

UNDERSTANDING HASHEM'S LOVE

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

1. The Obligation of Joy

Shlomo Ha'Melech (King Solomon) writes in Mishlei, "What brings joy to the tzaddik? When justice is served. And this brings dread to the evil doers." Based on this verse from Mishlei, Rabbeinu Bachya says that there is an obligation for one to perform mitzvos with simcha (joy). In addition a Jew should have simcha when he observes his fellow Jew performing mitzvos. When the tzaddik witnesses justice being served his simcha does not emanate from the fact that he is going to be rewarded, but rather, his joy stems from the fact the he is seeing the hand of Hashem. Rabbeinu Bachya says that simcha itself is an independent mitzvah because just as a mitzvah is regarded as the service of Hashem so too is simcha service of Hashem. As the verse states in the Portion of Ki Savo, "Why is this tragedy befalling the Jewish people? It is because you did not serve Hashem with simcha!" Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the Torah is teaching us that in order to perform a mitzvah in its most complete way is to do it with simcha. For example, the Leviim played musical instruments in the Bais HaMikdash (the Temple) in order to bring about simcha in the service that was being performed.

What makes a Jew proud and joyful to be a Jew? Is it because we survived for thousands of years despite adversity? Is it because there are more Jewish Nobel Prize winners than any other nation? We state every day in our prayers, "Ashrei Ashrei Baisecha (Fortunate are we that we sit in Your (Hashem's) house)" Rabbeinu Bachya explains that "Ashrei (Fortunate)" means that we are fortunate because what we possess encompasses all good things. If we are sitting in Hashem's House then we are lacking in nothing. Fortunate are we for our portion! Blessed be Hashem because He created us and separated us from those who go astray in order to praise Him. Hashem gave us His Torah to help us not to go astray.

The Mishna in Tractate Shabbos tells us that since the Jewish people are the sons of kings, and thus have a royal status, items, which may be considered as medication to ordinary people, are considered as items used for anointing ourselves. Just as a prince anoints himself with oil so too do the Jewish people anoint themselves. This is an indication of intrinsic status of the Jews.

A Jew should be joyful when he recognizes his intrinsic value and that Hashem has chosen him to do His Will. If a Jew is not joyful and ecstatic then it is an indication that he does not appreciate who he is and what he has. If Hashem tells us that He has given the Jewish people His most valued treasure how can one perform mitzvas with a sense of burden? Performing mitzvos with simcha is an

indicator to what level we connect with Hashem. Performing mitzvos with simcha is a crucial not only because it is emotionally healthier, but rather it is a key element infusing that mitzva with value.

What is the secret to have everything even though one has relatively little? The answer is- being content. What is "being content"? It is the knowledge that our actions are not futile- that there is deep purpose in everything that we do. Each moment of our lives is invested in pursuits that have tremendous value. For example, wearing tefillin once a day or studying Torah has infinite value. If only one understood and appreciated the true value of the mitzvos which he performs, he would be overwhelmed with simcha. The only reason we are not overwhelmed with joy is because we do not appreciate our own value and the value of our actions.

2. The Uniqueness of our Individual Achievements

The Torah tells us that the first prince out of the twelve to bring his gift and offering for the inauguration of the Mishkan was Nachshon Ben Amminadav from the tribe of Yehudah. The tribe of Yehudah is associated with kingship and was the first camp to lead the others through the desert. In Hebrew we know that the letter "vav" usually means "and"; however, when the Torah discusses Yehudah's gift the Torah uses the letter "vav" (and) even though he was the first prince to give gifts. The Torah does not use a "vav" with all of the other princes. What is the Torah communicating to us?

The Midrash explains that although Nachshon Ben Amminadav represented the most prestigious tribes, his level of humility was unequalled. He conducted himself as if he were secondary and thus the "vav" (and) is communicating his level of humility. The Torah also tells us that Nachshon Ben Amminadav was so special that he was the first to go into the Sea when the Jewish people left Egypt. The Sea split only after Nachshon Ben Amminadav entered into it up to his neck ahead of all the Jewish people. Even though Nachshon Ben Amminadav and the tribe of Yehudah had much to be proud of, they were exemplary in their humility.

We find that Tamar, while she was pregnant with twins, went out to be burnt and did not want to embarrass her father-in-law by revealing that he was the father of her children. She said that the father of these children is the "one who had given me the signet, the cloak etc.." When Yehudah heard this he said, "She is more righteous than I am." Despite his public embarrassment, he did not hold back the truth because he believed that his honor was not worth someone being put to death. A true king leads with the truth as his guide and not his own sense of self. Yehudah embodied humility in his behavior and this is why the Torah uses the letter "vav" (and) when it delineates Yehudah's gift.

The Gemara in Tractate Eruvin states that although the students of Shammie had very keen and sharp minds and were more intellectually astute than the students of Hillel, the students of Hillel came upon the truth more than the Shammie because they had the characteristic of humility. Hillel the Elder was one of the most humble people to ever live. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us

that if the Torah had not been given through Moshe Rabbeinu it would have been given through Hillel the Elder. Since Hillel and his student had such an exceptional level of humility, they merited that the halacha should be decided according to their ruling and not Shammei.

We find that throughout the Mishna, Yehudah the Prince (the compiler of the Mishna) stated the position of the House of Shammei before the position of the House of Hillel. Yehudah the Prince, did this to indicate that Hillel did not offer his position until he first thoroughly reviewed and understood the position of Shammei. This is another example of the humility of Hillel. Humility is the way of true leadership.

In order for one to acquire Torah one must be humble - there is no "I" or "me". The Rambam states in Hilchos Talmid Torah that if a person restrains himself from asking a question in a Torah class in order to only avoid embarrassment it is if he did not attend the class at all because he left with the same lack of understanding that he started out with. Embarrassment is rooted in ego and thus is an impediment to acquiring Torah. The Gemara says that Torah is humility and can be compared to water. Just as water constantly moves from a higher position to a lower position so to is the Torah acquired through humility.

3. The Special Role of the Kohaine

The Torah juxtaposes the portion that discusses the gifts of the twelve princes (representing the twelve tribes) with the portion that discusses the kindling of the Menorah, which is the Mitzvah of the Kohaine. Rashi asks why are these two portions juxtaposed? Rashi answers by citing the Midrash, which states that Aaron Ha'Kohaine was "taken aback" because he had seen that all of the tribes of Israel contributed to the inauguration of the Mishkan except for the tribe of Levy. Aaron believed that his tribe may have been unworthy to be represented in the inauguration of the Mishkan because of some spiritual shortcoming. He thought that perhaps the shortcoming stemmed from the Chet Ha'Aigel (Sin of the Golden Calf) when the Leviim did not prevent the rest of the Jewish people from sinning with the Golden Calf.

The Midrash says that Hashem responded to Aaron's concern, "Your participation shall be greater than their participation. They (the rest of the tribes) participated in the inauguration of the Mishkan but you will be responsible for the ongoing mitzvah of the lighting of the Menorah." The Ramban in his commentary asks why should Aaron have been "taken aback"? He should have already known his special status vis-à-vis the Mishkan from the fact that the Kohaine officiates on a daily basis and the Kohaine Gadol (High Priest) is the only person qualified to enter the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. Given these special mitzvos, why should Aaron feel deficient in any way by not participating in the inauguration of the Mishkan?

The Mishkan was comprised of components, which were contributed by each of the twelve tribes. Each tribes infused its own spiritual intent into the components it contributed to the Mishkan. Thus the Mishkan itself was a representation of the entire Klal Yisroel. The twelve tribes established the

physical infrastructure of the Mishkan. The fact that the Leviim did not participate in the establishment of the physical infrastructure troubled Aaron because it implied that the Leviim were not worthy to contribute to the overall spiritual make-up of the Klal Yisroel. Hashem however, informed Aaron that he and his tribe would participate at a greater level than the rest of the Jewish people because the Kohaine would be responsible for the lighting of the Menorah as well as other services in the Mishkan. Just as the neshama (the soul) brings life to the body, so too did Aaron and his tribe bring life into the Mishkan and the Jewish people through their lighting of the Menorah.

The Gemara tells us that the light of the Menorah represents the oral law which is the elucidation of written law. Thus the Menorah represents the study of Torah that is the essence and the source of life for all Klal Yisroel. The Kohaine is the only one qualified to light the Menorah and thus bring down that level of energy that gives us relevance to the Torah. The Kohaine therefore has the most important participation in the Mishkan because it is through him that the Jewish people have relevance to Torah. Just as the body has value only when it is infused with a soul, so to is the Mishkan and the Jewish people valuable when they are infused with Torah which is the role of the Kohaine.

After Hashem reassured Aaron about his tremendous value to the Mishkan and the Jewish people, the Midrash says that Aaron was praiseworthy for lighting the Menorah without any change. What was so praiseworthy? One would think that Hashem's reassurance would have affected Aaron's ego to some degree thus causing him to light the Menorah differently. Aaron maintained his level of humility despite understanding his value vis-à-vis the Mishkan and the Jewish people. Since Aaron was not affected and lit the Menorah without change he therefore did not cause a negative impact to the spiritual energy that is brought down by the lighting of the Menorah, which affects our ability to understand and elucidate Torah. Therefore Aaron was praise worthy.

4. How to Attain Happiness

The Torah tells us that for the forty-year period that the Jewish people were wandering in the desert, Hashem provided them with all of their needs. Every day the Mann (Manna) would fall from heaven to feed the Klal Yisroel and on Friday they would receive a double portion (the Manna did not fall on Shabbos). The Mann not only tasted like the food that was desired it also provided all the nourishment of that particular food. However there were a number of foods that the Mann would not assume their taste such as garlic, onions, melons, and gourds. Hashem provided the Jews with sustenance. He protected them from the elements and their enemies. Hashem also caused there to be no disease, sickness, or fatigue in the desert. He performed endless miracles to accommodate the Jewish people. Nevertheless the rabble complained and the Jews followed suit.

The Torah tells us that when the Jews complained to Moshe in the desert, they complained that back in Egypt they had garlic, onions, melons, and gourds; however here in the desert they are being denied such foods. They fondly remembered the cuisine they ate in Egypt without regard of the fact

that they were slaves living under the worst conditions. How could the Jews complain?

Perhaps we could say that it is because they did not see things clearly and therefore could not understand and appreciate how fortunate they were. But how could they not see things clearly? The Jewish people were in the desert for a bit more than a year. They had previously witnessed the Ten Plagues in Egypt and the splitting of the Sea which Chazal tell us that Hashem's Presence was so obvious at the Sea that even the maidservant had Divine Revelation greater than Yichezkel the Prophet. Every Jew stood at Sinai and heard the Voice of Hashem. Nevertheless the Jews complained that the Mann did not taste like the garlic and onion that they fondly remembered in Egypt. How could the Jews not have absolute clarity? This was the most spiritually advanced and insightful generation. Midrash refers to this generation of Jews as, "the generation of understanding" indicating that they had a level of clarity that was unequalled in Jewish history. If they had this degree of clarity then how could the Jewish people been affected by the rabble and complain?

We find that there are people who have a great amount of material wealth yet they are unhappy because they do not possess what they want. Regardless of their wealth they do not feel that they are getting what they need and even the wealth at best is a distraction. If one has what they need and still he remains unhappy then this is an indication that he has a problem. The Jews understood clearly that the objective and focus of life was spirituality. They understood Hashem's agenda with utmost clarity. The question is was this way of life what they really wanted? Regardless of how much Hashem provided for the Jewish people, if they were not satisfied with Hashem's agenda they had reason to complain. Not having the garlic was enough reason to complain. The fact that Jews complained regardless of the fact that objectively no one should have complained indicates that they had a problem.

The Jews were not interested in Hashem's agenda. They understood that the purpose of life was to perfect their spirituality and their will and existence was secondary to G-d's. At Sinai the Jewish people negated themselves to such a degree that they gave their will and existence completely over to Hashem; however, at this point in time they wanted to re-assert their will. The problem of the Jews was rooted in their ego. This is the nature of a human being. The Jewish people wanted to assert their independence and their individuality by complaining despite the fact that Hashem provided them with all of their needs. The experience at Sinai was in the past and now the feeling of self-negation was also in the past.

We find that a person is most happy when they are who they are supposed to be. The Jewish people would not have complained had they been in line with the Will of Hashem and the spiritual agenda for which they were created. If a person wants to satisfy his ego there is not end to that pursuit and he will never find happiness and satisfaction. However, if a person negates his ego and pursues the goals for which he was created he will definitely attain happiness.

5. Understanding Hashem's Love

The Torah states, "Then I assigned the Levites to be presented to Aaron and his sons from among the Children of Israel to perform the service for the Children of Israel in the Tent of the Meeting and to provide atonement for the Children of Israel, so that there will not be a plague among the Children of Israel when the Children of Israel approach the Sanctuary." Rashi notes that "Children of Israel" is mentioned five times in the verse to reveal the great love that Hashem has for the Jewish people because as Chazal explain we are the equivalent to the Five Books of the Torah. Rashi could have simply stated that repeating "Children of Israel" five times is an indication Hashem's love for the Jewish people; however, Chazal add that it is because the Jewish people are equivalent to the Five Books of the Torah. The question is what do the Five Books of the Torah have to do with Hashem's love for the Jewish people? If the Torah wanted to communicate that Hashem loves the Jews it could have simply stated so. Evidently there must be a connection between the Torah and Hashem's love for the Jews.

Hashem created this existence, as the Prophet states, "For My (Hashem's) Glory". How do we bring about the Glory of Hashem? Is Glory what we believe it is or what Hashem believes it is? The Torah states, "Berashis bara Elokeem es hashamayim v'es ha'arets (In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and the earth)." Rashi cites the Midrash, which explains that "Berashis" means that Hashem created the world for the sake of Torah which is called "reishis" (the most special) and for the Jewish people who are also identified as "reishis". Thus the Glory of Hashem is brought about through the Jew's adherence to the Torah because the intrinsic purpose and value of the Jew is based on in the Torah.

Hashem's love for the Jewish people is not based on the fact that we are descendents of Avraham but rather, Hashem repeats "Children of Israel" five times to express His love only because we have relevance to the Five Books of the Torah. The Jew is the only being that has the capacity to bring about the Glory of Hashem through the Torah and fulfill the purpose of existence. Chazal explain that if the Jews did not accept the Torah at Sinai existence would have reverted back to pre-creation. The only reason why existence has value is to glorify Hashem and that is accomplished only through Torah. Therefore if one has the capacity to glorify Hashem through Torah and does not do so, it is a tremendous claim against that individual.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that the Blessings of the Kohaine mention that Hashem will turn His face towards the Jewish people in a favorable way. The angels asked Hashem, "How could You favor the Jews when it says that You (Hashem) will not show favoritism to anyone?" Hashem responded to the angels by explaining, "The Torah obligates the Jew to acknowledge and thank Me only if he eats to the point of being "satiated"; however, the Jews acknowledge Me even if he eats an amount as small as an olive!" It is not that Hashem is biased towards the Jewish people; but rather we are worthy of His favor because of our conduct.

The question is- Hashem could have answered the angels by telling them that He favors the Jews only because we accepted the Torah at Sinai and nothing (including the angels) would have

continued to exist had it not been for that. Why did Hashem respond to the angel's claim by telling them that we acknowledge and thank Him after eating the measure of an olive even though we are not obligated to do so?

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk zt'l explains that when a person becomes satiated he has a tendency to reject and forget about Hashem. Therefore when one has a satisfying meal the Torah obligates a Jew to recognize that the feeling of satiation only emanates from Hashem's Kindness. Thus the blessing after a meal in which one is satiated is a Torah obligation. Hashem tells the angels that the Jews are praiseworthy because they are so concerned to be satisfied and not to acknowledge Him that they obligate themselves to thank Hashem even after consuming bread in the amount of an olive, which brings about a certain degree of satisfaction. Since the Jews are so concerned to acknowledge the source of blessing it is an indication that they have relevance to Torah. Because if the Jews were focused only on themselves and did not acknowledge that all blessing emanates from Hashem, then they would have no relevance to Torah.

Therefore Hashem's response to the angels once again highlights that He favors and loves the Jewish people only because of their relevance to Torah, which is the only purpose of existence.

6. Hashem's Most Precious Gift

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that when Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to heaven in order to receive the Torah from Hashem, the angels wished to consume him with the vapor of their breath. Moshe was frightened and Hashem told him to hold on to the Heavenly Thrown and he would not be harmed. The angels asked Hashem why He was giving the Torah to man who is limited and imperfect. The angels said to Hashem, "Place Your Glory in heaven." Despite the fact that the angels question was directly to Hashem, Hashem said to Moshe, "Respond to them." Moshe responded by saying, "It says I am the Hashem Your Lord who has taken you out of the Land of Egypt from the house of bondage." Moshe asked the angels if they had ever been in Egypt or in the house of bondage. Moshe then continued with other examples of mitzvos stated in the Torah that clearly indicate that angels have no relevance to Torah and Torah is only relevant to mankind. (done)

The question is - if the angels posed their question to Hashem, why did Hashem tell Moshe to respond. Hashem should have easily answered their question Himself. The answer is that Hashem is teaching us a fundamental principle in the acquisition of Torah. The Torah can only become ours if we take the initiative to acquire it.

The Gemara tells us of an argument between Reb Lezer and Reb Yehoshua in which Reb Lezer believed his ruling concerning the status of a contaminated oven was correct while the Chachamim (the Majority of Rabbis) ruled in the opposite manner. Reb Lezer was so convinced that his ruling was correct that he asked for a heavenly voice to declare it correct and that the Chachamim were not correct. The heavenly voice declared that Reb Lezer's ruling was in fact the correct ruling; however, Reb Yehoshua stood up and responded to the heavenly voice, "The Torah is not in heaven." Meaning

that the Torah was given to the Jewish people at Sinai and it is no longer a matter for spiritual beings to decide the Laws. Hashem gave man Divine principles to interpret the Torah. These interpretations are a product of the human intellect and not the Divine Mind. In order to transfer the Torah from the Divine realm into the human realm, Moshe and not Hashem needed to respond to the angels because the Torah was to be interpreted with the human intellect. The process and effectiveness of understanding Torah exists only through human intellectualization within the parameters that were set by Hashem.

The Mitzvah of Talmid Torah (the study of Torah) goes beyond simply the understanding of Torah. The halacha is that even if one is completely proficient in the entire Torah one must still toil in Torah. The human initiative must be continuously be involved in Torah because it is our Torah and we must demonstrate how we value it and how we are attached to it.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that Hashem says, "I have given you an incredibly valuable commodity (the Torah) - do not leave it" The Gemara explains that usually when one gives away something of great value and the recipient does not want it, the donor will immediately retract the gift. Hashem gave us His most precious gift yet He says, "do not leave it." This is because Hashem wants us to understand the value of the Torah. Hashem wants the constant human pursuit and toiling in the Torah just as one would continuously engage in a precious item without becoming lax or blasé. This is the reason why Hashem wanted Moshe to respond to the angels.

Once a person approached the Vilna Gaon to become his student. The Vilna Gaon gave the prospective student a verse from Chronicles and told him to study it and return to him after three hours. The student read the verse many times over the course of fifteen minutes and quickly came to believe that he understood all that there was to know about the verse. He returned to the Vilna Gaon who promptly dismissed him. The Vilna Gaon pointed out to him that he was not qualified because he did not value the Torah sufficiently. If the student truly valued the Torah he would not have grown tired of reviewing the verse just as one does not become tired of gazing upon a priceless object.

We must value and pursue Torah to the point that each word is priceless to us in order to merit it to become our Torah.

7. Distraction Emanates from Lack of Trust

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos says that a Sadducee (Early sect of Jews who only accepted the written Torah and rejected the Oral Law) once witnessed Rava deeply engaged in his Torah studies and saw that Rava was so immersed in his studies that he did not notice that his heels were pressing on his fingers so hard that they were bleeding. The Sadducee told Rav, "You compulsive people! Your mouths spoke before you heard the extent of the obligation! I see that you have not changed since then. You are till compulsive in the way you live your life."

We can see from the words of the Sadducee that he is referring to the fact that the Jewish people

said "naaseh V'nishma (We shall do and we shall listen)" - thus obligating themselves to the precepts of the Torah without first knowing its contents. The Sadducee believed that the Jews were foolish and irresponsible to accept the Torah without knowing its contents. He chastised Rava for acting as impulsively as the Jews at Sinai by studying Torah so intensely. The Sadducee advised Rava, "You should first listen then if what you hear is acceptable to you only then should you take it upon yourself to do it." Rava responded, "We Jews live our lives with total love and trust in Hashem." Rashi explains that since the Jewish people love and trust Hashem, they know that He would not impose upon us a task that we cannot accomplish. Hashem had taken us out of Egypt, split the Sea and performed endless miracles for us. There is not reason not to trust Hashem. However someone who does not trust Hashem (such as the Sadducee) will question Hashem. Rava responds further to the Sadducee by quoting a verse from Mishlei." The perfection and wholeness of those who are straight leads them and those who question will destroy themselves."

The question is what is the connection between Rava's behavior while studying Torah (e.g. his immersion to the exclusion of all else) and his statements to the Sadducee? If a person were able to study Torah without any other concerns in the world, then he would definitely be able to focus completely on his studies and become immersed in his studies. Nevertheless we have distractions. On the other hand if we had complete trust and faith in Hashem we would have no such concerns or distractions because we would be confident that Hashem would provide for our needs. In addition, one would never compromise his adherence to Torah in the course of business dealings if that person had trust in Hashem because he would understand that no harm will come to his livelihood if he is following the Will of Hashem. The only reason why people are distracted is because they do not have complete trust in Hashem.

We all understand the concept of "trusting Hashem" on an intellectual level and we believe that we trust Him; however, we need to internalize this trust to such a degree that we will not become distracted. The Gemara in Tractate Yomah says that the Torah Sage is the same on the "outside" as he is on his "inside". Meaning that the Torah Sage lives every moment of his life in accordance with the Torah. All of his actions and thoughts emanate from Torah and holiness. The Torah sage's life is guided by his trust in Hashem as we quoted Mishlei earlier- "The perfection and wholeness of those who are straight leads them ..." The concept of "Emunas Chachamim - Trust in the Sages" is based on the Torah Sage's spiritual dimension and involvement with Torah. The Torah Sage's advice and teachings do not stem from intellectual capacity alone but rather from the intrinsic holiness of the Torah which he has internalized. Therefore one should also have unquestioning trust in the Torah Sage's advice.

Hashem has always provided the Jewish people with everything we need because we are the Am Hashem. Our relationship with Hashem is based on our love and trust which dates back to Sinai when we said, "naaseh V'nishma (We shall do and we shall listen)".

8. How to Understand and Appreciate Shavuot

The Torah identifies every Yom Tov (Holiday) explicitly for what it is except for Rosh Hashanah and Shavuos which are identified in a concealed manner. Pesach is referred to as the time of our freedom, Yom Kippur is identified as the "Day of Atonement", and Succos is the period in which we sit in the Succah (the booth); however, Rosh Hashanah is referred to as "Yom Teruah - the day of blasting the Shofar" and Shavuos is the "Holiday of bringing the new fruits" when we thank Hashem for all that He has given us.

We know that Rosh Hashanah is the "Day of Judgment" during which Hashem judges the world and determines the destiny of each person for that year vis-à-vis many issues such as livelihood, health, etc. Rosh Hashanah is such a serious day that the angles in heaven tremble as Hashem judges creation. We also know that Shavuos is the "Time of the giving of our Torah" when we said "naaseh V'nishma (We shall do and we shall listen)" and accepted upon ourselves the obligation of the Torah. Nevertheless, the Torah does not refer to Rosh Hashanah and Shavuos in these explicit terms. The Maharal of Prague asks if the essence of Rosh Hashanah is the "Day of Judgment" and Shavuos is the "Time of the giving of our Torah" then why are these two Holidays identified by the Torah in such a concealed manner?

The Maharal answers that whenever the Torah identifies a Holiday it refers to it in a joyous and festive manner so that every Jew regardless of their level could appreciate and celebrate that holiday with Joy. In fact there is a Mitzvah to celebrate the Festivals in a Joyous manner - "Visamachta B'Chagecha". If one perceived Rosh Hashanah on a cursory level as the "Day of Judgment" during which the angels themselves tremble with fear would he be able to celebrate Rosh Hashanah with Joy? If one simply understood Shavuos as the day the Jewish people obligated themselves to 613 Mitzvos and submitted themselves completely to Hashem perhaps would one be able to appreciate the Joy of this day? Until Shavuos the Jewish people were only obligated in the seven Mitzvos given to the children of Noach. Basically, a person only needed to live in a civilized manner in order to fulfill his obligation. However at Sinai that changed dramatically. How could someone celebrate?

If a person does not truly understand and appreciate the value of Rosh Hashanah and Shavuos he would not be able to celebrate them with joy knowing the gravity of these days. This is why the Torah identifies Shavuos as the "Holiday of bringing the new fruits." The Torah highlights the fact that Shavuos is a time of celebration when one thanks Hashem for the fruits of his labor. The Torah does not emphasize the fact that on this day the Jewish people became a Nation and the "servants of Hashem."

Rav Nachum zt'l, who was a great Torah Sage, once came to visit the Brisker Rav zt'l who is recognized as that generation's leading Torah giant in order to present him some issue in Torah study. Rav Nachum zt'l gave his presentation to the Brisker Rav zt'l in the presence of Rav Shach zt'l who noticed that Rav Nachum trembled with trepidation as he presented the material. After Rav Nachum left, Rav Shach asked the Brisker Rav, "Rav Nachum presented his Torah thoughts so well. Why was he trembling?" The Brisker Rav answered, "He presented well only because he trembled."

Meaning Rav Nachum understood and appreciated the gravity and seriousness of the Torah.

If a person truly understood the value and seriousness of the "Day of Judgment" one would be able to take advantage of the day and make all the corrections that needed to be made. One would be joyful and celebrate the opportunity that Hashem has given us to perfect our spirituality and to advance. Similarly, if one is able appreciate Shavuos as the day Hashem gave us the Torah "His most precious gift" then that person would be able to celebrate with joy. Having the ability to comprehend and appreciate the essence of is the prerequisite to being able to be "Visamachta B'Chagecha (being joyous with our Holidays)".

A person who does not comprehend the true essence of Shavuos would regard the day as a time when we accepted a great burden upon ourselves. However the person who understands the essence of Shavuos would regard it as the day Hashem gave us endless opportunity to advance spiritually and to achieve incalculable reward for our actions. This is similar to someone who has prepared and waited for a senior position with a major corporation for many years. The person understands that the position will yield great wealth and financial security, but at the same time he understands that the position demands many hours of his time and carries with it great responsibility. The man on the street however would regard this executive as a slave and look at himself as the true free man - regardless of the rewards of the executive's position.

We are fortunate that Hashem "has chosen us from amongst all the nations of the world to give us His Torah." Hashem gave us His treasure from which emanates infinite Good. If there the Jewish people did not accept the Torah there existence would have come to an end. Therefore in terms of the "Simchas Yom Tov - Joy of the Holiday" the simcha (joy) of Shavuos should be even greater than all of the other holidays because on this day the Jewish people achieved the purpose of Creation. The more we contemplate how fortunate and privileged we are to have received the Torah the more we will be able to celebrate Shavuos with simcha.

9. Perfecting Existence and Ourselves

There is an argument in the Gemara between Rebbe Eliezer and Rebbe Yehoshua as to how one celebrates the Festivals. Rebbe Eliezer believes that one has a choice either to dedicate the day totally to Hashem (prayer, Torah study, etc.) or to celebrate the day totally through festivities of eating and drinking. Rebbe Yehoshua on the other hand states that one must divide the day between oneself and Hashem. One must be occupied in spirituality and in addition celebrate with festivities in a physical sense. There are three holidays a year, however, in which Rebbe Eliezer and Rebbe Yehoshua are in agreement that one must celebrate the holiday in a physical sense.

One of the days in which a Jew must celebrate in a physical manner is Shabbos because the verse from the Prophet states, "The day (Shabbos) itself should be declared as a day of oneg (pleasure)." The other day is Shavuos because it was the day that the Torah was given to the Jewish people. The third holiday that must be celebrated in a physical sense is Purim because it is stated, "It is a day of

joy and mishte (celebration with a banquet)." The question is- what is the common element between Shabbos, Shavuos, and Purim that they should all be celebrated in a physical sense? One would think that Shavuos, the time the Jews received the Torah, should be a time completely dedicated to the study of Torah and spiritual involvements.

After the six days of Creation, the world was completed on Shabbos. Since the world reached a level of completion on Shabbos one must celebrate that achievement of perfection with festivities. The Gemara tells us in Tractate Avodah Zarah that "The earth did not become tranquil until the Jews accepted the Torah." Meaning the status of existence was questionable until the Jews accepted the Torah at Sinai because had we not accepted the Torah the world would have reverted back to pre-existence. The existence of the world solidified and became stable only on Shavuos, thus bringing creation to another level of completion. Therefore in order to celebrate this level of perfection (Shlaymus) one must celebrate with physical festivities. At Sinai, the Jewish people accepted the Torah because Hashem held a mountain over their heads and gave them an ultimatum - either they accept the Torah or Hashem would bury them under the mountain. On Purim the Jewish people re-affirmed their commitment to Torah; however, unlike the Sinai experience the Jews accepted the Torah out of love on Purim. This brought existence to yet another level of Shlaymus in a qualitative sense.

The highest level of achievement in one's life is to reach spiritual completeness and perfection - Shlaymus. The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states that one is not permitted to have a circumcision on Shabbos because it would bring him to a level of perfection and perfecting something on Shabbos through a creative act is prohibited. Up until a Jew is circumcised he considered incomplete. Until Avraham was circumcised, Chazal explain that he was not a complete person and did not have complete control over his existence. Circumcision is the Shlaymus Ha' Adam (The perfection of man). How do we achieve the ultimate Shlaymus? The answer is - it is only through the study of Torah

Every day we say in our prayers, "Hashem gave us the Torah and He implanted within us Eternal Life." Meaning, by giving us the Torah, Hashem has given us relevance to the World to Come, Eternity, and Infinite Good. What does the giving of the Torah have to do with the World to Come and Eternity? The answer is- unless a Jew reaches a degree of spiritual perfection - Shlaymus - he cannot have relevance to the Infinite and Divine. As a result of giving us the Torah, which is the means one reaches perfection, Hashem implanted within us Eternal Life. This is why "Talmid Torah Kineged Coolum - The study of Torah is equivalent to everything."

The Chinuch explains that the concept of counting the forty-nine days of the Omer until Shavuos is similar to the slave who counts the days until he can cease his labor in the bright sun and take refuge in the shade. Similarly we count the days until the receiving of the Torah with great anticipation and joy because it is only through Torah that we can perfect our spirituality and have relevance to Hashem.

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Rabbi Kalatsky is the founder of the [Yad Avraham Institute](#), a New York-based learning center whose mission is to disseminate Torah to Jews of all backgrounds and walks of life.