

לזכות
 הרה"ת שלום דוב בער שיח"ל שוחאט
 לרגל יום הולדתו ל"ז מרחשון
 לשנת הצלחה בגו"ר



THE SPIRIT OF
AVODAS HASHEM



שמחה!



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Listening to a tale of Chassidim, one can sense a feeling of pure joy and happiness. Whether it's an account of spending a Yom Tov in the presence of the Rabbeim or a story of perseverance through the most difficult of times, there is an energy present—one of ecstasy and joyfulness infused in every step of their *avodas Hashem*.

As it says in Tehillim “עבדו את ה' בשמחה באו לפניו”¹—the *avoda* of a Yid is to be done with joy and enthusiasm. When we learn Torah and do mitzvos, it should be infused with energy and excitement from the incredible fortune we have in being Yidden and being able to serve Hashem.

This *possuk* serves as a guide not only to one's state of mind while learning Torah and doing mitzvos, but also as a lesson on the importance of *simcha* throughout the life of a Yid. We are taught that every aspect of a Yid's day—even the most mundane part—is for the higher purpose of serving Hashem. This *possuk* in Tehillim is therefore a mandate for us to live our lives with constant happiness.

Although *simcha* has always played an important role in the *avoda* of a Yid, with the revelation of Chassidus it took on a whole new significance. The Baal Shem Tov emphasized this idea, how every aspect of our lives should be carried out with complete joy, explaining that *simcha* is fundamental in every step in one's *avodas Hashem*. Even when it comes to doing teshuva, one's approach should be pure joy.

The Frierdiker Rebbe describes in a letter how there are two things that were never lacking by Chassidim: “שמחת הנפש וידידות—

Joy of the soul and
friendship.
These

are Chassidische characteristics that always exist... sometimes it needs to be revealed though. The way to reveal it is through learning Chassidus.”² This joy plays such a pivotal role in Chassidus to the point that it is often referred to as one of the foundations of Chassidus.

In Tanya, the Alter Rebbe explains at length the importance of *simcha* in *avodas Hashem*. He describes how just the thought of being able to connect to Hashem should bring an immense excitement and joy to the person, even more than when receiving wealth and riches!

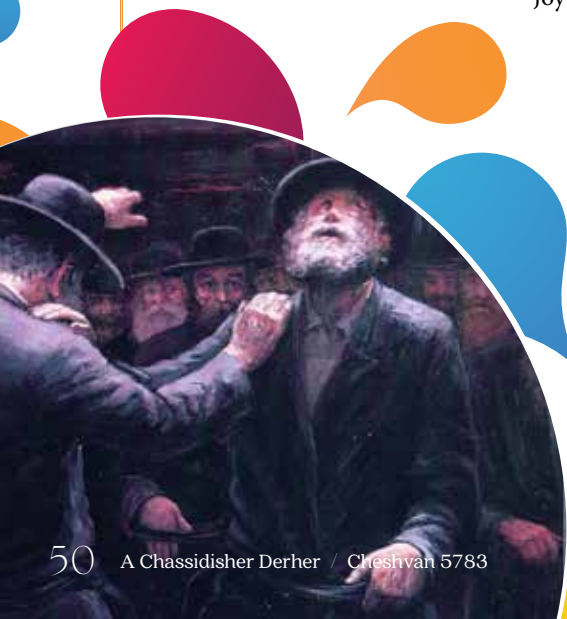
This should be the way a Yid lives when things are easy and difficult alike. Chassidus teaches us how joy shouldn't just be an outcome of good circumstances, it should be the way we define and approach every situation. Whatever may come our way, we should take it in stride recognizing that it is coming from Hashem and it is for our ultimate good.

There are countless letters and answers from the Rebbe describing how the way to approach a difficult situation is to add in *simcha*, and by doing so we create a כלי for all the *brachos* we need, bringing them about in a way of טוב הנראה והנגלה.

Keeping this frame of mind may prove difficult at times. In a lengthy letter, the Tzemach Tzedek writes to a Chossid who was struggling emotionally that in addition to asking Hashem to bring him to joy, he can be in control of his emotions and put himself in a joyful state.

The Tzemach Tzedek explains: Since one has control over his מחשבה דיבור ומעשה, he can affect his emotions and bring himself happiness by paying attention to what it is that he is focused on. By keeping his thought, speech and action concentrated on upbeat and joyful matters, and distracting himself from anything to the contrary, his emotions will follow and thus he will bring himself true happiness and a joyful state of being.³

In addition to the importance regularly given to *simcha*, it is especially important as a preparation to bring about the *geulah*. The Rebbe explains that just as שמחה פורץ גדר—when one is joyful it enables him to break boundaries and do more in every aspect—so, too, our joy brings about the ultimate breaking of boundaries, the coming of Moshiach!





Simcha In Avodas Hashem

Towards the end of the תוכחה in parshas Ki Savo, as the Yidden are rebuked and told of the great pain and suffering they will endure if they don't serve Hashem properly, the *possuk* says that this will be "חתת אשר לא"—because you have not served Hashem with joy and gladness of heart over the abundance of everything.⁴ The Rambam⁵ brings this *possuk* and explains how it teaches us just how important *simcha* is in *avodas Hashem*. We see how even when Yidden serve Hashem but are not doing so with joy, it has such an effect to the point that they are deserving of punishment.

This joy in *avodas Hashem* is something that can be found in many stories and teachings in the Gemara as well. The Gemara relates how Rav Bruna was once joyous for the entire day just from being able to daven

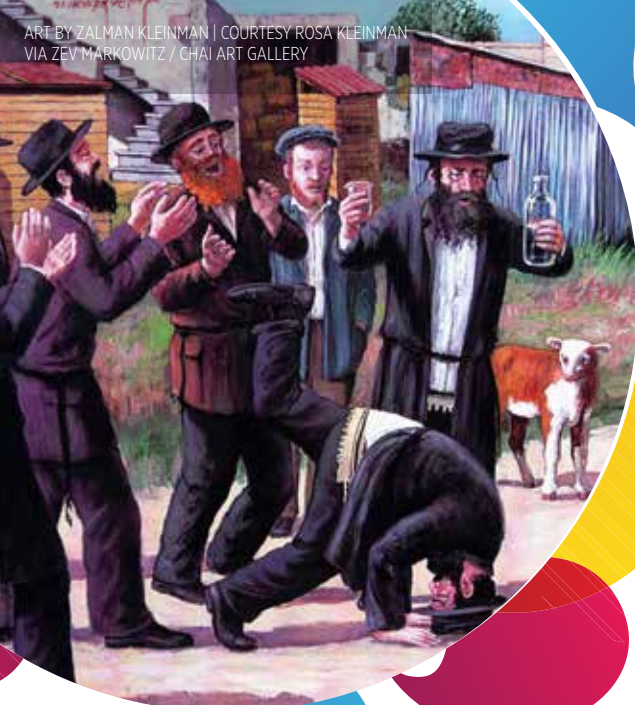
properly and be גאולה לתפילה!⁶ The opportunity of being able to do a mitzvah properly was of such value to him that it brought him joy for the entire day.

We find this demonstrated in other stories and teachings in the Gemara as well. The Gemara describes how Rava⁷ would begin every *shiur* with a מילתא דבדיחותא—a humorous thought, and only then begin to teach his *shiur*. "אין שכינה שורה... אלא מתוך דבר שמחה של מצוה", the Gemara says. The joy in doing a mitzvah is what draws down the *Shechina* to a person.⁸

One may wonder what the significance of this joy is. Why is it that *simcha* has such a profound impact and doing the *avoda* without it is not sufficient? What is it that makes it such a fundamental element to our *avoda*? As in everything in Torah, this idea is illuminated and brought to a new light with the explanations of Chassidus.

In Tanya the Alter Rebbe devotes a number of *per-akim* explaining the importance of *simcha* and negating any sort of עצבות in *avodas Hashem*. At the beginning of *perek* 26, the Alter Rebbe explains how when a person is wrestling with another, as much as his physical strength contributes to his success, if he is lazy he will not succeed. So, too, in *avodas Hashem*; in our battle with our *nefesh habahamis* we must be upbeat and energetic in order to succeed.

The Alter Rebbe goes on to work through the different distractions that can come to a person, be it



Rebbe explains, is because the joy that we should have in our *avodas Hashem* should be one that is so great—far greater than any joy one is already accustomed to—one that takes much work to attain.⁹

What About Bittul?

With all the emphasis on *simcha* in *avodas Hashem*, one may wonder how there seems to be conflicting messages on what our approach should be. We find in many places the importance of ביטול—one's *avoda* should be done in complete subjugation to the will of Hashem, not coming as a result of his own excitement or passion. This seems to run contrary to the emphasis put on always being joyful and in constant elation?

Chassidus explains that these two things aren't a contradiction; on the contrary they complement each other. When one's *avoda* is with ביטול, it brings him to the ultimate level of joy. Being able to entirely give oneself over to the will of Hashem is in and of itself the greatest source of joy.

When one is humble and recognizes that his talents and strengths are not from his own doing but rather a gift from above, that generates immense joy to the person being that he possesses something that he doesn't particularly deserve. So, too, with our *avoda*: The greatest source of joy is recognizing that our *avoda* is not our own accomplishment, it is fulfilling the *kavana* of Hashem.

How To Come To This Joy

Although one may recognize that serving Hashem with *simcha* is important, he may wonder how it is that

concerns about mundane matters or concerns about his *avodas Hashem*,

and explains that even being distracted by inappropriate thoughts during learning or davening shouldn't put a person in a negative state of mind. A Yid must do his *avoda* with joy and happiness, and any feeling otherwise is only detracting from his *avoda*.

In other places in Chassidus it is explained how *simcha* is essential to the effect a mitzvah has on us and the world around us. As we know, every mitzvah brings about a גילוי אלוקות, a mitzvah being the conduit for bringing *Elokus* to the world thereby creating a *dira b'tachtonim*. For this to happen, a mitzvah has to be done with joy. Just as when a person is joyful it reveals in him inner strengths and powers that were previously not seen, doing a mitzvah with *simcha* has a similar effect. The joy in a mitzvah is what brings about the revelation and *hamshacha* of *Elokus*.

Interestingly, when the Rambam speaks of the importance of *simcha* in *avodas Hashem*, he describes it as being a "עבודה גדולה"—something that takes much work. The Rebbe learns from this just how much joy one must have when doing a mitzvah.

The Rebbe references to the fact that the Rambam wrote *Mishneh Torah* intending for it to be a guide for people on all levels of *avodas Hashem*, even for those that are holding on a level that they already have natural excitement in their *avoda* and don't necessarily need effort to get there. Yet, we see the Rambam referring to this joy as an עבודה גדולה. The reason for this, the

he can bring himself to such a state of mind. Seemingly his emotions are not always in his control, so what is it that he can do to generate this enthusiasm in his *avoda*?

Chassidus explains that the way to come to this joy is by giving thought to the great value of our *avoda* and the immense fortune we have in being Yidden. When doing a mitzvah, we are entrusted with the opportunity to bring the greatest levels of *Elokus* down here to this world, connecting to Hashem in a real and profound way.

In Perek 33 of Tanya, after explaining the importance of *simcha* in *avodas Hashem*, the Alter Rebbe goes on to describe methods a person can use to bring himself to that feeling of joy. He advises a person to fill his mind with thoughts of the greatness of Hashem, to think deeply how Hashem fills heaven and earth, and that everything in this world is completely *battel* to his greatness. By doing so, a person allows the greatness of Hashem into his mind and heart.

This experience, the Alter Rebbe explains, generates tremendous joy and happiness for the person. He brings a *mashal* of the joy a simple person would have at the honor of being able to host a king in his home; it would be an experience of great excitement and exhilaration. How much more so for a person in this world to be able to connect to Hashem, the King of all kings—this is an extremely special opportunity, leaving a person in a state of great elation.

It's interesting to note that out of the 12 *pesukim* and *maamarei Chazal* that the Rebbe chose to focus on and which famously became the “12 *Pesukim*,” the last two—*ישמח ישראל וזוה כל האדם*—both come from this *perek* in Tanya, where the Alter Rebbe discusses the value of *simcha* in the *avoda* of a Yid and how a person should come to it.

In many instances the Rebbe advised people to give thought to the beginning of Perek 41 of Tanya, where the Alter Rebbe discusses that Hashem “מניח עליונים ותחתונים—forgoes on the upper realms and worlds, ומייחד מלכותו על עמו ישראל בכלל ועליו בפרט—he bestows his greatness specifically on Yidden in general and every Yid in particular.” The thought of being the unique place where Hashem bestows his greatness is reason for great joy.¹⁰

Giving thought to how fortunate we are to be Yidden is itself a tremendous source of *simcha*. A story is told how a Yid came to see Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev early one morning, while he was in the middle of reciting the morning *brachos*. The Yid found him to be dancing with great joy! Wondering what could be the source of such excitement at the beginning of his day, he

CUTTING WHEAT IN LUBAVITCH

This joy in doing a mitzvah is illustrated in a vivid account found in Likkutei Dibburim, where the Frierdiker Rebbe describes the scene of what it was like cutting the wheat for baking matzos near the town of Lubavitch. He describes in detail the immense joy and delight that was apparent by everyone there.

There was a Chossid who lived in the town of Shtcherbina—about 30 kilometers from Lubavitch—by the name of Reb Zalman Shtcherbiner who for many years had the privilege of hosting this special occasion. He would put much time and care into preparing for this event, and it was a source of great excitement and joy for him. “Being able to cut wheat for the Rebbe’s matzos, having all the guests come for the occasion, and on top of all of this the Rebbe himself would come for the cutting of the wheat—this would give Reb Zalman *chayus* for the entire year!”

The scene of cutting the wheat was one of pure joy and exhilaration. A large crowd would gather to watch, with everyone dressed their finest for the occasion. The work was done with much alacrity and joy, with some of the Chassidim focused on harvesting and others watching while singing.

“Cutting the wheat was done with great joy... Reb Zalman worked swiftly as if he were a young man. It was clear that the joy was lifting him. His shoes and socks were floating as spiritual as the feet of Naftali sent on a G-dly mission. Such can only be by he who is an עובר אלקים, someone that even his heels feel the great pleasure of this *avoda*.”

The Frierdiker Rebbe continues to describe the scene after the cutting. They would daven Mincha with Yom Tov tune, and afterwards they would eat a *seudas simcha* with the Rebbe Rashab *chazzering* Chassidus for a few hours. This account, which can be found in greater detail in Likkutei Dibburim²³, gives insight to the great joy that should be present when doing a mitzvah.

JOY IN QUARANTINE

During a major Typhus epidemic in Russia—a disease which took the lives of many—those who contracted the disease were taken by the authorities and forced to quarantine away from the cities to prevent further spread of the disease. With no available cure, they were left there to suffer in their pain and many unfortunately succumbed to the illness.

The Rebbe's grandfather, Harav Meir Shlomo Yanovsky, fell ill and subsequently was forced to seclude himself in a designated area outside the city. With the exception of the doctor who would come by once a day to supply them with medication to ease their pain, no one was allowed to visit them or come close to the area.

Reb Meir Shlomo had a close friend by the name of Reb Asher Grossman, the *shochet* of Nikolayev. When Reb Asher got word that his friend was taken outside the city, he immediately set out and made his way there. Upon arriving, the authorities did not allow him to enter the facility, leaving him with no choice but to remain outside.

Not being able to gain access to see his friend, he stood outside the door. With a Tanya in hand, he began reading aloud "סימן י"א of Iggeres Hakodesh titled להשכילך בינה, where the Alter Rebbe discusses how everything that comes from Hashem is for the good and that a person should rejoice knowing that it's all for the good.

Without hearing any response, he stood there reading in a loud voice hoping that Reb Meir Shlomo would hear it, and that it would provide him the necessary strength to persevere. As he finished reading he turned and returned home. The next day he came back and did the same again. And so it was for a number of weeks; he would come to the quarantine camp, read aloud this section in Tanya and return home.

As time went on, Reb Meir Shlomo's health improved and after a number of weeks—against all odds—he was able to return home. Upon seeing his friend he exclaimed: "Reb Asher, you saved my life! Your reading and reciting the words of Tanya gave me the necessary *chayus* to be able to overcome the difficulties."

inquired as to what is making Reb Levi Yitzchak so happy? The Berditchiver explained that when he came to the *bracha* שלא עשני גוי and gave thought to how lucky we are to be Yidden, it made him break out in joy and dance.

Throughout the many answers and letters the Rebbe wrote emphasizing the importance of *simcha*, we find numerous other ways that can bring about *simcha* in *avodas Hashem*.

To one Chossid who wrote to the Rebbe how he is lacking fulfillment and *chayus* in his *shlichus*, the Rebbe advises him to "... contemplate the great fortune he has in being one of the students and *mekusharim* of the [Friediker] Rebbe, and you will rejoice with great joy at this lot and take this energy and apply it to all of your doings fulfilling the will of the משיח..."¹¹ The opportunity and merit of being a Chossid of the Rebbe is a source of tremendous joy and vitality, permeating every aspect of a Chossid's *avoda*.

In a *maamar* the Rebbe explains another way we can bring ourselves to *simcha*. Expounding on the *possuk* "רני ושמחי בת ציון," the Rebbe explains that when one connects himself to *tzaddikim* this gives him special power for his *avodas Hashem* to be done with joy. Being that the idea of a *nossi* is to bring *Elokus* to Yidden, strengthening our *hiskashrus* to him generates added enthusiasm and *simcha* in our *avoda*.¹²

Teshuvah With Simcha

This importance and emphasis that Chassidus puts on *simcha* applies even when one must do *teshuva* and reflect on his past misdeeds. Although in previous generations breaking oneself was a primary focus, Chassidus teaches us how even when working through our past mistakes we should not allow it to leave us in a state of despair, rather we should focus on the positive outcome.

The Alter Rebbe explains in Tanya how even when it comes a time that, in order to refine oneself, a person has to give thought to his shortcomings and focus on that which needs improvement, it should be followed



by an immense joy at the opportunity of being able to correct his missteps and serve Hashem properly.¹³

Chassidus also emphasizes how *teshuva* doesn't have to be done through breaking ourselves—through fasting and giving torture to our body. The way we can best connect to Hashem is by working with our *guf* and refining it, as highlighted in one of the fundamental teachings of the Baal Shem Tov on the *possuk* “עזוב עמו תעזוב עמו”—that our *avoda* must be done by working with our body.¹⁴

The Friediker Rebbe discusses in a *sicha* how it is a misconception that *teshuva* must be done with tears, and in truth one can do proper *teshuva* whilst being in a state of pure *simcha*.¹⁵ As much as one must focus on his past and correct it, this can all be done with the same energy that goes into every step of his *avodas Hashem*.

In a *maamar* in 5746* the Rebbe defines just how much *simcha* is the primary focus in our generation. Even though in previous generations there was always importance given to *מרירות*—bitterness on reflection of one's past misdeeds, this is not the case in our generation.

The Rebbe explains that since we are on the brink of the *geulah*, we are at such a high level that our *avoda* must be done solely out of joy! In previous generations the *avoda* of breaking oneself and doing *teshuva* with tears had a place, but in our generation—the Rebbe explains—besides for the fact that we wouldn't be able to handle doing *teshuva* with bitterness, we are on such a level that our *avoda* is to be done exclusively with joy.¹⁶

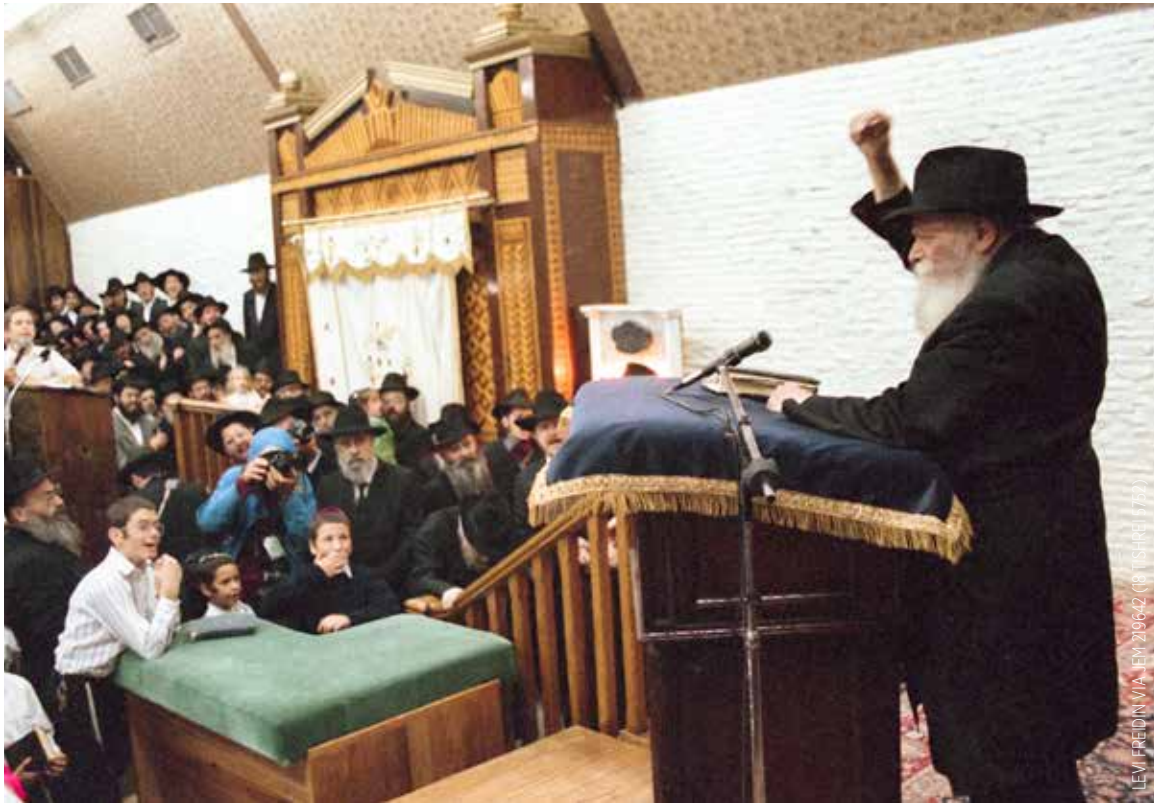
Permeated With Joy

The importance of *simcha* that the Baal Shem Tov emphasized was not only when a Yid learns Torah and does mitzvos. He taught that every step of a person's day should be infused with a spirit of joy, for in truth every part of a Yid's day is to serve Hashem. The Rambam writes¹⁷ that a person must direct his heart and all his actions to the focus of serving Hashem. This includes his eating, sleeping and every aspect of his life, all should be for the purpose of serving Hashem. Taking this into account, one can understand that the importance of serving Hashem with joy applies to even the most mundane aspects of a Yid's life.

The Baal Shem Tov constantly encouraged those he came in contact with to go about their day with joy and enthusiasm. This would go on to become a defining feature found by Chassidim, always being upbeat and energetic and going about their day with joy and enthusiasm.

The Gemara relates a conversation that took place in the market between Rav Brokah Chuzaah and Eliyahu Hanavi; their discussion turned to analyzing who in

* 5746-1985



LEVI FREIDIN VIA ENR 2/9642 (© TISHREI 779)

the market would be of merit for *olam haba*. While conversing, Eliyahu Hanavi pointed to two brothers who had just come to the market and proclaimed “these are *bnei olam haba!*” Wondering what it is that would give them that merit, Rav Brokah approached them and asked what it is that they do. To which they replied “We are jesters and we cheer up the depressed!”

The Rebbe learns from this story just how important *simcha* is even when it’s in the simplest of forms. The joy that’s being spoken of in this story is not the joy of learning Torah or doing mitzvos, as we are talking about people that were “in the market” and nevertheless we see that their *simcha* was so significant that it earned them *olam haba*.¹⁸

In another *sicha* the Rebbe explains how being joyful even from mundane things can in truth bring someone to add in their *avodas Hashem*. For example, we see that when one is joyful it is easier for him to give a large amount of money for tzedakah, his joy allowing him to do more than he is usually accustomed to. So, too, with all other mitzvos; when one is joyful it is an opportune time for him to add in his learning of Torah and doing *mitzvos*.¹⁹

Joy In Every Situation

This emphasis on constantly being *besimcha* is epitomized by the way Chassidus teaches us to approach difficult situations. When one is going through troubles and is having difficulty with something, he may think that being joyful is not just unrealistic, it is unattainable. Chassidus teaches us the contrary—being joyful is the method by which one will be able to rise above the challenge and bring down all the *brachos* he may need.

As the saying goes, “טראכט גוט וועט זיין גוט”—think good, it will be good.” The Rebbe wrote to many people going through difficulties that the way to get out of their situation is through *simcha*. One’s optimism and joy serves as the *keli* for all the *brachos* he may need.

This approach can be seen in countless letters and answers from the Rebbe to people facing various challenges and difficulties. In a letter to someone

struggling with a health matter, the Rebbe writes: “Surely he has heard the saying of the Rebbe Maharash that one must go *lechatchilah ariber*. So, too, in this situation, although it would seemingly be appropriate to hold back the joy until there is improvement of health, based on the above saying there is room to preface with joy before the revealed improvement. This itself will hasten the outcome, as the saying we’ve heard many times from *nesiei Chabad* ‘טראכט גוט וועט זיין גוט—think good, it will be good...’²⁰

On a number of occasions the Rebbe mentioned that we find this idea exemplified by the Frierdiker Rebbe. The Frierdiker Rebbe experienced much suffering in his life, to the point that the physical torture he went through affected his ability to speak and teach Chassidus. Nevertheless we find that he was in constant joy!

In truth, every situation and difficulty is for our benefit, even if at times we do not see it. The Alter Rebbe explains in Tanya²¹ that a person must realize that everything coming from Hashem is for the good. Not always is the ultimate benefit clear to the person, but one must rejoice with the *emunah* that Hashem is doing the ultimate good for the person.


Hachana To Geulah

In many *sichos* in the later years, the Rebbe stressed time and again the importance of *simcha* in bringing about the *geulah*. Being joyful has the ability to break all boundaries and when one is in a state of joy it brings out in him strengths that were not previously revealed—“שמחה פורץ גדר.” This has the resulting effect of causing the ultimate breaking of boundaries, the coming of Moshiach.

On Shabbos Parshas Ki Seitzei 5748* the Rebbe spent the entire *farbrengen* focused on the importance of *simcha*. He went on to make a “הצעה ובקשה מיוחדת”—a special suggestion and request: To add in *simcha* in order to bring about the coming of Moshiach.”

The Rebbe explained that increasing *simcha* is the one last thing that we must do to bring about the *geulah*. “We see that despite all the efforts throughout the years to bring Moshiach, especially the *hafatzas hamaayanos* that has been taken to a whole new level in recent years, yet despite all this Moshiach is still not here. It must be that the one thing that remains is a

proper level of *simcha*.”

There is a story told of a *tzadik* that as a child, when he wanted an apple and it wasn’t being given to him, he would make a *bracha* בורא פרי העץ and that would force his parents to give him the apple. The Rebbe brings this story to demonstrate the approach we must take when demanding of Hashem to bring the *geulah*: When we rejoice and go about our *avoda* with complete *simcha* (שמחת הגאולה) and *bitachon* that Moshiach is coming, we are demanding of Hashem that he fulfill our wishes and very soon bring about the coming of Moshiach!²² 

1. Tehillim 100:2.
2. Igros Kodesh Rayatz vol. 5 p. 246.
3. Igros Kodesh Tzemach Tzedek p. 20.
4. Devarim 28:47.
5. Hilchos Lulav 8:15.
6. Brachos 9:
7. Or Rabbah (see sicha 11 Shevat 5724).
8. Shabbos 30:
9. Hisvaaduyus 5746 vol. 1 p. 336.
10. See Hisvaaduyus 5745 vol. 2 p. 1141. Igros Kodesh vol. 11 p. 74.
11. Igros Kodesh vol. 3 p. 447.
12. Sefer Hamaamarim Melukat 4 p. 287.
13. Perek 31.
14. Hayom Yom 28 Shevat.
15. Sefer Hasichos 5701 p. 135.
16. Sefer Hamaamarim 5746 p. 53.
17. Hilchos De’os 3:2.
18. Hisvaaduyus 5745 vol. 2 p. 1113.
19. Hisvaaduyus 5742 vol. 3 p. 1522.
20. Igros Kodesh vol. 16 p. 252.
21. Iggeres Hakodesh 11 (“להשכילך בינה”).
22. Likkutei Sichos vol. 20 p. 384
23. See Likkutei Dibburim vol. 1 p. קכא

