

WITH JOY!

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Our Parashah opens: "V'hayah / It will be when you enter the Land that Hashem, your Elokim, is giving you as an inheritance, and you will possess it and dwell in it." R' Chaim Palagi z"l (1788-1868; Chief Rabbi of Izmir, Turkey) writes:

Our Sages teach that any verse that begins with the word "V'hayah" is an expression of joy. Thus, our verse is teaching that one who makes Aliyah to Eretz Yisrael should do so with joy. It is wrong for a person to say, "I have to leave my home for health or financial reasons, so I may as well move to Eretz Yisrael," R' Palagi writes. Rather, Aliyah should be motivated solely by the joy of living in such a holy place as Eretz Yisrael.

R' Palagi continues: If, for whatever reason, a person is unable to move to Eretz Yisrael, he still must yearn for the Land, as we read (Tehilim 87:5), "But of Zion it can be said, 'Man and man who was born there.'" Why the redundancy ("man and man")? The Gemara (Ketubot 75a) explains: "One who was born there and one who yearns to see it are equal [as if the latter was born there]." R' Palagi notes: The Gematria of Eretz Yisrael (832) equals the Gematria of "Tet Lev" (Tav-Tav Lamed-Bet) / "pay attention." Then, Hashem will view one's desire to perform this Mitzvah as if the person had actually performed the Mitzvah. However, if one refrains from moving to Eretz Yisrael simply because he is happy where he is, then he will be punished, concludes R' Palagi. (Tochachat Chaim: Parashat Chayei Sarah)

"You shall be joyous with all the goodness that Hashem, your Elokim, has given you . . ." (26:11)

R' Moshe Yehoshua Hager z"l (1916-2012; Vizhnitzer Rebbe) explains this verse in the name of his father, R' Chaim Meir Hager z"l (1887-1972; Vizhnitzer Rebbe) as follows: "You will be joyous when you believe that all that comes from Hashem is good."

He continues: Simchah / gladness or joy is the key to attaching oneself to Hashem. Without Simchah, a person cannot have even the smallest connection to G-d. Service of Hashem without

Simchah is like a body without a soul.

We read in Tehilim (100:2), "Serve Hashem with Simchah." This, explains the Vizhnitzer Rebbe, is not merely good advice; it is a statement that the only way to serve Hashem is with Simchah. The psalm continues, "Come before Him with joyous song." The only way to come before Him is with joyous song.

Because Simchah is so important, the Yetzer Ha'ra works extra hard to spoil it, notes the Vizhnitzer Rebbe. This includes blurring the line between joy and frivolity, as well as between humility, on the one hand, and self-deprecation that leads to depression, on the other hand. Indeed, Chassidic sources teach that the Yetzer Ha'ra derives greater satisfaction from a person's feeling of depression after sinning than from the sin itself.

The Vizhnitzer Rebbe concludes: Serving Hashem and studying Torah require Simchah. Indeed, the fact that a person has the opportunity to serve Hashem should itself give him Simchah. (Yeshuot Moshe: Ma'adanei Ha'shulchan)

"I have also given it to the Levi, to the proselyte, to the orphan, and to the widow, according to the respective commandment You commanded me; I have not transgressed any of your commandments, and I have not forgotten." (26:13)

R' Nosson Lewin z"l (1857-1926; rabbi of Rzeszów, Poland) writes: This Mitzvah (i.e., tithing) reminds us at all times, at every moment, of Hashem's Honor, as the Gemara (Bava Batra 10a) states: "One who gives [even] a small coin to a pauper merits to see the "face" of the Shechinah." When one gives a donation to a needy person, his soul will take flight and he will be satiated for eternity by Hashem's presence. Through the act of kindness, one recognizes the Father of kindness and compassion. (Bet Nativ p.62)

"You have distinguished Hashem today to be Elokim for you, and to walk in His ways, and to observe His decrees, His commandments, and His statutes, and to listen to His voice. And, Hashem has distinguished you today to be for Him a treasured people, as He spoke to you, and to observe all His commandments." (26:17-18)

R' Alexander Ziskind of Horodna z"l (1739-1794; Belarus) comments: Do not think that the Mitzvot are a burden, like a decree that a master imposes on his servants. To the contrary! Because of Hashem's immense love for us, He has given us a great, priceless gift. (Yesod V'shoresh Ha'avodah: Introduction)

"Because you did not serve Hashem, your Elokim, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when

everything was abundant.” (28:47)

R' Yehuda Halevi z"l (Spain and Eretz Yisrael; approx. 1075-1141) writes: The Divine Torah does not impose Perishut / asceticism on us. Rather, the Torah's way is the middle road, giving each aspect of the soul and body its due, but without excess. Indeed, excess in one area necessarily shortchanges some other area. For example, one who succumbs excessively to his body's desires shortchanges his intellect, but the opposite is also true. Being poor is not a form of Divine service if one can become wealthy in a "kosher" way, without excessive toil, and not at the expense of acquiring Torah wisdom and performing good deeds. Wealth befits a person who has children to support, so long as his intentions are for the sake of Heaven.

R' Yehuda Halevi continues: The foundations of Divine service are three: Yir'ah / fear or awe of G-d, Ahavah / love of G-d, and Simchah / gladness or joy. You should serve Hashem with each of these, as Hashem does not value your subjugation to Him on a fast day more than He values your Simchah on Shabbat and Yom Tov, if that Simchah is wholeheartedly for the sake of Heaven. Just as you must concentrate on proper thoughts when you beseech Hashem, so the joy you experience when performing Mitzvot and studying Torah requires thought and proper intentions. Your happiness when performing a Mitzvah should be motivated by love of the One who commanded that Mitzvah and a recognition of the good that He does for you, as if you were invited into His house and are eating at His dining room table. Give thanks both privately and publicly, and, if your joy leads you to break into song and dance, that, too, is a form of Divine service and Dveikut / clinging to Hashem. (Kuzari 2:50)

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes: Although eating and drinking on Yom Tov is part of a Mitzvat Asei/ affirmative commandment, a person should not eat and drink all day long. Rather, this is the proper way to act: In the morning, get up early to go to the synagogues and Batei Medrash, pray and read a timely portion from the Torah, then go home to eat. After that, go to the Batei Medrash to study Torah and Talmud until midday. After midday, recite Minchah, then go home to eat and drink until nightfall.

Rambam continues: When one eats, drinks and rejoices on Yom Tov, he should not drink to the point of frivolity and lightheadedness, thinking that that is how the Mitzvah of Simchah is performed. That is not Simchah, but rather folly and foolishness, and we were not commanded to be foolish. Rather, we were commanded to experience the type of Simchah that includes service of the Creator, as is written (in our verse), "Because you did not serve Hashem, your Elokim, amid gladness and goodness of heart . . ." It is impossible to serve Hashem amidst frivolity, lightheadedness or drunkenness. (Hil. Shevitat Yom Tov 6:19-20)

Tehilim

Siddur Avodat Yisrael cites a custom to recite Psalm 51 on the Shabbat on which Parashat Ki Tavo is

read. Accordingly, we present here verses from, and commentaries on, that Psalm.

“Show me favor, Elokim, in accordance with Your Chessed / kindness; in accordance with Your vast Rachamim / compassion erase my transgressions. Abundantly cleanse me from my iniquity, and from my sin purify me. For I know my transgressions . . .” (Verses 3-5)

R' Moshe David Valle z"l (Italy; 1697-1777) writes: King David begins by mentioning Hashem's Attribute of Chessed, for that is the source of the pure "waters" that wash away the filth of sins. After that, he asks that the Attribute of Rachamim wash away even the stain left behind by the sin, so that he will be pure and clean, like a newborn baby, as if he had never sinned. This is what happens on Yom Kippur, as we read (Vayikra 16:30), "For on this day He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you; from all your sins before Hashem you shall be cleansed."

R' Valle continues: Indeed, a person--at least a Tzaddik--can sense whether he has been purified completely of his sins or whether he still feels an indictment pending against him in Heaven. This is why the pious king [David] cried out to Hashem (in our verses): "Abundantly cleanse me from my iniquity, and from my sin purify me. For I know my transgressions . . ." The verb "know" connotes an attachment (see Bereishit 4:1); therefore, "I know my transgressions" means, "I feel my transgressions clinging to me." King David was praying the he be cleansed completely of his sins. (Be'ur Sefer Tehilim)

The Midrash Yalkut Shimoni likens King David's prayer to the request of a person who is sick and goes to the doctor. The doctor says, "I can heal you, but the cure is expensive, and you don't have enough money." The patient responds, "Please! Take all of my money and do the rest out of kindness." Similarly, Hashem says, "You have not met all the prerequisites for atonement," but King David responds, "In accordance with Your vast Rachamim, erase my transgressions." Take whatever I have to offer and do the rest Yourself.