

פרשת ויחי

This adaptation is dedicated
in honor of my daughter Ariella's Birthday.
Happy Birthday!!!

"ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים שבע עשרה שנה" (מז, כה)
"Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt
seventeen years"

Did Yaakov live only seventeen years? Rather, these years were ones of satiety and tranquility - as if to say, these were the years that he truly lived. His earlier years were referred to as, "The days of the years of my life have been few and miserable."¹ That is what is meant by the *pasuk*, "And your beginning shall be small, but your end shall increase exceedingly."² We find likewise regarding the wicked - their beginning is joyous but their end is bottomless pain. By contrast, the righteous often commence with suffering but their conclusion is everlasting jubilation - as it says, "with joy of days of yore shall be upon their heads."^{3 4}

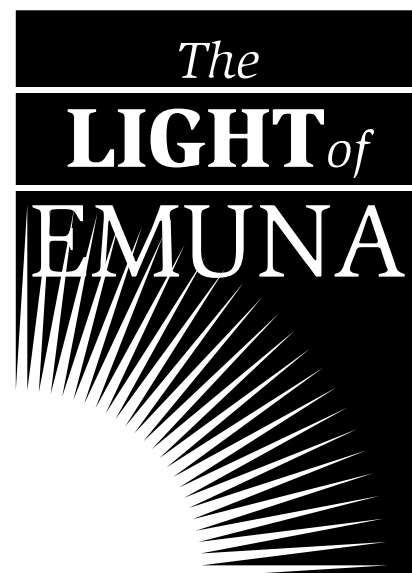
מצוה גדולה להיות בשמחה תמיד

It is a great *mitzvah* to always be happy

Each and every person has due cause to carry on in life blissfully and good-naturedly. However, in practice, this does not happen. We are not always cheerful. We tend to find joy only when we enjoy successes. Under those circumstances, we experience satisfaction and fulfillment, we exhibit elation. During periods of setbacks, confusion, doubts and worries - we lose our pleasantness entirely.

We all recognize the great value of joy and its

¹ ימי שני מגורי ... מעט ורעים היו (מז, ט)
² והיה ראשיתך מצער ואחריתך ישגה מאוד (איוב ח, ז)
³ ושמחת עולם על ראשם (ישעיה לה, י)
⁴ מדרש הגדול



Based on Harav Menachem Azolai's "Ohr Ha'Emuna"

importance. We all realize that without serenity - there is no life. Without gladness it is impossible to cling

Happy Birthday to: Ben Schlanger,
Kenny Schiff, Sruli Glaser, Avi Brum

Happy Anniversary to: Mordi & Chany,
Yaakov & Galit, JayJ & Chana, Sruly &
Sima

to Hashem, to draw close to Him. Yet, we somehow do not view it as obligatory; we continue to classify it as voluntary, as some admirable but optional trait.

This week's parsha shows us otherwise. One hundred-thirty years of Yaakov Avinu were "few and miserable." How could it be that specifically, within the depravity of Egyptian culture, as the exile during which the Egyptians were going to embitter the Jewish people was originating, Yaakov obtained tranquility? How could those years possibly be considered the principal years of his life, full of joy and ease? The numerical value of seventeen is found in the word "good" (טוב). Precisely there it was good? There is a fundamental lesson in this! A Jew can attain vitality and joyfulness wherever he finds himself. That is the essence of a Jew - to fortify himself in any situation and at any time - even in Egypt. That is our test. Even in those situations that are forced upon us. When we grasp onto happiness - sorrow and despair are forced to the side. But, how do we actually bolster ourselves with joy?

Often, we make mountains out of molehills⁵. We make big deals out of small matters and consequently become distressed. It is a shame, because these are mostly imagined fantasies and failed hopes. What should we do? We must steel ourselves with the *emuna* that Hashem will assist us and place everything in its proper perspective. In the midst of whatever difficulty we find ourselves, there are tiny components that can hearten us and we must express our gratitude - **these** small things should indeed be turned into large matters. Rebbe Nachman taught that we must find joy wherever we can - as in his story of the simple man who was always upbeat. He was so ecstatic that people assumed him to be an imbecile. He was so delighted with bread as if it was meat and with water as if it was wine - he was so content with what he had that he actually merited experiencing all of life's delicacies within his bread and water. Small things that bring joy must be revealed.

What about when things are extremely difficult? We must strengthen our *emuna* that Hashem will help. And He will help. We must reinforce our *emuna* that *tefilla* helps and never desist from praying. A life of *emuna* is not subject to the whims of time and place. The elation of a Jew of *emuna* is not limited to times of success - joy is not separate, it is part of him - it reveals G-dliness.

A person has difficulties, he is saddened, broken and desperate - he does not perceive Hashem, his eyes are darkened. When everything is bleak and he conjures no solutions to his troubles - it is a black hole, absent the Divine Presence. Despite the fact that Hashem created the world with this black hole and there are constant troubles and so many things we cannot understand, it feels like everything goes wrong and nothing good happens to us - we must remember that Hashem is there to be found. We are *Ivrim* - we pass through (עובר) to the place where Hashem is revealed. We open our hearts and discover that inner facet of connection to Hashem - that point that is entirely love and longing for Hashem -

that point of the "shield of Avraham."⁶ That element is shielded, no one can touch it, and no one can take it away from us. It is found in our hearts. Go to it (לך לך) - to that component - that aspect inside that joins us anew to Hashem. Avraham Avinu gave each Jew, in every generation, the "shield of Avraham" - a protected trait - greater than the ability to revive the dead.

Hashem gave Avraham the first *bracha* in *Shemona Esrei* - we begin with the "shield of Avraham" and only then proceed to the revival of the dead. First, we must shield ourselves. Hashem told Avraham that he came first, only afterwards do we recite Hashem's *bracha*. Avraham Avinu gave us the aspect of yearning and love for Hashem, the only true joy - and in its merit and with its power we can overcome all of our challenges. The Jewish people are sustained by this. Men sin, stumble, err, fail - and then their children return, and they themselves often return. Even if we fall, we connect again. This ingredient will survive until the end of time. Just as an infant longs for its mother - the entire world longs for Hashem.⁷

When a Jew merits loving Hashem, his life is exhilarating. Loving Hashem is taking pleasure in *mitzvos*, *davening*, acts of kindness - more than from one's own urges, even those that are *halachically* permissible. When a person loves Hashem, it leads him to higher levels in the service of Hashem and the performance of *mitzvos*. This is a fundamental of *yiddishkeit* - one who loves Hashem endeavors, with all of his might, to perform *mitzvos* and do His will, even what is not strictly required. Thrice daily we remind ourselves that the foundation of Judaism is love of Hashem. "And you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means."⁸ But, if this remains merely intellectual, if it does not pervade the heart - the essential element is missing. Ultimately, there must be love.

⁵ "Elephants out of flies" in R' Azolai's words

⁶

⁷

⁸

מגן אברהם

באור פני מלך חיים

ואהבת את ד' בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאודך

We must teach this to our children. Is there any greater gratification than watching our children follow the path of Hashem and do so joyously? The *pasuk* states, "and he blessed Yoseph"⁹ - but where is Yoseph's blessing? The *parsha* immediately proceeds to Yaakov's blessing of Yoseph's children. Yaakov teaches us that the greatest blessing to a father, his greatest joy, is for his children to be successful and educated and follow the ways of the forefathers.¹⁰

Rav Eliezer Berland Shlita: The Jewish people are a holy nation, seeking only to serve in holiness and purity. The Jewish people do not quest after personal prophecies or personal greatness - that is the focus of other nations and people that do not know the way of serving Hashem - that was the error of Balaam and others. To them, of primary importance is being great, important and famous. By contrast, we strive for one thing - to serve with sanctity and purity - the exact opposite of all of the practices and systems of the other nations, who cannot understand holiness. They do not recognize the concept of true piety. The Jewish people are not satisfied with words - we begin to serve with sanctity, by guarding our eyes and our personal sanctity. We battle our urges, refusing to succumb to our eyes and our hearts - even when doing so is very difficult and we see almost no possibility of victory - but, we know that we must fight, we have no choice - this is why we are in this world. The Vilna Gaon taught that a person was placed in this world for the singular purpose of being triumphant in this arena - everything else is ancillary.

We do not have the option of sidelining this and electing to ignore just this one of the 613 commandments. "Behold, not everyone performs every mitzvah perfectly - I will excel at being an intellectual genius, becoming famous, attaining the Holy Spirit - but, working on the prohibition against following my heart and my eyes is not for me, I am incapable, I am a busy man." This outlook is in error - it is certainly

possible to guard one's eyes - one is able to beg Hashem to help him guard his eyes, for, via prayer, everything is attainable. Avraham Avinu traveled the world without looking at the forbidden, so did the *shevatim*, on their trip from Eretz Yisroel to Egypt, as the Midrash testifies. A person cannot pretend that illicit images will not affect him - that is a blatant lie. The Beis Yisroel of Ger once related a parable to a group of professors who claimed that viewing inappropriate material didn't really affect them: Bedouins who are raised walking on rocks, thorns and thistles can walk barefoot on stony mountains without feeling anything while cultured people suffer from grains of sand in their loafers. Those who have spent their lives looking at inappropriate material feel as if it has no effect on them, while those who guard themselves are sensitive to any minor sin. One's free will depends on his eyes - if he guards them he will consequently: (i) avoid *loshon hora*, (ii) not be so demanding, (iii) not hate, (iv) keep Shabbos, (v) don tefillin, (vi) etc. One must guard his spiritual eyes, not only his physical ones. There are eyes of jealousy, of hatred, of honor - we must guard them all - to sever our senses from this world, to not have eyes for anything else. All of our senses and desires must be directed only towards Hashem Himself. "Uncover my eyes and I shall look at hidden things from Your Torah."¹¹ When we guard our eyes - all of the secrets of Torah, of Creation are revealed to us - all of the wonders of the world become clear.

Joy is attachment to Hashem and it is impossible to cling to Hashem if we do not guard our eyes. Vision drags our thoughts along - our thoughts jump to things we see. We cannot remember Hashem, think of Hashem or speak to Hashem - if we are always looking around us. This is true for men, women and children. It is so much better to close our eyes whenever possible and contemplate Hashem, talk to Hashem, recite Tehillim, do hisbodedus. Otherwise, we observe deficiencies within others; we covet things that we do not need but come to crave.

⁹

ויברך את יוסף (מח, טו)
שי למורא

¹⁰

¹¹

גל עיני ואביטה נפלאות מתורתך (תהלים קיט, יח)

Our mission is never to despair. We must close the door and begin to dance, to thank Hashem, to sing, to be exuberant and bless Hashem for making us Jews, for giving us legs with which we can dance. We begin to smile, even artificially - for that is the most genuine - for it defeats Satan, who tries to trip us up with sadness. We do not allow him to; we protect ourselves - even artificially - for our desire is authentic.

A student once asked the Tzemach Tzedek of Lubavitch what a person should do to remain enveloped in good cheer. He answered that the very recitation of the blessing each morning "for not having made me a gentile" should be sufficient to create such a tremendous joy within us to last all day. Remember - you are a Jew!

We have so much to thank Hashem for. A person

who is accustomed to nagging constantly sees what he is missing - the opposite is to habituate one's self to thank. We must feel ecstatic for this very moment - not for what was or for what will be. At this very moment we have the opportunity to connect afresh - we can invite Hashem to be with us in whatever we do. With Hashem, everything is completely different.

Joy is the best vitamin. No day can pass without it. Anything that casts us into depression must be avoided - joy reveals *emuna*. If a person is genuinely happy, it is a sign that he has *emuna*. If he is down for even one minute - it is clear that at that moment he is detached, he has lost his *emuna* for that moment, he is not connected to Hashem. Any joy without connection is folly, nonsense and silliness. Our joy is elevated above all pain, suffering and agony. It is not at the mercy of upon anything that we are lacking.

תפילה

Master of the World! Help me find joy in the little things in life and never forget to thank You for them.

Thank You Father - that I was kind enough to open the door for that collector and that I did not rush him out or make faces.

Thank You Father - that I was able to keep that promise that I made long ago but had not managed to fulfill until now.

Thank You Father - for the two telephone calls that I received today concerning that matter that worried me and disturbed my peace of mind lately - thank You for calming and encouraging me.

Thank You Father - that after so many failed attempts to concentrate while praying and feel Your Presence and not just mumble the words - that I managed to suddenly feel something and even shed a tear and pray with devotion.

Thank You Father - that after circling so many times and not finding a parking space, even after planning so well, that I finally found a spot in time. Thank You for making me only remember how I felt upon succeeding and forgetting the stress and despair that I felt while searching.

Thank You Father - that instead of getting angry at my neighbor who blocked my driveway, I maintained my composure to politely and calmly say something and to see that he, in fact, is more careful ever since.

Thank You for forgiving me, thank You for being so forbearing, thank You for helping me smile when I didn't have any smiles left, thank You for so many small ways in which I have succeeded but never thought them worthy of gratitude - I took them so for granted.

Master of the World! May I merit remembering that You do everything for me - nothing happens on its own and nothing is my doing - everything is from You, from Your vast compassion.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

Dov

Notice: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the Parsha Sheet, *Ohr Ha'Emuna*, disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai *Shlita* and is not a complete or exact adaptation of *Ohr Ha'Emuna* and is not necessarily even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented therein. *Ohr Ha'Emuna* is published in Hebrew; in translation, accuracy is always compromised. Rav Azolai has not reviewed this material - any inaccuracies, omissions or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy and it provides some *chizuk*.

©Dov Elias 5773.

To receive this adaptation by weekly email, email me at LightofEmuna@dovelias.com