



**RABBI JUDAH**

**MISCHEL**

Mashpiah, OU-NCSY

Executive Director, Camp HASC

Dedicated L'IluY Nishmas HaChaver  
Shlomo Michael ben Meir z'l

## The Joy of Mitzvot

**R**eb Shlomo Freifeld zt'l, the beloved Rosh Yeshivah and founder of Yeshivah Sh'or Yashuv, was a unique *talmid chacham*, legendary educator, and larger than life Torah personality that enjoyed particularly close, honest and personal relationships with his students. One morning at Shacharis, a close talmid observed Reb Shlomo laying tefillin. After wrapping the *tefillin shel yad* around his arm, Reb Shlomo stopped, and with his eyes closed, was seemingly lost in thought. Only after a few lengthy moments of reflection, did the Rosh Yeshivah continue wrapping his *tefillin shel rosh*.

After davening, the student approached his Rebbe and asked why he had delayed placing the tefillin on his head, inquiring if the pause did not possibly constitute a *hefsek*, an interruption in the mitzvah. Reb Shlomo smiled and related a story from *Masechet Brachos* (30b): R' Yirmiya was 'excessively' joyful. When R' Zeira inquired as to why, R' Yirmiya replied

with wonder: *Ana tefillin manachna*, "I am putting on tefillin!"

"The act of wrapping tefillin ought to fill the heart with joy," Explained Reb Shlomo zt'l. "Today, I just didn't feel it, so I paused to reflect upon what was holding me back from feeling happy. Only once I felt the appropriate *simchah shel mitzvah* did I continue laying my *tefillin shel rosh*."

### AWAKEN SIMCHAH

*Tachas asher lo avadeta es Hashem Elokecha b'simcha u'btuv levav...* "Because you did not serve the Lord, your God, with happiness..." (Devarim, 28:47) Thus our *sedra* pinpoints the cause of all the painful *Tochacha*, Rebukes, and the calamities listed there. The severity of this warning is not lost on the meforshim, numerous of whom seek to understand the important role that 'serving G-d with joy' plays in mitzvah observance and Jewish life.

Rabbeinu Bachaye (28:47) explains that the joy experienced when performing a

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mitzvah is itself a mitzvah, and that there is a reward for both the performance of the commandment as well as the joy with which it is fulfilled.

Reb Tzadok HaKohein of Lublin zy'a pointed out that "b'Simchah" are the same letters as *Machshavah*, meaning that our thoughts and emotional state in our service of Hashem is a mental choice that we have to make. We are called upon to choose and awaken a state of joy in our fulfillment of *mitzvos*.

Ramabam (*Hilchos Lulav*, 8:15) cites the warning from our sedra to express the severity of the commandment to keep mitzvos *b'simchah*: "The joy we express in performance of a mitzvah and the love it expresses for G-d who commanded it, is an *avoda gedola*, a major act of Divine service. Whomever does not do so (serve Hashem with joy) is worthy of punishment...." Rambam frames the emotions we ought to feel as an act of sacrifice before Hashem, for even if we 'don't feel it' or find it challenging to awaken *simchah*, digging deeper and working toward performing our obligations with vitality and joy expresses humility, faith and love for Hashem. It is a praiseworthy act.

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It is understandable and natural that our daily or regular mitzvah observances feel routine and staid, at times. Without a conscious, proactive choice to engage them with joy, the same pair of tzitzis, tefillin, sidur liturgy and *bentching* text day and day out, can seem stale. Even the most uplifting, sacred moments like Shabbos candle-lighting or *Kabbalas Shabbos* could become automatic and ritualized, if we don't make efforts to unearth the wellsprings of joy hidden within them.

May we remember to be patient with ourselves and dig deep in our preparation for and observance of Torah and mitzvos, so that we may be able to summon the appropriate simchah of fulfilling ratzon Hashem! ■

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