



B'reishit 5786 (last year's Hi All)

Who among us did not experience a bursting of joy and profound gratitude this past Hoshana Rabba as the news of the hostages was broadcast through the world. 20 men were released after two years of harrowing confinement and untold suffering; 20 souls, each a whole world redeemed. Indeed, ZEH HAYOM ASA HASHEM... (T'hilim 118:24)

No doubt, it will take time - and properly so - to process and fully appreciate and understand all that has occurred, not the least of which to attempt to make sense of all the events: the pre-October 7 internecine fighting, the horrific massacre on Simchat Torah, the subsequent two-year devastating war, and, of course, where we go from here.

However, often, in trying to analyze and anticipate the "day after" apprehensions, one can easily become cynical and fail to give due attention to that thrilling moment of supreme relief and jubilation when we witnessed each of the hostages joyously embraced by their loving families. True, there are many ques-

tions and serious doubts about how matters will ultimately play out here. Already, it would appear that the elation of but a few days ago has evaporated, and for some, it is "business as usual" insofar as the current political discordant situation is concerned. But we make a terrible mistake if we allow such legitimate questions overshadow that incredible moment of sheer happiness in watching the return of our hostages.

It is to this unfortunate misguided phenomenon that the following Midrash (B'reishit Rabba 27:4), quoted by Rashi (B'reishit 6:6) is so very apt. The verse reads, "And HaShem regretted having made man on earth and He was pained in His heart." And the Midrash: "A gentile once asked R. Yehoshua ben Korcha, saying to him, 'Do you not admit that the Holy One, blessed be He, knows what is to happen in the future?' He replied, 'Yes.' The gentile retorted, 'But is it not written 'and He was grieved in His heart?' He answered: 'Have you ever had a son born to you?' The reply was 'Yes.' He asked (the gentile): 'And what did you do?' He replied: 'I rejoiced and I made others rejoice also.' The Rabbi asked him: 'But did you not know that he must die?' The heathen replied: 'At the time of joy, let there be joy, at the time of mourning let there be mourning.' The Rabbi then said: 'Such, too, is the way of the Holy One,

blessed be He: although it was clear to Him that in the end men would sin and would be destroyed, He did not refrain from creating them for the sake of the righteous men who were to issue from them."

So indeed, deliberate and decide what must be done the day after, but let not those important discussions detract and prevent one from experiencing the overflowing joy of an entire nation coming together to celebrate the events of last week. Of course, beyond this specific application of the Midrash, the message has a much broader relevance. To illustrate: A wedding is being planned. The arrangements, honors, and the bills can be quite stressful. Worries abound; anxiety levels rise. Now, when the chupa begins and the festive meal follows, can the "father of the bride" along with all those who planned the wedding enjoy the simcha! Answer: absolutely! In fact, it is a great mitzva to do so. True, those many issues will have to be dealt with eventually, but now, remember well: "At a time of joy, you rejoice...!"

There is a fascinating halachic analogue to this very necessary life-insight. The Talmud (Sukka 25a) discusses the exemption to perform a given mitzva while one is already preoccupied with observing another mitzva. The reason: one's intense involvement in fulfilling one mitzva

precludes becoming engrossed in another mitzva. Asks the Gemara, if so, then one whose ship sank at sea, who is preoccupied with worry, should also be exempt. The Gemara reinforces its question: And if you say that indeed, it is so, what about a mourner who is obligated in all the mitzvot of the Torah, including reciting Sh'ma. Now, if a mourner, who is clearly pained and mired in grief, is obligated to recite Sh'ma, then certainly all others who are preoccupied, even one whose ship sank at sea, whose loss was merely monetary, should be obligated. The Gemara answers: "Nevertheless, there is a distinction between the cases. Here, in the case of a mourner, he is preoccupied with the observance of a mitzva which he must perform; there, in the case of a ship lost at sea, he is preoccupied with a voluntary act that he chooses to perform.

The lesson here is fundamental. Life is often a jumble of ups and downs: upheavals of pleasures and joys, of tensions and hassles. The worries and anxieties of daily living can be enormous and often generate all sorts of insecurities, and self-doubts. Indeed, the mood can naturally be downright cheerless and depressing. Yes, at times - all true, but now it's time to perform a mitzva, and know that there is a simcha component to every mitzva - the absence of which,

the Torah itself testifies was responsible for the maledictions of the tochacha (D'varim 28:47) - "Because you did not serve HaShem, your God, with happiness and with gladness of heart, when [you had an] abundance of everything. Is it possible to put all those headaches and upsets aside and immerse oneself in fulfilling HaShem's word and actually experiencing great simcha in doing so? Absolutely, yes! Difficult, for sure, but if your spiritual antennae have cultivated an acute awareness of HaShem's Presence everywhere and at all times, then to switch from a mood of distress and concern to one of profound gratitude and joy can actually be accomplished.

And amazingly, when such a spiritual habit can be inculcated and instilled into the religious disposition and consciousness of a person, life's difficulties - the very paradoxical human condition - become easier to bear and even accept. When you can detect HaShem's many small acts of chesed in the course of a normal day - finding a misplaced object, unexpectedly getting than sought after appointment, receiving a surprising compliment or gift, etc. - your life becomes enveloped in a palpable Divine embrace which allows us to frame even the difficult times as a function of Gd's inscrutable wisdom.

And then, with this extraordinary perspective, when it comes time to

perform a given mitzva and we wish to "payback", as it were, our profound debt and deep appreciation to our Maker, we are eager to do so, and do so with simcha!

Will all of our problems and distresses disappear? Of course not. But with Chazal's remarkable directive of "At a time of joy, you rejoice", our life can become a wondrous and meaningful experience, one filled with love and simcha!