy** with difficulties, one simply needs to accept whatever Hashem has decreed with the same settled mind and positive attitude [as opposed to actual joy] as one has when he makes a *bracha* on the *tov*. This acceptance of the *ra'ah* constitutes service of Hashem, and that will be a *simcha* for him.

The ***Mishnah Brurah*** (***Shulchan Aruch #222:3***) added:

All *yissurim*, whether physical or with one's money, are a *kaparah* (spiritual repair) for one's transgressions. They preempt the need for other *yissurim in Olam Haba* (the World to Come) where the severity would be enormously greater. Since Yitzchak Avinu recognized this greater severity [of retribution] in *Olam Haba*, he actually requested *yissurim* to come upon him [in this

world] in order to cleanse himself and have less to be concerned about in the future. Hashem responded that he had asked for something good, and then [actually] gave him some *yissurim*.

The **Malbym** (*Iyov* 1:21) pointed out:

Since whatever Hashem took from us had originally come to us from Him, there is no room for complaints at all... and this *ra'ah* must have been for the ultimate good... Therefore, we should bless on the *ra'ah* just like we bless on the *tova*.

Sefer Hafla'ah (*Keubot* 8b):

The nature of this *simcha* is the understanding that “nothing negative ever comes from Hashem, so why should anyone ever complain?” Since Hashem never changes, He is *tov* and causes *tov* always. The only type of change which occurs is [therefore] in terms of man's actions, which in turn affects what will [ultimately] be good for him. [After all,] if one is not deserving of some good, then some difficulty may actually [end up] being what is best for him.

Sefer M'voh I'Chachmat haKabbalah (*Cheilek Bet, Ma'amar Bet*):

Never make the mistake of believing that *tov* and *ra* are two independent powers. When all will be revealed, [we will see that] even the “*ra'ah*” is acting exclusively as G-d's agent... In fact, the greatest power of light is specifically when it comes from the darkness, as is discussed in the *Zohar*.

The **Ohr HaChayim** (*Shemot* 28:1) wrote:

This requirement [to make a *bracha* on the *ra* with *simcha*] seems a bit extreme in my eyes... [However,] the *yissurim* do bring aspects of the *neshama* (soul) back to its roots. And since there is nothing more negative or bitter than one who abandons G-d, and through the *yissurim*, the distant is brought close, the heart of the intelligent can have *simcha* from this.

The **Ha'emek Davar** (*Devarim* 33:8) added that one who could do this would be considered a — **chasid bein adam I'Shamayim** (pious in terms of his relationship to Heaven) since he would have separated himself from the normal nature of man.

The Meaning of *Simcha* — *Orchot Tzadikim* — *Sha'ar Simcha*

Simcha comes to a person through *rov shalva b'libo, bli pega ra* — an abundance of tranquility in one's heart, with no bad occurrences. If one attains his desires and never experiences anything which saddens him, he will always have *simcha*.

Since difficult challenges are an inherent part of life, this must refer to maintaining our tranquility, and viewing whatever challenges we do have in our lives as not being negative.

Included within *simcha* is the **mitzvat asef** (positive Torah obligation) of being *matzduk hadin al kol m'orosav* — Acknowledging G-d's justice in **all** that befalls one, as it says — “And you should know in your heart that just as a parent gives *yissurim* to his child, G-d your L-rd [also] gives you *yissurim*” (*Devarim* 8:5).

While there may be no single english-word translation for *yissurim*, this verse provides the proper context to understand it. The key point that we need to always remember is — Just as a proper parent gives *yissurim* to his child **exclusively from the love of the parent and for the benefit of**

the child, similarly does Hashem give *yissurim* to us, also **exclusively from His love and for our benefit**.

All of this depends upon being *same'ach b'chelko* (having *simcha* with one's portion) with what G-d has apportioned for us.

Sa'me'ach b'chelko is not only relevant to appreciating the *tov* (good) in our lives, as in “*Eizehu ashir? Hasa'me'ach b'chelko* — Who is rich? The one who has *simcha* with his portion.” The *Orchot Tzadikim* is pointing out here that *same'ach b'chelko* is relevant also with the *ra* in our lives. The recognition that even the difficult elements in our lives were specifically apportioned to us from Hashem, for our benefit, allows us to be able to feel *simcha* with them as well.

This approach to *same'ach b'chelko*, to accept the *ra* with *simcha* just like with the *tov*, is divided into many aspects. First one needs great *bitachon* (trust) in Hashem, secondly *emunah* (faith), third *seichel* (intelligence), and fourth — *histapkut* (contentment).

Bitachon means to live with the reality that all of one's success in both *Olam Ha'zeh* and *Olam Haba* are exclusively from Hashem. One will then be able to love G-d with all of one's heart.

And one will then have *emunah shleimah* that his Creator is good and more merciful than the most merciful.

There is no doubt that one who accepts all of this with a *leiv shaleim* will have *simcha* in all of G-d's judgments. Who wouldn't have *simcha* if copper coins were taken from him and he received gold coins in their place?

Bitachon in Hashem will cause one to **turn his heart from the matters of this world** and devote himself to Torah and *avodat Hashem* (service of G-d).

This **turning of one's heart from the matters of this world** is one of the most important concepts associated with *yissurim*. It is what allows us to be able to cope with *yissurim* in the first place, and it is also one of the greatest benefits which actually come from *yissurim*.

One must examine one's thoughts to strengthen his heart to live with complete *bitachon* in Hashem.

One who believes with a *leiv shaleim* (complete heart), and has *bitachon* in G-d's help, will **always** have *simcha*, will be able to endure **anything**...and will be free from all worries in the world. He will also find whatever he has to be sufficient, saying — “Whatever the Creator has decreed for me is sufficient.” See just how all-encompassing *simcha* is, since **whoever worries about *Olam Ha'zeh* will have no *menucha* (tranquility) his entire life**... [While] one who is ***same'ach b'chelko* is rich** even though he may have less, because he has *simcha* in Hashem.

And this *middah* is found in the souls of the *tzadikim* (righteous), who find complete pleasantness in their *avodat Hashem* (service of G-d)... Whoever does *mitzvot* with *simcha* receives a **thousand times more *s'char*** (benefit) than one who finds the *mitzvot* to be a burden.

One should feel *simcha* even with *yissurim*, as Chazal said — “***Chavivim yissurim***” — “Beloved are *yissurim*” (*Baba Metzia* 85a), and “All who feel ***simcha*** with *yissurim* bring salvation to the world” (*Ta'anit* 8a). One should accustom his mouth to say — “*Gam zu*

l'tova — Also this is for the good” (*Ta’anit* 21a), and “All that the Merciful One does is for the good” (*Brachot* 60b), since there are many *ra’ot* that, in the end, are *tovot*.

The longer people have lived, the more likely they are to have experienced this in their own lives.

The *Gemara Niddah* (31a) thus explained the verse — “I thank you Hashem for having been angry with me, Your anger turned away and You consoled me” (*Yeshayahu* 12:1) with an analogy of two men who were about to travel on a boat. A thorn embedded itself in the leg of the first and he could not travel. The second one did manage to go, while the first one cursed his bad luck. Some time later, however, [the second one] heard that the ship had sunk and that all aboard had been lost. He then began to praise the Blessed Creator, since he **saw** that the purpose of his mishap had been to keep him alive.”

We see from this *gemara* that one should have *simcha* even with *yissurim*, as well as with any other losses which occur to him, since **one never knows** what future *tova* may be coming to him from them. This was the attitude of Nachum Ish Gamzu (*Ta’anit* 21a).

One should also have *simcha* in the *simcha* of the *resha'im* and the pleasures of the rebels, and consider — “If this is what happens to those who defy His will, how much more will there be for those who obey it!” (*Nedarim* 50b).

One should not have *simcha* in the nonsense of *Olam Ha'zeh*. One who **truly** understands this world will have *simcha* only...in whatever brings him to *avodat Hashem* (service of G-d).

[In conclusion,] one should not have [complete] *simcha*, nor fill his mouth with laughter, now. [After the *Churban Beit HaMikdash* — Destruction of the Temple], all *simcha* has been diminished today.

When should one have full *simcha* and laughter? [Only] when the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) returns to *Tzion*, because this is the great *simcha*, as we say in *Tehillim* 126:2 (*Shir HaMa'alot*) — “**Az yemalei s'chok pinu, ul'shoneinu rina. Az yomru vagoyim, higdil Hashem la'asot im eileh**” — “**Then** our mouths will be filled with laughter and our tongues with song. Then it will be said [even] among the nations — “Hashem has done great things with these.”” (*Brachot* 31a).

It is striking that the trait which the ***Orchot Tzadikim*** considers to be the polar opposite of ***simcha*** is ***da'agah*** (worry).

Da'agah (worry) is negative in **most** of its manifestations... One of the wise said — “I find no aspect of *da'agah* at all in those who are elevated.” *Da'agah* over [merely] attaining things in this world is very lowly, and is not found at all in those with *emunah* and *bitachon* in Hashem...

Da'agah encompasses the opposite of all the *tov* which comes from *simcha*.

However, we should realize that there are also positive aspects to *da'agah*...when it comes to one's transgressions.

The conclusion is that all of one's worries should be *l'sheim Shamayim* (for the sake of Heaven)...

[However, returning to the topic of *simcha*,] one should place Jerusalem at the head of all his *simcha*, and he should merit to see it [rebuilt] in its *simcha*.

Accessing *Simcha* in Times of Pain

The ***Aish Kodesh*** is a remarkable collection of talks which were given by Rav Shapira, the *Piaseczner Rebbe*, in the Warsaw Ghetto from 1939 until the very beginning of 1943, before he was murdered there. It is certainly one of the most powerful works which grapple with how to deal with overwhelming pain and difficulty. He wrote in ***Beshalach***:

The verse of “*Az yashir*,” which describes the Jewish people singing praise to Hashem after He split the *Yam Suf* to save them from the Egyptian army, uses the future tense to speak about what had clearly happened in the past. It could, therefore, be loosely translated as — “Then they sang/will sing.” Rashi explains that this praise to Hashem involved a two-step process. When they saw the miracle which G-d had done to save them at the *Yam Suf*, Moshe and the Jewish people **first thought** to sing a song of praise to Hashem for having saved them, and **then** they did actually sing it.

The *Kedushat Levi* extended this concept of Rashi that the praise of the Jewish people to G-d was a two-step process. He says that even while the Jews were enslaved in *Mitzrayim*, they had such *bitachon* that G-d would save them, that they had **already thought** of the song they would sing when they would finally be saved.

In addition, not only did the Jews think about the singing they **would** do when they would be saved; even while they were in *Mitzrayim*, they actually thanked and praised G-d, as it says — “The people bowed and prostrated themselves” (*Shemot* 12:27).

It is possible to accept *yissurim* with love, and to have *emunah* that everything is from G-d, but to actually sing while enduring it is very difficult. In order for a person to sing, his essential self, his heart and soul, must burst into song. And even *Nevi'im* (prophets), who needed to have *simcha* with their *yissurim*, in order for *nevuah* (prophecy) to be able to rest upon them, would request that music be brought to them when they needed this extra degree of *simcha*. Therefore, we see that we need something good, or some sort of a salvation, for the heart to feel *simcha*. Once this has brought one to *simcha*, one will then be able to sing to Hashem even for their *yissurim*.

This explains why the third *psalm* in *Tehillim* which discusses David HaMelech (King David) having to flee from his son Avshalom, could be called — “***Mizmor l'David*** — A **song** of David” when, as the *Gemara Brachot* (7b) points out, it would seem more appropriate for it to have been called — “***Kina l'David*** — A **lamentation** of David.” Although the *Mishnah in Brachot* (9:5) discusses the obligation to accept the *ra'ah* with *simcha*, the question on the *psalm* was — how was David HaMelech actually able to **sing** in relation to his enormous personal tragedy? The *Gemara* answers that even in the midst of his *yissurim*, David HaMelech saw that if not for a miracle, things would have been so much worse. Through the *simcha* which he felt over this miracle, David HaMelech was able to sing about his difficulties as well.

This teaches us a fundamental principle — With all *yissurim*, even when there seems to be nothing with which to strengthen ourselves, we still need to strengthen ourselves and even to feel *simcha*, [at least] in the fact that it could have been much worse, *chas v'shalom* (G-d forbid).

However, when the *yissurim* multiply so greatly, *chas v'shalom*, that every single person is crushed by them, leaving no more humanity [within one] to strengthen oneself, it is then extremely difficult for one to feel *simcha* through thoughts like those of David HaMelech.

This is what happened when the Torah described Moshe first going to the Jewish people to tell them that he had been sent to redeem them, and the verse said — “They didn’t listen to Moshe — *mi’kotzer ruach umei’avodah kasha* — because of their shortness of breath and the hard work.” [Rashi explains the meaning of — “They didn’t listen to Moshe,” as — “*Lo kiblu tanchumin* — they didn’t accept his consolation.”]

Hashem responded to Moshe that he should lead the Jewish people with extra gentleness and patience, and this would allow them to be able to listen [to him] and to sing. G-d’s decree that the Jewish people be led with *rachamim* eventually led to the end of their slavery. It also enabled them, even while still in *Mitzrayim*, to sing and praise Hashem, and to prepare them for the [greater] singing and praising which they would do upon their final redemption. The Jewish people were able to establish this for future generations as well — that from their heart and soul they should be able to sing and praise Hashem [even in the face of enormous *yissurim*].

Completion, Security, and Peace of Mind

Rav Miller — *Yom Tov Shiurim* — *Shavuot*:

The *Sefat Emet* explains that Sukkot is called — *Chag HaAsif* (the festival of ingathering) not merely because it is an agricultural season. On a deeper level, by the time one has reached *Sukkot*, one has progressed throughout the entire Jewish year and calendar, from the joyous celebrations [of Purim] until the extremes of mourning [on *Tisha b’Av*]. One has experienced the entire spectrum of emotions which each holiday has drawn from within him. And because *Sukkot* is a time of completion, of “gathering in” all of these different experiences and emotions, it is called *Zman Simchateinu* — “the Time of our Joy.”

Therefore we see, *simcha* denotes a feeling of completion and totality of emotion.

Rav Moshe Wolfson (*Emunat Itecha*) relates the word *simcha* to *someich*, meaning — to rely on, to feel secure, and [to feel] that one is lacking nothing.

The Maharal (*Derech Chaim* — *perek shlishi*) asks:

How could the *Gemara* have initially considered the possibility that we should respond to painful news with the *bracha* of “*HaTov v’HaMeitiv* — The One Who is good and does good?”

The answer is that even *ra’ah* comes from the *midat hatov* (the positive attribute). Since G-d is *tov*, He wants (only) *tov*. He brings difficulties to this world and holds man accountable for his deeds only in order to remove the evil from this world and to leave the *tov*. And, therefore, one is obligated to accept the *middah* of *din* (the attribute of justice and judgment) from Hashem with *simcha*. We must, however, make the *bracha* of “*Dayan HaEmet* (The True Judge)” and not “*HaTov v’HaMeitiv* (The One Who is good and does good)” since we are not [actually] receiving [what we see as] *tov*.

Maharal (*Netivot Olam* — *Ahavat Hashem* — *perek aleph*):

The requirement to make a *bracha* on the *ra’ah* just like one makes a *bracha* on the *tov*, is derived from the mitzvah of *ahavat Hashem*, to love Hashem, with all of one’s being. When one is able to make a *bracha* to Hashem despite Hashem having brought a great difficulty upon him, this shows an *ahavah gemurah me’od* — an extremely complete love. However, even if one fully recognizes and accepts that this *din* came from Hashem, in terms of one’s *ahavat Hashem*, why is one still obligated to make a *bracha* and to give thanks to G-d for this?

Through the *bracha* which we make to Hashem, we acknowledge the *tov* which is inherent in Him. We need to remember that what occurred was only *ra'ah* in terms of us, the recipient, but not at all in terms of G-d Who is completely *tov* and hates *ra'ah*. It is actually because Hashem despises *ra'ah* that He brings *ra'ah* on those who engage in *ra'ah*. Therefore, we need to make a *bracha* to Hashem even on the *ra'ah*, since the *ra'ah* [ultimately] comes from the *tov*. Since both [what **we** see as] the *tov* and the *ra'ah* come from the single source of one Creator Who is completely *tov*, we need to make a *bracha* on the *ra'ah* just like on the *tov*.

In addition, since it is inconceivable that the *yissurim* which come upon a person are not a *kaparah* (spiritual repair) for his *aveirot*, even *yissurim* are [clearly] for the good, and should, therefore, be accepted with *simcha*. The *Medrash (Bereshit Rabbah, perek tet)* explains that when Hashem saw that the Creation was "*tov me'od* (very good)," this was referring to the *middah* of *yissurim*, since *yissurim* are what allow people to achieve life in *Olam Haba*.

The *Gemara Brachot (60b)* brings many different verses to support the concept of "*likbulinhu b'simcha*" — to accept even the *ra'ah* with *simcha*. While each of the verses adds a different dimension to this imperative to accept all *yissurim* with *simcha*, it is only the final one of "*Hashem natan, Hashem lakach, yehi sheim Hashem mevorach* (G-d gave, G-d took, the Name of G-d should be blessed)" which tells us — even in a case of complete loss, one is still required to make a *bracha* to Hashem.

There are many ways that the *ra'ah* coming upon a person will benefit him, such as when it extricates him from some difficult situation, or it comes as a *kaparah* for his transgressions. When one has trust in Hashem that even the appearance of *ra'ah* is actually *l'tova*, Hashem will then transform that *ra* to be good in the *zechut* (merit) of that very *bitachon*.

V'hayisa Ach Sameach:

The *Gemara Gittin (58a)* relates a story from a *braita*:

"When Rebbe Yehoshua ben Chananya went to the great city in Rome, he was told that there was a boy in prison with a [particularly] beautiful appearance. He went and stood by the entrance of the prison, and recited the verse — "Who has given Yaakov over for spoil and Yisrael to plunderers?" (*Yeshaya 42:24*). That boy answered him with [the continuation of the very same verse] — "Was it not Hashem? He against Whom we transgressed, and in Whose ways our fathers did not want to go, and unto Whose Torah they did not listen?" Rebbe Yehoshua ben Chananya then said — "I am certain that this boy will become a *moreh hora'ah b'Yisrael* — a *halacha* authority in Israel." He redeemed the boy for a large sum of money, and within a short time he actually did become a *moreh hora'ah b'Yisrael* — Rebbe Yishmael ben Elisha.

Rav Alexander Mandelbaum (in the *sefer V'hayisa Ach Same'ach*) points out an obvious difficulty with this *Gemara*:

What was the great wisdom which Rebbe Yehoshua ben Chananya saw in this young boy, who simply answered with the continuation of the very same verse? Would we say that anyone who knows the verses of *Tanach* will become a *moreh hora'ah b'Yisrael*?

The special quality Rebbe Yehoshua ben Chananya recognized in this boy was his great spiritual strength. He was able to fully accept with love that all of the *yissurim* were happening to the Jewish people because they hadn't been properly listening to Hashem. He was, therefore, certain that a boy with this degree of spiritual strength would necessarily become a *moreh hora'ah b'Yisrael*.

As difficult as it may be to intellectually understand *yissurim*, the greatest challenge, of course, is to be able to live with the principles we all know to be true. That is the critical lesson which the story in this *Gemara* is teaching us.

Many are bothered by the obligation to accept *yissurim*, and to say the *bracha* of *Dayan HaEmet*, with *simcha*. There are numerous answers, approaches, and understandings to address this. They are all based on the important distinction between the inherent pain involved in a tragic situation — which is unavoidable, and the manner in which one views that tragic situation — which we do have the free will to choose. As we discussed, the *Ohr HaChaim* and *HaEmek Davar* speak about this *chiyuv* as being a type of *chassidut*, beyond the normal *teva* (nature) of man. The *Bach* says that because it is impossible to feel actual joy with *ra'ah*, the *Tur*, therefore, restated the *chiyuv* as one of accepting *ra'ah* with a settled mind (similar to Rashi's approach), not regular *simcha*. Perhaps the single source which best expresses the contradictory tension inherent in this *chiyuv* is the *Shlah haKadosh*.

HaShlah haKadosh (*b'Asarah Ma'amarot — Ma'amar hachamishi — 10*):

Serve Hashem *b'leiv shaleim v'nefesh chafeitzah* (with a complete heart and a willing spirit)" (*Divrei Hayamim* 28:9):

"*Leiv shaleim* (with a complete heart)" — one should always have a *leiv shaleim*, even at a time when it is *nishbar v'nidkeh* (*nun dalet chaf hei*) — broken and overwhelmed.

"*V'nefesh chafeitzah* (with a willing spirit)" — this refers to an *eit cheifetz v'ratzon* (a time of desire and willingness) — i.e., to serve Hashem just as if it were an *eit cheifetz v'ratzon*. In other words, one should strive to have a *leiv shaleim* even when it [the heart] feels broken.

Many of our hearts, both individually and communally, are *nishbar v'nidkeh* over the loss of our loved ones. We are, however, striving for our *leiv* to be *shaleim* even so. Hashem should give all of us who love and miss them so much, the *siyata d'Shimaya* (Heavenly assistance) to be able to bridge this seemingly impossible chasm. Despite this huge loss which we may continue to be pained by, we should be able to maintain a steadfast *emunah* and *simcha* at the very same time.

This should be *I'zechut ul'iluy nishmat Ruchama Rivka, a"h, bat Asher Zevulun*