



The Power of Happiness and Mitzvos

Parshas Ki-Savoh

Leilui Neshmas Meira Chaya Nechama Bracha A"H

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There was a man who lived in southern part of Israel, he had survived the horrors of the Holocaust, at least physically, spiritually was a different story; the experience brought him to renounce his religion. I was told that he was once the owner of a successful textile factory.

He forgot his religious education, with the exception of one verse from the Torah, which he would habitually recite out loud – "Because you did not serve the Lord, your G-d, with happiness and with gladness of heart, when you had an abundance of everything"¹ – a verse which is part of a segment in the Torah that describes the woes Israel will encounter if it strays from the worship of G-d.

No one ever asked him why he would recite the verse. I met this man once as he was on his way to work. I asked how he was doing, and in response he recited the verse. I shuddered.

I asked him about his life. He told me he came from a small village in Poland. He spent five years in the Nazi concentration camps, during where he met the Klauzenberger Rebbe.

The Rebbe was pressed into forced labor, and as he would hit the ground with his work tool he would recite the verse using a tune, the man told me he can still hear that tune. "It entered my bones," he explained, "I can't forget it."

The man went on his way to work while humming the upsetting verse, which he learned while being persecuted by the Nazis.

Sometime after this encounter, I had an opportunity to visit the Klauzenberger Rebbe. He inquired about the growth the Migdal Ohr institution, he asked with caring and with much love. I told him about my chance encounter with this holocaust survivor in the south.

The Rebbe listened intently, and then explained to me: "There is a story told about the Baal Shem Tov, who locked himself in his room one Rosh Hashanah. Time to blow the Shofar arrived, but his disciples were afraid to disturb him. He was locked away for hours."

"At some point the students realized that Heaven had decreed a harsh decree, and that the Baal Shem Tov was

trying to change it. He emerged later on from his room with a smile and ran to blow the Shofar."

After the conclusion of the prayers they asked the Baal Shem Tov what he had encountered in the Heavens. He said that the Jewish Nation's good and bad deeds were weighed, and the bad deeds outnumbered the good ones. An angel was given permission to harm the Jews.

"I told the court in Heaven that there was a difference between good and bad deeds. There were more bad deeds, but the good deeds were done with happiness and with a gladness of heart, and therefore carried more weight," said the Baal Shem Tov.

"How is this so?" he explained. "When a father does a *Bris* for his son it is with great splendor and with a feast for the broad public. Each Mitzvah is done with great care and much love. Conversely, if a person commits a transgression he is saddened and broken."

"Weigh everything again," the Baal Shem Tov demanded. The court in Heaven agreed, and thus the decree was annulled and the Jews merited a good year.

This is how the verse should be understood, the Rebbe explained. "Because you did not serve the Lord, your G-d, with happiness and with gladness of heart" teaches us the heavy weight the Mitzvos carry when they are done with happiness and with a gladness of heart. They have the power to annul bad decrees and bring good to the Jewish Nation.

That's what I meant at the concentration camps, the Rebbe explained. "We knew we were being reprimanded by G-d for not worshipping him with happiness and with a gladness of heart, out of his love for us. Even so, we must keep in mind that only with the power of happiness can we reverse the tide to a positive one." The Rebbe himself had lost his wife and 11 children in the Holocaust.

"Only if Jews observe the mitzvot with happiness can the mitzvot really be affective. Only Mitzvos observed with joy can overcome our enemies," the Rebbe explained.

Even during his worst hours in the Holocaust the Rebbe berated himself for not worshipping G-d "with happiness and with gladness of heart, when you had an abundance of everything."

¹ Dvarin 28:47.