



Torah Thoughts from the YIGC Community

The Florida Sun in a Cleveland Winter

Rochie Berkowitz

“Say goodbye,” I tell my kids as we board the flight home to Cleveland.

As we leave Florida, I have my children wish farewell not to people or to restaurants but to the clear blue skies and the bright ball of fire they enjoyed over the past few days on vacation. I am reminded of a rare solo trip I took to Florida 7 years ago, which provided not only some much-needed rest and relaxation but also a valuable lesson that I could pass on to my children as we prepared to return to Cleveland.

In the coming days, we will begin to hear the joyous refrain of “*mi shenichnas Adar, marbim b’simcha* – when Adar comes in, we increase joy.” We all want a reason to be happy, so heralding a month that is specifically associated with *simcha* is a welcome opportunity. What we don’t always realize is that this line is part of a longer phrase that includes another month as well. The full quote in Taanis 29a says that just as we decrease our *simcha* in Av, we increase our *simcha* in Adar.

The juxtaposition and the mirror language regarding our level of joy in both Av and Adar seem to connect the two. Perhaps the Gemara is telling us that the reason our *simcha* decreases in Av is no longer an issue when it comes to Adar.

However, if we are saddened in Av due to the loss of the Beis Hamikdash, Adar does not seem to remedy that at all. No rebuilding took place in Adar. The Purim story takes center stage in Adar, as we celebrate how Esther, Mordechai and *Klal Yisrael* were spared from Haman’s genocidal decree. Truly a joyous occasion, but how does this solve our sadness from Av?

In truth, what we mourn in Av is not the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. The loss of a building? Ruination of a stone edifice, sad though it may be, does not warrant national mourning for all generations. What we truly mourn in Av is the loss of connection. The Beis Hamikdash was the home of the Shechina, which allowed Hashem, in a sense, to “live with us.” Once the home is gone, its inhabitants are gone as well. What happened in Av was

our first exile. We had lost our intimate connection with G-d. We felt we were all alone. That tragedy is cause for unimaginable sadness and mourning.

Living in Bavel, and subsequently Paras u’Madai, we experienced our first taste of *galus*, being kicked out and abandoned by our Father. We were downtrodden, feeling hopeless.

But we were wrong.

We hadn’t been abandoned. While there is no mention of Hashem in the entire Megillah, we all know He was there, behind the scenes, orchestrating every detail. Esther, whose very name means hidden, taught us that even when we don’t see the hand of G-d clearly, it is always there guiding, holding, and embracing us. In Adar, we realized that even in *galus*, we are never alone. Hashem may be hiding, but He is there, ALWAYS.

This realization is what allows us to increase our *simcha* this month. What we thought we lost in Av, the closeness and connection to Hashem, was never really gone. When we went into exile, our loving Father went with us.

When my plane dipped beneath the clouds that day, seven years ago, it all became clear. I had been bracing myself for exhaustion to set in once I lost sight of my beloved sun and calming blue skies as we descended into Cleveland, but surprisingly it did not. I realized at that moment that the sky is always bright blue, and the sun is always shining. We just aren’t always privileged to see it. Now, when I look up into the grey blanket overhead, I know just beyond that thin layer of vapor, of nothingness, is a bright and beautiful sky. Now, when I find myself in trying, stressful times, I am comforted knowing Hashem is right there with me.

As we continue walking through what has been an incredibly challenging and painful time in our collective history, we can rejoice in the knowledge that was gained in the month of Adar, that Hashem is ALWAYS there, even when we can’t see Him so clearly.

“LaYehudim Haysa Ora...”

Shaindel Bresler

Chazal say that Haman and Achashverosh enacted decrees against Torah learning, Shabbos and Yom Tov, *bris milah*, and *tefillin* (Megillah 16b, with Rashi). The Jewish people felt such intense gratitude and devotion to Hashem after the miracle of

Purim, when their freedom to fulfill these *mitzvos* was restored, that “*kimu v’kiblu*” (Esther 9:27) – they reaccepted the Torah in its entirety, with love (Shabbat 88b).

How did they reach the level of such extraordinary gratitude?

To answer this question, let us explore a previous verse in the Megillah. When they defeated their enemies, *"the Jews felt light and joy, and gladness and honor"* (Esther 8:16). The *Michtav M'Elياهو* quotes an explanation from the Maharal that helps explain how each of those four words relates to one of the four *mitzvos*.

When the Jews felt **ora** (light), they connected with the intellectual pleasure of **learning Torah** and thereby grew closer to Hashem..

This renewed intellectual connection led them to joy, **simcha**. *Simcha* starts with gratitude. The Jews had so much gratitude that they wanted to pass it on, creating a relationship of giving. Thus *simcha* refers to the **holidays**, when we show gratitude, engendering a desire to give.

Sasson, gladness, refers to **bris milah** and the knowledge that our bodies are holy and a conduit to a real connection with Hashem. A midrash (Menachos 43b) illustrates how circumcision relates to gladness: King David was in the bathhouse and felt sad that he didn't have any *mitzvos*, such as *tzitzis*, upon him. Then he remembered his *bris* and was so relieved to have that connection to Hashem that he composed a *shira* to express his happiness. Wherever we are, we can always be glad of the potential to elevate our physical selves towards a loftier bond with Hashem.

Yikar, glory or preciousness, refers to **tefillin**. *Tefillin* is placed on the head and the arm, to counterbalance man's tendency to attribute his success to his brains and personal strength. *Tefillin* symbolizes that a true cause for pride is the usage of our very selves in serving Hashem. Everyone has a personal ego, and with it, a need to be recognized. We strive to incorporate the meaning of *tefillin* in our lives, mitigating our personal egos to focus on Hashem's will and excel in serving Him. True glory comes when we commit ourselves to belonging fully to Hashem.

After the Purim miracle, these four realizations - *ora*, *simcha*, *sasson*, and *yikar*, led to wholehearted love for Hashem and His Torah, and reacceptance with a full heart.

We all wish in our heart of hearts for greater connection with Hashem and Yiddishkeit. To this end, I would like to share an acronym I like to use to remind me how to work on *simcha* in particular:

S – See and focus on the good in others and in your situation.

I – Ignore iniquities! The Talmud states (Rosh Hashana 17a), "Whoever is forgiving of others (*ma'avir al midosav*), Hashem will look away from his iniquities (*ma'avir al p'sha'av*)." Rather than trying to demand rights or benefits for him/herself, a person who is *ma'aveer al midosav* is always conscious of his/her duty toward others and what others stand to lose or gain. Such a person is able to see the other person's perspective and be forgiving of others.

M – Make changes for peace. When Sarah hears she will have a child, she says, "How can I have children? My husband is so old!" When Hashem repeats Sarah's words to Abraham, He says, " And Sarah said, "How can I have children? I am so old!" The midrash teaches that Hashem changed Sarah's words in order to maintain peace in their home. Hashem is teaching us an important lesson: Sometimes you need to make changes for the sake of peace. If you work on having peace in your home, your home will be filled with happiness.

C – Cultivate a can- and will-do attitude. Recognize what your special *maalah* is, and use it to give to others and make others happy.

H – Hold with love. We are all one family. When Bnei Yisrael camped in the desert, it says, in singular, "And he camped opposite the mountain," because they were united as one. Connection equals happiness. In today's day and age, this is more important than ever. Reaching out to others and giving and connecting to them will increase *simcha*.

A – Always notice and appreciate what you have.

May we all be blessed with true *ora*, *simcha*, *sasson*, *v'yikar*!

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May their neshamot have an aliyah.

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