

Be Smart, Be Happy

Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

This year's Purim was different from most years. We had the rare occurrence of celebrating the special day on a Friday, with the specter of Shabbos hanging over us. Everything we did on Purim day was rushed because we knew Shabbos was coming. We had our usual stops – the people we visit every year to bring mishloach manos and to make a lechaim with – but this year, we had to cross some of them off the list. There was so much to do, and we wanted to get the seudah started before chatzos as well. We had to end the festivities early, quickly clean up, and restore the house because Shabbos was approaching, and we couldn't afford to be late.

Despite Purim being somewhat cramped, if you will, its message had time to permeate us and will remain with us for a long time. And despite the feeling that Shabbos and Purim were competing for our attention, they share a common lesson.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 688) rules that when the 14th of Adar falls on a Friday, even those who live in places such as Yerushalayim, where Purim is celebrated on the 15th of Adar, do not observe it on that day. Instead, they read the Megillah on Thursday evening and Friday morning, when they also distribute matanos la'evyonim, as we do. They eat the seudas Purim and distribute mishloach manos on Sunday.

The Mishnah Berurah (ibid.) explains that the reason the seudah is not eaten on Shabbos is based on a Yerushalmi, which derives it from the posuk (Esther 9:22) which states that it is incumbent to have simcha and a seudah on the days of Purim, and they must be observed on a day whose simcha is dependent on bais din, not on a day whose joy is dependent on Yedei Shomayim.

What the Yerushalmi is saying is that the days on which Purim fall are dependent upon the calendar. Bais din proclaims when Adar begins, and then the 14th and 15th of the month are designated as Purim, bringing about joy. The joy of Shabbos, however, is brought on by Hashem, who declared the seventh day of every week holy.

From where does the joy of Shabbos derive? What is it about Shabbos that causes us to be happy? Just because it is a holy day does not necessarily make it a joyous day. What is the source of happiness on Purim and Shabbos?

The Alter of Kelm wrote that the greatest joy a person can experience is when he attains chochmah, intelligence. Chochmah brings simcha because it allows a person to understand that everything that happens in this world is from Hashem.

Once a person understands that everything that happens to him and to the world is from Hashem, he is no longer saddened when things happen that cause him consternation, loss, and pain. A wise person knows that Hashem created him and everything else, and wants His world

and people to be happy and productive. Therefore, even when things seem bad, he knows they are ultimately for a good purpose.

Essentially, this is the message of Purim. A wise person studies the Megillah and reviews the story, realizing that everything that initially seemed bad turned out to have been for the good. Those who were evil and were rising to positions of power, threatening the Jewish people, eventually suffered defeat or played a role in the eventual happy ending and the construction of the second Bais Hamikdosh.

A chochom looks at the story of Purim and sees that there is no “ra” in this world. “Kol d’ovid Rachmana letav ovid” – everything that Hashem does is for the good. The gloom of Shushan was turned to joy. Everyone’s fears were shown to be unfounded, because when the people are good and have bitachon, Hashem turns everything around. Certain death and destruction were reversed, and instead of the Jews being killed, their enemies were.

The simcha of Purim comes about through man because we study Megillas Esther and its meforshim, along with Maseches Megillah and the limudei Chazal. The more we learn, the more joyous we become. Purim is a day of intense joy for Jews of all levels, though the more one learns, the more the joy intensifies.

From where does the simcha of Shabbos derive?

Rav Dovid Cohen, rosh yeshivas Chevron, was recently asked this question and responded that the answer lies in the Zohar, which states that the neshomah yeseirah – the extra neshomah we are gifted with on Shabbos – makes us happy and removes from us all the mundane matters of the week, along with all pain and misfortune.

The joy of Shabbos is also derived from chochmah, though it is a Divine chochmah, brought on by the neshomah yeseirah. This extra soul elevates us to a higher spiritual level, where we are granted a deeper understanding of the knowledge that Hashem created the world, and His objective in doing so was to be “meitiv” – to benefit and bring goodness to His creations.

On Shabbos, we rise above the mundane lives we lead and are spared from the agony brought about by the day-to-day activities of the week, which can often cause grief.

Thus, on Shabbos, we are joyful because we are freed from the shackles that bind us and distress us during the week. On this day, Hashem gifts us with additional chochmah and kedusha through the extra neshomah, allowing us to better appreciate the purpose of life and be rid of the pains and struggles of daily life.

When Shabbos ends and the neshomah yeseirah returns to its place On High, we revert to the way we were before Shabbos began, with less chochmah and less kedusha, and with aggravation and frustration brought on by the demands of daily life.

The joy of Purim, which is brought on by man, can have a lasting impact on those who understand its roots and are changed by it. By appreciating that Hashem is behind everything that happens, there is never reason to give up in despair, despite appearances to the contrary. In every situation, we can maintain our faith that Hashem will bring us to a positive conclusion.

When we encounter Hamans in our day – on the road, in school, at work, or wherever we are – we need not become overwhelmed with fear and grief. Instead, we should return to the story of Purim and become reinvigorated. When things are going differently than we had wished, we think of Queen Esther and how Hashem helped her and her people triumph over those who sought to harm them.

We find a similar lesson in this week's parsha of Vayakhel, where, in the middle of the campaign for the Mishkon, Moshe Rabbeinu brought it to an end. Once they had enough for what they needed to construct the Mishkon, Moshe informed everyone that they had reached their goal and that the people should stop bringing precious metals and materials. The question is why. There was probably no other campaign that ended this way. Although they had received what they needed, down the road there would be a need for more. The prudent thing would have been to continue allowing donations while people were motivated rather than hoping that they would still be interested in giving when the need would arise.

The Chiddushei Horim explains that this was done so that people who wanted to have a share in the holy Mishkon would know that whatever they gave was used. Had there been a bonus round allowing donations to continue after they were no longer needed for the Mishkon's construction, the generous donors might have felt left out, wondering whether their materials were used in the building of Hashem's house or left over in some warehouse somewhere.

By ending the campaign when the goal was reached, every contributor knew that he had a share in the Mishkon.

No Jew is superfluous. Every Jew has a share in Torah and fills a necessary role. No matter their social status or degree of wealth, everyone – back then in the desert and today, as we enjoy a burgeoning population – is a vital member of our nation and deserves to be treated as such.

Every person can study Torah and acquire chochmah. Every person receives a neshomah yeseirah each Shabbos. Every person can use these gifts to make themselves a better person, and a better Jew, reaching the highest levels humanly possible if they set their heart and mind to it.

Thus, the posuk states, "Vayavo'u kol ish asher nesa'o libo" (35:21). Every man "whose heart lifted him" was invited to work on the construction of the Mishkon. Regardless of how talented the person was or wasn't, that was not the determining factor in the decision of the Mishkon's "HR Department" to accept them into the team.

The Mishkon was built by men of greatness who ignored their shortcomings and pushed themselves to do what they didn't know they could do to serve Hashem.

What was necessary to be a builder of the most important edifice in the world was desire – the will to be good and to do good. Hashem granted those dedicated people the chochmah and talents required to complete the task given to them.

Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, the Ponovezher Rov, epitomized being a builder of Torah before the Holocaust in his city of Ponovezh in Lithuania and after the war in Bnei Brak. After losing everything in the Holocaust, he arrived in a hot and dusty small town. He looked up at the large hill in the center of that place and said to himself, and then to anyone who would listen, that he was going to build a huge yeshiva on that mountain.

People thought he was ill, having gone mad from his Holocaust experiences and losses. Nobody really took him seriously. Every architect he asked to draw plans for the building he imagined turned him down. He traveled the world to raise money for the yeshiva he dreamed of building, putting together small donations like bricks, one and then another and another, until his yeshiva rose from the dust, shining light and Torah upon all.

How did he do it? In the words of the posuk, “nesa'o libo” – his heart carried him.

Rav Chaim Leib Auerbach was rosh yeshiva of the famed mekubolim yeshiva, Shaar Hashomayim, in Yerushalayim. One year, he held an emergency dinner to keep the yeshiva open and turned to Rav Kahaneman to be the guest speaker.

The rov made a special trip to be at the yeshiva's dinner and delivered a rousing speech about emunah, bitachon, and love of Torah. The directors of the yeshiva were very upset. “For this we brought you all the way here to speak?” they told him. “We are desperate for money. We were expecting a rousing appeal from the master fundraiser that would motivate the crowd to donate generously.”

The rov answered them, “I am not a good fundraiser. I do not know how to raise money. What I have is emunah that Hashem will help me maintain the yeshivos I established. The love of Torah that burns in my soul motivates me to travel from one end of the world to the other. These are my fundraising tools, so I shared them with your crowd.”

“Nesa'o libo” – his heart carried him, and Hashem took note of his burning desire to build a Mishkon of Torah and blessed him with the wherewithal to get it done.

What brings a person to nesius lev, to raise his heart and fuel it with a burning desire to build, to create, to donate, to help erect Mishkonos for Torah, for chesed, and for everything our world needs? It is chochmah – the chochmah of the Alter of Kelm. The chochmah that teaches us why we are here, Who brought us here, and why. That chochmah brings happiness and joy, and it also motivates us to answer the call of Hashem in our generation.

There is so much that needs to be done, so many people who have not yet attained chochmah and are therefore sad and floundering, so many yeshivos that need a patron and a helper, and so many institutions of chesed that influence and save lives. They can't do it alone. They need people who look beyond their own shortcomings and heed the chochmah that teaches us that Hashem placed us here for a reason. It is upon us to raise our hearts, roll up our sleeves, and rise to the occasion.

Helping to build and maintain helps us, brings us joy and satisfaction, and helps the world and so many Yidden. We are living in ikvesa deMeshicha, when there are so many difficulties: physical, mental, moral, financial, and existential. So many institutions and people need help.

We need to keep the spirit of Purim alive in our hearts and souls all year round, happily raising ourselves and assisting others, realizing our missions and helping them realize theirs, so that we all merit the coming of Moshiach very, very soon.