



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

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Our *Sedra* this week, *Parshat Ki Tavo*, contains the second formal *pesukim* of *tochacha*- of warning and admonition given to the Jewish People should they fail in their fidelity to *Hashem*, his *Torah* and *mitzvot*.

In the midst of this extended expression of caution, we read the verse:

Tachat asher lo avadata et Hashem Elokecha B'Simcha UvTuv Leivov meirov kol- Since you did not serve Hashem your G-d with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things...

How exactly are we to understand this verse?

Rabbeinu Bechaya offers a unique reading of our verse, *tach-at asher lo avadata et Hashem Elokecha, B'Simcha-* that not only did we fail in our *Avodat Hashem*, but that we were *b'simcha* -we were happy and glad with that failure.

The **Netivot Shalom, the Slonimer Rebbe zy'a**, explains that the *Torah's* rebuke is not simply about failing to feel happy while performing *mitzvot*. Rather, joy itself is the vessel through which we become receptive to *Hashem's* presence and blessing. When our *Avodat Hashem* is infused with *simcha*, we open our hearts to a deeper relationship with the *Rib-bono Shel Olam*; when joy is absent, that vital connection weakens.

Rebbe Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov zy'a, the **Bnai Yissascher**, offers a very different but inspirational interpretation of our verse.: '*tach-at asher-* is a reference to *Shabbat*- the letters which follow the letters *alef shin* and *reish* are the letters *bet, tav* and *shin*, the letters which comprise the word *shabbat*. When a Jew fails

to experience the joy and fulfillment of *Shabbat*, when the beauty of *Shabbat* is missing from one's life, then that is when we begin to feel lost, and lose our way.

Reb Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk zy'a, in his *sefer, Pri Haaretz* offers a slightly different take on our verse. The Rebbe cites the well known Talmudic

teaching that the transgressors among Israel are full of *mitzvot* like the *rimon*- the pomegranate. (*Chagiga 26a*).

What exactly are we meant to learn from this teaching likening those who transgress to a pomegranate, and how are we to understand that despite the fact that they are labeled as transgressors, they are still full of *mitzvot* like the *rimon*?

The Rebbe explains that a pomegranate is indeed full of seeds, in fact the actual fruit components of the pomegranate are the many individual, compartmentalized, isolated seeds. The pomegranate's fruit is a stark contrast to almost any other fruit, such as an apple or an orange, where the seeds are minute, but the fruit is one big continuous fleshy object. Our approach to *mitzvot* says the Rebbe must be one where each *mitzva* is not a random



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isolated sweet little kernel, but rather that each and every *mitzvah* brings more and more sweetness and happiness, that each individual *mitzvah* is a portion of an overall collective whole of sweetness and happiness. When that is achieved, explains the Rebbe then we will merit to experience *brachot*. However, if each *mitzvah* remains to be an isolated seedling, and doesn't join together with an overall sweet holistic, collective "fruit", then our *Avodat Hashem* is both devoid of vitality and joy and thus lacking, and we are therefore susceptible to stumble and to the harm of outside influence.

May each of us be blessed to heed this powerful message from the **Rebbe of Vitebsk**, and to live a life of *simcha*, of joy and vitality in our *Avodat Hashem*, and may we merit to experience the blessings that come through *Avodat Hashem B'Simcha*. ■

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