

The News

“Chaim, did you hear the news?”
 “Oh no. What happened now?”
 “You’ve got to hear this.”
 “Wait a minute, Avi. Let me prepare myself. I don’t want this news to be a shock to me. There are so many terrible things happening. War, sickness, terrorism, poverty . . . it’s not easy to take.”
 “Nothing to worry about, Chaim. This is good news.”
 “Great! Did the stock market go up?”
 “No.”
 “Did someone give birth to quadruplets?”
 “No.”
 “Did someone donate his life’s savings to a yeshiva?”
 “No.”
 “What is it? I’m plotzing! Please tell me the news.”
 “If we listen to Hashem’s mitzvos, we will prosper. And if we don’t, Hashem will be angry with us and He will punish us.”
 “That’s news??? That is from the second paragraph of Kriyas Shema; this week’s parasha. The Torah was given 3300 years ago. That’s not news.”

Avi smiled warmly.

“Let me explain, Chaim. Let’s begin with the news. Why are people so excited about the news?”
 “Ummm. I guess because it is new. It never happened before. Also because it is interesting, and it affects their lives.”
 “Very good. Now, let’s look at this verse.”
 “Behold if you will surely listen to My mitzvos which I command you today” (Devarim 11:13).
 “Rashi explains that the mitzvos must be new to you, as if you heard them today.”
 “I see. Something new is special. A new baby, a new book, a new gift . . . you get excited over it.”
 “Exactly, Chaim. That is how we should treat the mitzvos. They should always have that special feeling of newness.”
 “Avi, when we see the mitzvos as new, we will be much more motivated to study them and observe them. They are new, they are interesting, they are exciting, they are relevant to our lives today.”
 “Right. Hashem’s Torah is called *Toras Chaim* (the living Torah). It is alive. It is dynamic. It is relevant. It is new.”
 “Wow. This is great. I can’t wait to tell people. Thank you for sharing this with me. Avi, this is the best news that I’ve ever heard!”

*Kinderlach . . .
 Did you learn about a mitzvah today?
 One of the halachos (laws) of Shabbos observance? Blessings before eating food?
 Giving tzedaka? Honoring parents?*

Wonderful! Do you remember when Imma took you to buy new shoes? Do you remember that special feeling, wearing them the first time? That excitement of having something new? That is how we should feel about Hashem’s mitzvos. So special. So new. Kinderlach, remember this twice a day when you say Kriyas Shema. Hashem’s mitzvos are so special. So new.

True Happiness

“Imma, I’m home.”
 “Esti, it’s great to see you. What a beautiful smile on your face!”
 “Thank you Imma.”
 “You look very happy, Esti.”
 “I am, Imma.”



“Did you find some money on the way home?”
 “No.”
 “Did you stop in the candy store and buy a treat?”
 “No, Imma.”
 “Did you play a nice game of hopscotch with your friends?”
 “No, Imma. Do you want me to tell you why I’m so happy?”
 “Yes, please, Esti. I am so curious.”
 “I saw a mother with a baby struggling to hang out the laundry, so I hung up the whole load for her.”
 “That’s wonderful, Esti!”
 “I’m happy because I did the mitzvah. We learned all about “simcha shel mitzvah” (the happiness of a mitzvah) in school today. The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh speaks about it in this week’s parasha.”
 “Where, Esti?”

“The word *vihaya* (and it will be) [if you will surely listen to My mitzvos] (Devarim 11:13) is used to describe happy things. The verse then goes on to speak

about mitzvos, so we see that the prerequisite for mitzvos is happiness.”
 “That is pretty deep, Esti.”

“I will explain, Imma. A mitzvah naturally has simcha. Take eating, for example. A person who just eats a piece of bread, enjoys the food and his tummy is full for a while afterwards. On the other hand, a person who knows and performs the mitzvos associated with eating bread, separating challah, washing, blessing, and thanking Hashem gets a lot more than just a good feeling in his tummy. He gets close to Hashem. He gets eternal reward. He gets blessing in this world.”

“Fantastic, Esti. That is surely a reason to be happy.”

“The Gemora (Shabbos 30b) states that Shelomo HaMelech, the wisest of all men, praised only one type of simcha - simcha shel mitzvah. However, about other simchas he said, ‘What does it accomplish? (Koheles 2:2).’”

“Fascinating, Esti.”

“So you see, Imma, the true simcha is the simcha shel mitzvah.”

Kinderlach . . .

Some people travel around the world looking for happiness. It is not necessary. Happiness is right in your heart. Wash the dishes. You are doing the mitzvah of keeping the home running smoothly, making it a beautiful, warm, and happy place, where nice Jewish children can grow. Sit and read or play with your baby brother. You are giving him the love that he needs. Help Imma prepare and serve dinner. You get the mitzvah of providing nourishing food for the family so that they have the strength to serve Hashem. You also have a share in all of the blessings and mitzvos associated with the meal. Let’s not forget about Shalom Bayis. A home where everyone is well fed is a happy home. There are so many mitzvos, and so much simcha!

Parsha Questions

- What are the seven fruits of the Land of Israel? (8:8)
- What is the danger of too much *gashmius* (material success)? (8:10-17)
- Did the Aron Kodesh that Betzalel made accompany the Bnei Yisrael to war? (Rashi 10:1)
- What does Hashem request from us? 10:12-13)
- How do we know that Eretz Yisrael is the most beautiful land in the world? (Rashi 11:10)
- If we miss one day of Torah learning, how many days do we lose? (Rashi 11:13)