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EVERYONE BECOMES A NEW PERSON ON SIMCHAT TORAH

The holy Torah begins with the word bereshith, which is composed of the letter beit (having a numerical value of two) and the word reshith. This alludes to the present world and the World to Come, which can both be designated as reshith ("beginning"). The present world elevates man and makes a "beginning" of him – but only if he defeats his evil inclination – and the World to Come is also a beginning for man, since he continues to elevate himself even after death. This is because the Torah and its mitzvot continue to protect a person after his life on earth. Conversely, the holy Torah ends with an account of Moses' death. However instead of mourning for him, we are overjoyed on Simchat Torah. This is due to the fact that the essential thing is not the end, but rather the beginning, the bereshith. Thus the Sages have said, "Happy is he...whose labor was in the Torah...and who grew up with a good name and departed the world with a good name" (Berachot 17a), since everyone is happy when he succeeds in rectifying everything. Hence a person must not waste his time in youth by failing to study Torah, which is called reshith (Bereshith Rabba 1:1). The Torah is also called truth (Berachot 5b), this being alluded to in the very first verse of the Torah, for the last letters of the expression Bereshith bara Elokim ("In the beginning G-d") form the word emet ("truth").

Hence instead of lamenting the fact that we are ending the Torah on Simchat Torah, we rejoice in having the merit to complete it. We also rejoice in being able to start it again from the very beginning, from Bereshith, for this will enable us to perceive still more amazing things in it. We will be able to renew our faith that Hashem is One and His Name is One, and that He will continue sustaining us in life in order to serve Him, given that we have studied His Torah and completed it. Therefore in us will be fulfilled the words of the Sages, "Learn it and learn it, for everything is in it" (Perkei Avoth 5:21). Without the Torah, people might fall without any chance of arising.

As a result, we must realize that the concept of an end does not exist for a Jew. The Holy One, blessed be He, does not even let a wicked person die immediately, but instead waits for him to repent,

as it is written: "He devises means, that he who is banished should not be an outcast from Him" (II Samuel 14:14). Even if we feel that a person has an end, this is incorrect, for a new spark immediately begins to ignite, a spark of renewal (bereshith). Even before the flame of one flickers out, the flame of another begins to illuminate the darkness.

Therein lies the nature of Simchat Torah's joy. Simchat Torah is also called the festival of Atzeret, as it is written: "The eighth day shall be atzeret [a closing festival] for you" (Numbers 29:35). At that time everyone is immersed in great joy because he has "restrained" (the root of atzeret) himself before Hashem for one more day. At this time of joy a person also connects to Hashem, as it is written: "You shall ach [solely] rejoice" (Deuteronomy 16:15). Since the word ach has the same numerical value (21) as the Name Eh-yeh, this means that one's joy is due solely to Hashem's presence. Hence in spite of all the high holidays that a person observes, he does not experience weariness in the service of Hashem. On the contrary, it is precisely on this final day that he adds to his joy and forgets all his problems. Since he realizes that he is in Hashem's presence, he forgets all else as he dances before Him. He merits having Hashem connect his soul to that of Moses in a great act of renewal, thereby becoming a new person.

Nevertheless, everyone must realize that to properly prepare themselves for Simchat Torah and to be joyous before Hashem, they must begin by putting an effort into becoming a new person as early as the night of Hoshana Rabba. The word rabba is composed of the same letters as bara ("he created"). We can achieve this by connecting ourselves to King David, the ushpizin ("guest") of Hoshana Rabba, for King David said of himself: "How I love Your Torah! All day long it is my conversation" (Psalms 119:97), as well as: "I considered my ways and returned my feet to Your testimonies" (v.59). In other words King David told the Children of Israel: I examined all the ways that are devoid of Torah and mitzvot, seeing if there is any advantage to them, or if they eventually lead to sin. I saw that all the nations err in their ways because they do not have the Torah. The only proper way is "to Your statutes" – Hashem's Torah – the holy Torah only.

In fact King David's great love for Torah makes him an example and symbol for all Jews. As Scripture tells us, he danced before the holy Ark with all his might despite the scorn of his wife Michal (II Samuel 6:16). King David also respected the talmidei chachamim and studied Torah with great humility (Moed Katan 16b). Furthermore, although he learned only two things from Ahitophel, he called him his teacher, his guide, and his mentor (Perkei Avoth 6:3). His only desire was to study Torah, which is why he merited being connected to Hoshana Rabba. Even in the future, King David will be chosen to recite the blessing over the cup in the great banquet for the tzaddikim (Pesachim 119b), for he is the symbol of Torah and joy. Hence when someone studies Torah during the night of Hoshana Rabba (which is similar to Yom Kippur) and recites Psalms written by King David, he is cleansed of all sin. This is just as the Sages have said: "If a man busies himself in the study of the Torah and in acts of charity...all his sins are forgiven" (Berachot 5a-b). In that case the Holy One, blessed be He, will certainly help him in becoming a new person, for one who desires to purify himself is given help to do exactly that (Yoma 38b). This is Hoshana Rabba: Hashem delivering a person from the evil inclination during the entire year.

After this holy day, when a person arrives at Simchat Torah, he merits standing next to the Creator with great joy. At that point in time, in that moment of divine favor, Hashem infuses him with the strength of King David, with the strength of Moses our teacher, thereby transforming him into a new person. The world owes its entire existence to such a person, since the entire world was created for his sake. Citing the Sages, the book Beit Aharon states that a person receives all these blessings from Hashem. Furthermore, Hashem restrains (otzer) all good things from returning to Heaven on the holiday of Shemini Atzeret, ensuring that they remain below to help the Jewish people. This is due to the fact that on Simchat Torah, Hashem pours His blessings upon the Jewish people more than on any other day of the year. This is what constitutes the joy of Simchat Torah.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Celebrating Simchat Torah in Unity

The Rav of Rozhin once asked: Is there not an ancient custom for Jews to dance together on Simchat Torah, both learned and simple Jews alike? The source of this custom stems from a teaching of the Sages that Rashi cites: "Remain with Me a little longer: This denotes affection, as when children take leave of their father and he says to them, 'Your departure distresses me'" (Rashi on Numbers 29:36). This means that a father cannot tolerate his children being separated from one another. He wants them to live in peace and harmony.

The Gemara recounts that a non-Jew once asked to be converted, but only on condition that he be taught "the whole Torah while standing on one regel [foot]." Hillel answered him, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor" (Shabbat 31a). This means that each festival deals with a particular subject, which is alluded to by the festival's name: The festival of Matzot (unleavened bread), the festival of Shavuot (weeks), the festival of Sukkot (booths). Yet there is one regel (festival) – Shemini Atzeret – whose name the Torah gives no reason for. Thus the proselyte wanted Hillel to teach him the entire Torah on one regel – concerning one festival – namely Shemini Atzeret.

This is why Hillel answered him by saying, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor." In other words, this festival is meant to end any divisions that exist among the Jewish people, for on this day there should be an awakening of love and brotherhood among Jews because our disputes and divisiveness upset Hashem.

This is why people must rejoice together on Simchat Torah, which brings joy to the Holy One, blessed be He. The joy of the Torah consists of all His children celebrating together, without any distance between them, like brothers who rejoice in each other's happiness. This is true whether a person is celebrating because he has put all his efforts throughout the year into swimming in the ocean of Torah and extracting precious jewels from it – something deserving of joyous celebration – or because he is sincerely happy for the joy of his brothers, even though he himself had financial setbacks in the past year and did not have the pleasure of plumbing the depths of our holy Torah.

As the tzaddik Rabbi Naphtali of Ropshitz Zatzal once told his close friends: "Only one person ever managed to have the last word with me, a certain wagon driver. Here's what happened: During the hakafot of Simchat Torah, this wagon driver was dancing and singing with great enthusiasm, demonstrating boundless joy. Because I knew that he was completely uneducated, I said to him in a lighthearted way: 'What's the reason for your joyous celebration tonight? Did you engage in so much Torah study during the year that you have reason to celebrate like this on Simchat Torah?' He glanced at me with a look of surprise and loudly exclaimed, 'If my brother has a celebration, should I not rejoice in his happiness?'"

A Pearl From the Rav

Our Sages have said, "The L-RD came down upon Mount Sinai" [Exodus 19:20]. This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, offered the Torah to all the nations of the world, but they did not accept it" (Midrash Tanhuma). In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita states: We need to understand why the nations actually refused to accept the Torah! Everyone saw the miracles that were done for the Jewish people, and they feared Hashem. Therefore why did they not accept the Torah? The answer is that they were disturbed by an absence of elevated holiness, which existed in Israel, to the point that even though they saw Hashem's miracles, acknowledged Him, and were prepared to accept His sovereignty, they still changed their minds when they witnessed the war against Amalek. Despite all this, there is something that is still surprising: Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, not shine His holiness upon them, as He did for the Jewish people? If Hashem had done that, the nations would have had a chance to accept the Torah!

This can be understood according to what we have said, which is that on

one hand they saw miracles and were prepared to accept His sovereignty, while on the other hand they backed away as soon as they witnessed the war against Amalek. In other words the Holy One, blessed be He, is not interested in unstable people. If they see miracles and wonders, they should accept the Creator as King; if not, let them remain in darkness. This is why Hashem did not shine any special degree of holiness on them, which would have helped them to accept the Torah. Besides, the Jewish people committed themselves by saying, "We will do and we will hear," meaning that they were stable and would follow G-d through fire and water. They did not weigh the pros and cons of following Hashem, for they devoted their entire lives to Him. For a people as holy as this, for those deserving to receive the holy Torah, the Creator agreed to add to their holiness.

Prepare Me a Simple Meal

It is written, "You shall offer a burnt offering, a fire-offering of a sweet savor to the L-RD: One bullock, one ram..." (Numbers 29:36).

The Gemara asks, "To what do those 70 bullocks [offered during the seven days of the festival] correspond? To the 70 nations. To what does the single bullock [of the eighth day] correspond? To the unique nation. This may be compared to a mortal king who said to his servants, 'Prepare me a great banquet.' However on the last day he said to his beloved friend, 'Prepare me a simple meal, that I may derive benefit from you'" (Sukkah 55b).

We need to understand why fewer offerings were required on the eighth day than on the other days of the festival. This seems to be to Israel's shame, for it would appear that its offerings were not as pleasing to Hashem as those of the other nations.

We can understand this with a parable: A wealthy man went on a distant journey, and impatiently awaiting his return were his children and those of his wife. When he came back home he gave his wife's children many gifts, but to his own children he gave just a few. The wealthy man's friends asked him, "Are your wife's children more important to you than your own?" He replied, "Of course not! I just wanted everyone to be happy when I returned. My stepchildren don't have much to be happy about besides these gifts, which is why I brought them many. However my own children are happy just to see me, and I didn't want the joy of receiving gifts to interfere with the joy of my return. Their joy over some gifts is nothing compared to seeing me again, and it would have been to their shame that they rejoiced simply because of some gifts!"

Similarly, the nations of the world do not rejoice on account of the Holy One, blessed be He. Therefore they must bring many sacrifices that are pleasing to Hashem in order for their memory to be acceptable to Him. As for the Children of Israel, however, who are intrinsically acceptable to their Father in Heaven, they do not have to bring many offerings. Hence the Sages say, "Prepare me a simple meal, that I may derive benefit from you," meaning that all Hashem's pleasure will come solely from the Jewish people.

– Ohel Yaakov

The Man of G-d

It is written, "This is the blessing that Moses, the man of G-d, bestowed et Bnei Israel before his death" (Deuteronomy 33:1).

Moses merited being described as "the man of G-d" only when he blessed the Children of Israel (Yalkut Shimoni). Rabbi Avraham of Slonim commented: How did Moses manage to reach the level of being "the man of G-d"? It is because he was "with the Children of Israel" (et Bnei Israel). True, he was a "man of G-d," constantly attached to the Shechinah and moving about in the supernal worlds. However he knew enough to come down from the celestial heights and to walk "with the Children of Israel." That is, he was interested in the personal needs and aspirations of each Jew. Hence it is written, "You shall love your fellow as yourself; I am the L-RD" (Leviticus 19:2), meaning that when a person loves his fellow Jew, Hashem says that He is present among them.

– Ma'ayanot HaNetzach

You Have Consoled Me!

It is written, "He shined forth from Mount Paran, and He came with holy myriads" (Deuteronomy 33:2).

It is said that after the Rav of Polnoye, a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, printed his book Toldot Yaakov Yosef, he went to a fair in Berditchev to sell and distribute his book. The Jews at the fair, however, were occupied with their own concerns, and they paid him no attention at all. Disappointed at this turn of events, this giant of Chassidut left the fair completely dejected.

As it turned out, the Rav of Polnoye met Rabbi Zev of Zhitomir right afterwards. He asked Rabbi Zev, "What do you think about the fact that the Torah was put in a corner and nobody cared about it?" Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev also happened to be present, and he tried to calm him down: "Jews were very busy at the fair, and they must be forgiven for having paid no attention to this great light." His explanation, however, had no effect on the Rav of Polnoye. Finally Rabbi Zev said to him, "Are you better than the Holy One, blessed be He, Who went and offered His holy Torah to all the nations of the world, yet none accepted?" The Rav of Polnoye was comforted by this, and he said: "You have consoled me Rabbi Zev, you have consoled me!"

Imported Goods Were Not Needed

It is written, "Of Zebulon he said, '...and the treasures concealed [sefunei] in the sand'" (Deuteronomy 33:19).

The word sefunei means covered, which is why a boat is called sefinah in Hebrew. A boat is covered with sealant in order to prevent water and sand from penetrating its hull.

In His wisdom, the Holy One, blessed be He, scattered the treasures of the earth around the globe, thereby obligating people to engage in commerce. What do people use to transport goods? They use boats to ply the waters and transport merchandise to where it is needed.

When boats have to return without cargo, they must be filled with stones or sand in order to properly load them. Otherwise they would be too light upon the water and incapable of maintaining proper balance. In other words, they might capsize. Within Eretz Israel, Hashem placed all kinds of raw materials and treasures within the territory of Zebulon. There is nothing lacking there, which is why the verse states that sefunei temunei chol – treasures are concealed in the sand. That is, upon selling their merchandise throughout the world, the boats of Zebulon returned home filled only with sand. They did not have to purchase anything elsewhere, since they had everything they needed in their own rich land.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Life and Death are in the Power of the Tongue

Why does the Torah command us to guard our tongue more than any other member? The Holy One, blessed be He, provided man with 248 members corresponding to the 248 positive mitzvot of the Torah. It is as if each member was telling a person, "Please, perform a mitzvah with me!" The power of speech is comparable to a machine. In a few minutes the tongue can be used to learn several hundred words of Torah, performing the positive mitzvah of studying Torah with each spoken word.

Conversely, when a person speaks forbidden words he may create hundreds of accusers at a time. This is why Hashem warned us about the tongue more than any other member.

– Drawn from the Parables of the Chafetz Chaim

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Observing Simchat Torah in Joy

On the second day of Shemini Atzeret, people throughout the Jewish communities of the world usually take the Sefer Torah out of the ark and celebrate the joy of the Torah. The Torah giants of Israel have often mentioned the greatness and power of this mitzvah, which can atone for even the gravest of sins.

The Rebbe of Satmar Zatzal once had an inflamed leg that prevented him from getting out of bed. In spite of this, on Simchat Torah he was seen dancing and leaping for joy in honor of the holy Torah. When he was asked how he could dance and rejoice while his leg was painfully inflamed, he replied: "The Sages have said that Shemini Atzeret is a festival [regel – leg] apart."

Similarly King David, with all the honor due a king of Israel, did not refrain from rejoicing and clapping his hands for the sake of the Torah, which he felt honored to do.

These great men of Israel understood the holiness of the Torah, which is why there was no limit to their joy. We can understand this with a parable: A man was crowned as king in a certain country, and after careful deliberation the royal ministers decided to make him a new and magnificent crown in honor of his ascension to the throne. They looked everywhere for an expert jeweler, eventually finding one in a certain town. Two prestigious ministers went to see him, bringing with them a great deal of gold, pearls, and precious stones in abundance. The jeweler took everything and made a magnificent, incomparable crown for the king, which the ministers then proceeded to return with. They passed through a village on their way back, and there one of the ministers called to some peasants. He said to them, "Do you want to see something amazing?"

They replied, "Yes, show us!"

The minister proceeded to take the royal crown out of its case, sparkling as it was in every direction. The peasants were shocked to see such a thing, all agreeing that it was truly stunning.

The minister asked them, "Perhaps you people would be interested in a trade? I'll give you this crown for a pair of oxen, the ones you use to work your land."

One of the peasants said, "Alright, that's fine with me. Let's trade!"

However another peasant said to him, "You poor fool! Although it's a beautiful crown, how it is going to work for you? How are you going to till your field with it and earn a living?"

The ministers began to laugh when they heard this rebuke. "With just the smallest fraction of the king's crown, you could purchase 100 pair of oxen. It's worth more, much more, than all your fields combined!"

The great men of Israel resemble these royal ministers, who understood the immense value of this crown, our holy Torah. Hence they greatly rejoiced in it. Let us not be like those peasants, but instead let us strive to understand the holiness of the Torah. Let us rejoice, us as well, in this marvelous gift!

A TRUE STORY

A Biblical Riddle

The custom in the city of Vilna was that during Sukkot, on the second day of the holiday, everyone would assemble in synagogue to celebrate the Simchat Beit Hashoeva. Youngsters, children, and even babies were present.

When the dancing reached its peak, one of the Torah scholars would ask questions that the youngsters would try to answer. The one who answered correctly was placed in the middle of a circle and carried on the shoulders of the person who asked the question. One scholar asked, "Dear children, tell me in which verse of the Torah the name Abraham appears twice, besides the Akeidah." While the rest of the children were trying to find an answer, a faint voice could be heard saying: "In Parsha Toldot: 'These are the offspring of Isaac, the son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac.'"

Everyone was amazed to hear a reply like this from such a young child. He didn't even need time to think about it! Another question was then asked: "In which verse do we find eight consecutive words that end with the letter mem?"

Once again the thin voice of the child was heard: "In Parsha Vayishlach: *l'zim matayim u'teyashim esrim, rechelim matayim ve'eilim esrim* [Two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams]."

This occurred in the year 5484, and the child in question, who was only three and a half years old at the time, was named Eliyahu. Today we know him as the Vilna Gaon. It was in this way that the talents of the tiny Eliyahu, the youngest son of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman, became known.

EISHET CHAYIL

The Torah is the Greatest Delicacy

Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan of Kovno was one of the greatest Torah figures of the last two centuries. From his youth he was heralded as an *ilui* (genius), a child prodigy. One day an influential figure found himself in the same town as the young man, and upon testing him he was very much impressed. In fact he was so impressed with this young man's greatness in Torah and marvelous reputation that he bought him to his home in the hopes of making him his son-in-law. As was the custom at the time, guests in the homes of affluent individuals were offered a bowl filled with fruits and delicacies. The young man continued to speak to his host, engaged as they were in a deep Halachic conversation, while the host's wife and daughter stood to the side.

In the midst of their intense conversation, the young man accidentally overturned the bowl containing the fruit and delicacies. When the young woman saw this, she was turned off by it, telling herself that he wasn't capable of acting normally. She therefore did not want to go ahead with the match, and her mother agreed. Hence the young man left and returned to his studies.

This story became the topic of conversation in the city of Wolkowisk. It also reached the ears of Rebbetzin Bluma (a relative of the honorable Rabbi Eliezer Wazerski), and it impressed her. She recommended the young man to her daughter, telling her: "The Torah of Hashem in his mouth is sweeter and more precious than all kinds of delicacies." The young woman accepted her mother's suggestion, and she rejoiced in having the merit to marry the young *ilui*. She became a great Rebbetzin in Kovno.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Only Be Very Strong and Courageous

It is written, "Be strong and courageous, for it is you who will cause this people to inherit the land.... Only be very strong and courageous, to observe to do according to the entire Torah that Moses My servant commanded you" (Joshua 1:6-7).

In the previous century, a board of government ministers was appointed to deal with the issue of draft deferrals for yeshiva students. The gaon Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky Zatzal, who then served as the head of the Vaad Hayeshivot, was invited to present the view of the yeshiva world to the board, giving the Torah's opinion on the matter. During the course of the discussion, one minister asked the Rav the following question: "Rabbi, do you not think that the duty to defend the state has priority over the defense of the Torah?"

The Rav exclaimed, "G-d's message to Joshua, the first conqueror of the land of Israel, proves the very opposite. In the first chapter of the book, Joshua receives the command to both conquer the land and guard the Torah. With regards to conquering the land, he is told: 'Be strong and courageous, for it is you who will cause this people to inherit the land' [Joshua 1:6]. However in the following verse, which deals with guarding and carrying out the entire Torah, he is told: 'Only be very strong and courageous, to observe to do according to the entire Torah.'" These sacred words, which emanated from the heart of the saintly Rabbi Yechezkel Zatzal, made a tremendous impression on everyone there.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Moshe Sofer – The Chatam Sofer

The Chatam Sofer Zatzal was among the greatest Poskim of recent generations. Born in Frankfurt to Rabbi Shemuel in the year 5523, his ancestors included the author of Yalkut Shimoni and Rabbi Shemuel Shatin Cohen. By the age of four he was already discussing Torah with the author of Sha'agat Aryeh, and at seven (being already fully versed in several tractates of the Talmud) he began learning with Rabbi Zalman Chassid. By the age of nine he was learning with Rabbi Nathan Adler and the gaon Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz (the author of Hafla'ah). He received Smicha from his teacher Rabbi Nathan Adler, as well as from Rabbi Mordechai Benet, who told him to leave for Prosnitz to teach Torah to the Jewish people. In fact by the age of 18 the Chatam Sofer was already teaching. He became the Rav of Dresnitz in 5554 and the Rav of Mattersdorf in 5558. Then in 5566 he became the Rav of the great city of Pressburg, succeeding the gaon Rabbi Meshulam Igra. From then on he did not stop teaching Torah in his Beit Midrash. Except for Tisha B'Av, the Chatam Sofer gave classes to his students on every day of the year, including the evening of Yom Kippur.

While serving as the Rav of Pressburg, the Chatam Sofer was held in high esteem by government officials. In fact it was because of this favor he enjoyed that he was able to fight the reformists who wanted to "modernize" the Torah of Hashem. We are familiar with what he said concerning this subject: "All that is new [chadash] is forbidden by the Torah!" By this he was alluding to the new harvest (chadash), which cannot be eaten until the Omer is offered. The Chatam Sofer was the son-in-law of the gaon Rabbi Akiva Eiger Zatzal, and his children became great rabbis after him. On Tishri 25, 5600, his soul departed in the presence of his many disciples, who recited Shema by his bedside. Buried in the city of Pressburg, the Chatam Sofer's disciples carried more than 90 of his manuscripts at his funeral. The memory of the tzaddik is truly a blessing.