

# TRAGEDY & REMAINING JOYOUS IN SERVING HASHEM

## 2002

LISTEN TO BILVAVI  
ON KOL HALASHON  
ISRAEL 073.295.1245  
USA 718.521.5231

2>4>12

A person can build an approach of how to remain happy even in trying times, without ignoring the pain and sadness.

In the recent years, we have seen a certain lack of stability that is glaring, in all areas of life. There are many signs that the future is imminent, and we have no way of knowing what will happen in a year from now, of what will be. It is upon us to think: For what reason is Hashem doing all of this? Surely He is not doing it so that people can be full of anger, sadness, and complaint. Rather, He is doing it all to awaken us to have the inner recognition: if only we were to awaken ourselves, and if only each person was living a truthful life, in his mind and heart, Hashem would not have to send all of this noise to us.

When a person is not living a truthful life, and then he feels that he doesn't know what tomorrow will bring – what life will look like, what his financial situation will look like, what his health will be like; and he begins to realize that there is no security to be gained from any politician, or army, or any one person – he then begins to realize, deep down, that everything is orchestrated from Above. Then his priorities begin to change. If a person comes to feel, as a result of all these *tzaros*, that he is beginning to search for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* – this must cause him to feel true *simchah* at this!

If one were to hear, *chas v'shalom*, of a tragedy that just occurred – on one hand, his heart is shaking, people have just been killed, and it must feel saddening to him. Without a doubt, it is saddening; who can rejoice at a time like this? But the sadness must be accompanied with a deep point in the soul, where a person awakens himself: “This is a personal awakening to *me*. Hashem did this in order to communicate a message to *me*, because He wants to draw *me* closer to Him.”

As we have already explained, there are endless intentions for why Hashem does what He does; the only one of these intentions that a person must try to figure out is, “What is the reason that applies to *me*? It is upon *me* to believe, that Hashem made this tragedy occur because He wants *me* to [become awakened and thereby] come closer to Him!”

When this one point is burning in your heart and accompanying every situation you experience – this point of “I am searching for Hashem” – although you must certainly feel sad about the fact that people have been killed, there is also a *simchah* that accompanies this feeling. The *simchah* that can be felt in all of these situations is: “Because this has happened,

I am now becoming closer and closer to Hashem!” The *simchah* that we can uncover in all of these *tzaros* is because these events cause us to sharpen our recognition of truth, and to then live by those perceptions.

### ***The Awesome Merit of Being Killed “Al Kiddush Hashem”***

Even more so, we need to realize that those who are killed in the terrorist attacks have died *al kiddush Hashem* (in sanctification of Hashem’s name), and therefore, they have earned reward which is immeasurable.

There are some people whose *neshamos* (souls) have simply gone to their destruction, simply; they did not keep Torah and mitzvos while they were alive. If anyone cares about these souls that have gone lost, he cries tears over the millions of our Jewish brethren who have been cut off from their Source. They have not only lost their physical lives, which lasts 70 years; anyone who has failed to utilize the 70 years of his life on this world has also lost his eternity.

But if a Jew dies *al kiddush Hashem*, his merit is so great that nobody else can stand near him in Heaven.<sup>1</sup> A Jew merits this if he was killed in a terrorist attack; even if he did not observe Torah and mitzvos, and his life has ended at the age of 40, he has lost 30 years on this world (because the average amount of years is 70), but in exchange for the 30 years that has been taken from him, he has gained eternity. If someone believes in the words of Chazal, who guarantee this, he can actually rejoice for the person who has been killed. But if a person is not a believer, he sees this as nothing but destruction and tragedy.

There is a story told of the Chofetz Chaim, in which his son-in-law, who was a very righteous man, suddenly was *niflar*. The young widow, who was the Chofetz Chaim’s daughter, took it very hard; she was inconsolable. The Chofetz Chaim said to her, “If I tell you that he is in Gan Eden right now, will you be comforted?” She said to him, “Yes. If he is in Gan Eden right now, it is better that he should be there.” That is the way the story goes. Perhaps we can ask: Why did this comfort her? Is she not left a lonely widow?

But we can only ask this question if we think that the 70 years we spend on this world is our actual lifetime. When those 70 years are then cut short, it seems to us as the most tragic thing possible, and people say, “*Oy, vey.*” Why “*Oy vey*”? If a person did not observe Torah and mitzvos and he lived 70 years and then he dies, this doesn’t bother anybody, even

<sup>1</sup> *Pesachim 50a*

though this person has just lost his entire eternity! But when a Jew at the prime of his life is killed in an attack, everybody is groaning over the tragedy, feeling that this is the worst thing possible - when our attitude should really be the exact opposite!

### *Our Perspective Is Limited*

The Chofetz Chaim, in the end of his life, *davened* to Hashem that he should merit to die *al kiddush Hashem* (in sanctification of Hashem's name). What does it mean to merit dying *al kiddush Hashem*? Does it mean that he should merit having the Zaka members gather all of his person's body parts into a bag? The Chofetz Chaim believed that there is eternal reward. He knew that being killed *al kiddush Hashem* will mean that he will receive far more eternal reward, and that his level would be far more elevated. This doesn't mean that should a person should enter Gaza tomorrow and 'merit' to die in an explosion there. Without a doubt, one should never wish for this. But if it does happen to a person, do we look at this as the *middas hadin* (attribute of judgment) or the *middas harachamim* (attribute of mercy)?

Those who were killed [in terrorist attacks] have not lost out on a thing. In their deaths, they have merited that which they wouldn't have merited, had they lived. The rest of the generation, who remain here on this world, are able to become awakened from these events. So what is anyone losing out on? It is only difficult for those who look at This World as our absolute place of existence; that perspective makes it seem as if the person's lifetime has been cut short, that his life is truly over, and that this poor soul could have lived so much longer.

But think about the following. There were many *tzaddikim* who did not even reach the age of 40. The Arizal and the Ramchal are just to name a few. If a person already rectified everything that he was supposed to rectify on this world, why should he stay here any longer? It's much better to be in *Gan Eden*, than to be here.

Maybe a person will ask: "Why did a nonobservant Jew 'merit' to die *al kiddush Hashem*, whereas others who keep Torah and mitzvos do not 'merit' to die *al kiddush Hashem*?" There are many ways to explain this. Maybe the person had *zechus avos* (merits of his ancestors); maybe he once did a great *mitzvah* in secret. But there is no question to begin with. After all, is this the only thing we don't understand? Do we understand why a certain person was born with a certain disability? If a person was born to a wealthy father, and then his father died, and then he inherited all of his father's wealth – do we understand why he deserves all of this

money that he didn't have to work hard for? There are so many questions. All of life is filled with questions, like the amount of seeds in a pomegranate.

The answer to all of these questions lies in a well-known parable which the Chofetz Chaim would explain:

Once a Jew came to sit in a *shul* and he saw that the *gabbai* was giving out all of the *aliyos*. He gave one *aliyah* to a person on one side of the shul, and a different *aliyah* to a person at the other side of the shul. The visitor was perplexed, and he wondered the *gabbai* was skipping over people as he gave out the *aliyos*; why didn't the *gabbai* just go in order? He went over to the *gabbai* on Motzei Shabbos and asked for an explanation. The *gabbai* explained to him that there was a certain system, and that he wasn't skipping over anyone. Each person was getting what he deserved.

That is the *moshol* (parable). The *nimshal* (lesson) is that when a person is living on this world for 70 years, he is full of questions. If he would live for another 340 years, he would begin to understand a little more, and his questions would no longer be questions. If he would live for 6000 years straight, then he would see the whole picture, and everything would be clear. We are living on this world for a very short amount of time. The questions that we have don't seem to have any answers, but that is only because we don't know much to begin with. It is not because there are no answers to our questions.

There is a famous story told of the Ramban<sup>2</sup>, who had a student who was deathly ill. The Ramban asked of his student to appear to him in a dream after ascending to Heaven, and to tell him the answers to certain questions that he had on Hashem's ways.

The student came to his teacher in a dream and said, "I do not have the answers to your questions. But I can tell you that in Heaven, these questions are not questions."

If this story is true, we can learn from it that even the Ramban, who was a giant amongst the *Rishonim*, did not merit to understand Hashem's ways; therefore, what should *we* say? Even more so, the sage Rabbi Meir said that the ways of Hashem were not even revealed to Moshe Rabbeinu.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> cited in *Yalkut Am Loez Shoftim* p.81

<sup>3</sup> *Berachos* 7a

Our perspective on things is so limited, that we don't even know what's considered a valid question or not. When a person internalizes this, he will begin to see how every curse is really a blessing in disguise.

What is there to be so sad about today? For the *chilonim* (the secular and anti-religious in Israel) who are killed [in the terrorist attacks], who might not have ever returned to *teshuvah* had they continued to live, who probably would have gone to *Gehinnom* if they would have remained alive and died a natural death after 70 years? Now that they have been killed, they have merited to go to the Next World, to eternity. So Hashem has done a kindness with them in taking them away before their destined time had come. It is like how Hashem took away Chanoch before his destined time had come, because Hashem wanted him to die a *tzaddik* rather than remain alive and become wicked with the rest of the generation<sup>4</sup>.

So why is everyone crying and depressed [over these tragedies]? It can only be because people are living with a materialistic perspective of This World. But if a person has eternity in front of his eyes, if Hashem would promise a person that he will live eternally in the Next World – in exchange for a few years of his life that are cut short – would he not want this? If a person really believes in the eternal, he wouldn't be able to refuse such an offer. Nadav and Avihu died out of a great desire to experience more closeness to Hashem.<sup>5</sup>

There is a verse, **ובחרת בחיים**, “*And you shall choose life.*”<sup>6</sup> The Torah is not saying to choose a life of This World, but a life of eternity, in the Next World. If a person eats pork or eats on Yom Kippur, he is not choosing “life” – he is choosing to live a life in which he is destroying himself. To “choose life” means to utilize the 70 years that we are alive, and to merit eternity with them.

Death - the true meaning of death - is when a person ends his 70 years of living and he never merited eternity with them. There is no greater “death” than this.

### ***Investing In Order To Get To The Purpose of Life***

A person might still claim that all of this is unclear to him, and that it's not settling on his heart. But reflect upon the following. We are talking here about someone who believes that

<sup>4</sup> *Beraishis Rabbah 25:1*

<sup>5</sup> see *Noam Elimelech in parshas Korach; and Me'ohr Einayim in parshas Pinchas; and Beer Mayim Chaim in parshas Achrei-Mos*

<sup>6</sup> *Devarim 30:19*

Hashem gave us the Torah at Sinai and that it was passed down to us through the Sages, and that all of their words of Torah are true. We do not find in their words any doubt about the eternal award in *Olam HaBa*. The Sages describe it as something that is definite. If so, why doesn't this concept settle on one's heart?

It doesn't settle upon a person's heart when his heart is blocked! A person needs to penetrate the blockage through attaining inner purity.

(As we have already mentioned, the words of this *derasha* are only for *maaminim*, believers. If someone is not a believer, he needs to hear something else.)

For a person who is a *maamin*\believer, he needs to realize that This World is not the entire picture, and that the Next World is not an imaginary realm which has no bearings on us now. That is a totally mistaken perspective! If a person views this lifetime (an average of 70 years) as one long journey with nothing that comes after it, he will live a very sad life. The happiness in life is to see our entire journey in life as one long path that brings us closer and closer to Hashem; that is the apex of our 70-year journey.

We are willing to put in a lot of work to get things we want. Anyone who works long hours at a job knows what this feels like. So why can't we understand, by the same token, that we are investing 70 years of our lifetime, in order to receive eternity afterwards? Anyone who works at a job will use various means in order to get to his goals at the job; nobody works without putting in some kind of effort. The same must go for anyone who is a *maamin*; he must know why he came onto this world. He does not expect every second that he will reach his purpose in life. Instead, he is investing effort every second, which will bring him to attain his eternity.

We don't mean to say here that a person should only invest in his spirituality and not try to earn livelihood. Only Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai and other rare individuals like him, were capable of only learning Torah and with no need to pray for livelihood. Those individuals merited to become close to Hashem even without the means of This World. But everyone else needs to invest on this world in order to reach *Olam HaBa*, just as much, and even

more, than how much they are willing to put in hard work when reaching their materialistic goals on This World.

### ***Happiness: Only Through Attaining A Palpable Sense For The Spiritual***

After all that we have elaborated upon here, it is now clear how we can have *simchas bachaim*, a joy in life, and how we can maintain it even as we amidst times of tribulation.

Maybe a person will still counter: “It is understandable that we can still be happy in spite of others’ troubles, but if a person himself experiences something very difficult and traumatic, like if he loses a child, *rachmana litzlan* – how can he remain happy?” Without a doubt, it is certainly a difficult thing to go through, but the perspective described earlier can be applied to this as well.

Here is a story which wouldn’t happen in our times. It is told of the Chofetz Chaim, after he had just lost a child. Someone came to visit the Chofetz Chaim and he was unaware that the Chofetz Chaim had just lost a son, whose name was Shalom Leib. The visitor asked the Chofetz Chaim, “Where is Shalom Leib?” The Chofetz Chaim responded, “Baruch Hashem, he has gone to yeshiva.” He was referring to the yeshiva in Heaven. These were not mere words. The Chofetz Chaim saw the loss of his child as a temporary departure, as if his son had gone overseas to learn in a yeshiva in America.

If a father doesn’t see or communicate with his son for one or two years, this would not disturb him that much, because in his heart he can feel that his son isn’t that far away from him; especially if he knows that his son is in a good place. But most people, who are not on the level of the Chofetz Chaim, become emotionally disturbed in such a situation.

*Olam HaBa* does not feel palpable to most people as America does. Even if a person has never been to America, he is much more aware of America than *Olam HaBa*, which he feels only on an esoteric and distant level. If a father knows that his son is learning in overseas in a yeshiva in America, he can feel that he knows where his son is; he knows that his son can visit him and that he’ll eventually return home. And his son can send him pictures and write letters to him, so he can always feel connected to his son even when his son is away. A person lives in the material world and therefore he seeks connection that is of a material nature.

But when a person becomes elevated, he can receive different and higher understandings.

There are higher senses that we have, which can sense the spiritual. There are people who are blind, because they are missing the sense of sight, and there are people who are deaf, and people who cannot feel love, and people who cannot hear music; so too are most of us missing a sense for the spiritual. It remains hidden from awareness.

Keeping Torah and mitzvos is the external aspect [of spirituality]. There is an inner aspect, which is “the spiritual sense.” When a person merits to feel this sense, everything that we have explained in this *derasha* will pass from his mind and into his heart, and he will feel all of this knowledge described here.

Understandably, we cannot begin with feeling. We must first begin with “knowing”, for the verse first states, “*And you shall know today*”, and then “*And you shall settle the matter upon your heart*” – we need to begin with “knowledge” and then at reach the level where the knowledge is internalized in the heart. *Avodas Hashem* (serving the Creator) requires a change in our senses. We need to add on another sense onto our five physical senses: the sense for the spiritual.

It is attained through reflection and deep thought, for a long amount of time. One needs to change his thinking patterns, and slowly he can then develop a sense for the spiritual. It takes a long time and, without a doubt, it is not easy.

True *simchah* is only possible when a person merits to reach this sense for the spiritual: when one’s Torah is not mere knowledge in his brain and his *mitzvos* are not merely actions performed by his body, and instead his Torah and *mitzvos* are deep in his heart - as a palpable feeling, and not an imaginary feeling.

### ***Simchas Purim – From Erasing Amalek***

The *Maharal* and others taught that *simchah* (happiness) is the point of *shleimus* (completion). As explained earlier, a person is happy when he feels that he has completed something that was lacking. To know and feel the existence of Hashem is not just a knowledge, but a palpable feeling, and this is the *shleimus* that is *simchah*. Not to feel Hashem is the greatest form of lacking that one can have, and therefore, feeling Hashem’s existence is the greatest and most complete form of fulfillment and happiness.

The antithesis to *simchah* is Amalek, who has the same *gematria* (numerical value in Hebrew)

as the word *safek*, doubt. Doubts are awakened when there are contradictory forces within the person, where a person is being pulled in several different directions, and he cannot decide between them. “Erasing Amalek”, then, means to unify all of the soul’s forces together, so that there are no inner clashes.

Esther sent a message to Mordechai, “*Go and gather all the Jews.*”<sup>7</sup> The deeper way of understanding this is that the entire “Jew” needs to be gathered together, both his outside and his inside, and to be unified into one piece. Through entering within, a person can connect and unify his inner layers with his outer layers. Then the inner contradictions will cease, and all “doubts” within him will be erased.

This is the *simchah* of Purim. True *simchah* is not an external show of joy like dancing in front of a groom and bride. It is an inner kind of joy, and it is a result of inner *shleimus* (completion). It is an inner reality, where a person feels a sense of completion, and that he lacks for nothing.

### ***True Happiness Is Revealed Only When The Inner Desires Are Fulfilled***

It is written, “*Wine gladdens the heart of man.*”<sup>8</sup> Chazal explain, “When wine enters, the secret exits.”<sup>9</sup> What is the connection between wine, secrets, and happiness?

As explained above, a person has many desires, desires within desires; there are desires that are deep in his subconscious, which he may not be aware of. If a person isn’t used to reflecting, he will believe that his desires are the desires that he is aware of. When those desires become fulfilled, he will become joyous. But if these are external desires that he has, the fulfillment of such desires will cause only a superficial, temporary feeling of happiness. Deep down, he will remain sad and empty. By contrast, if a person’s desires are more inner, the fulfillment of such desires will result in a more inner kind of happiness. If a person merits opening awareness to a more inner point of himself, the fulfillment of those inner desires makes it possible for him to reach a more inner kind of happiness.

Wine causes secrets to exit – when done properly, the intake of wine brings a person to an awareness of the more inner desires present in himself. This is the “secret” that the wine re-

<sup>7</sup> Esther 4:16

<sup>8</sup> Tehillim 104:15

<sup>9</sup> Sanhedrin 65a

veals. From that point onward, a person can then fulfill those inner desires, and reach inner, true, happiness.

### *The Level of Perfect Happiness*

Now this will be explained deeper. The Hebrew word for “happy” is נמנ, equal in *gematria* to the word שמח (five). This shows us that happiness is linked with “five”. What is the connection?

It is as we have explained above. The soul is comprised of five compartments: the *Nefesh*, the *Ruach*, the *Neshamah*, the *Chayah* and the *Yechidah*. Most people are experiencing their life through the *Nefesh* layer of the soul, and they usually do not even recognize the part in themselves that is beyond that, which is the *Ruach*. And not everyone who is in touch with their *Ruach* has reached their *Neshamah*. When a person has not yet uncovered all five layers of his existence, he is lacking in his *shleimus* (completion).

True *shleimus* (completion) is when a person has uncovered all five layers of the soul, and after that a person can reach the true *d'veykus* with Hashem. When one reaches this inner unity in the soul, he is able to integrate his own existence with the Creator. Of the Creator it is said, “*Splendor and joy in His place*”<sup>10</sup>, and in the *Midrash* it is brought that splendor and joy are one of the ten forms of happiness.<sup>11</sup> The ten forms of happiness there listed are: *sasson*, *simchah*, *gilah*, *rinah*, *ditzah*, *tzahalah*, *alizah*, *chedvah*, *alizah*, and *alitzah*. A person can only find *simchah* where he finds Hashem.

But *simcha* is not merely a result of attaining self-perfection. It does not merely result from the sum total of many factors coming together, such as when pages are attached together and a book is formed. That may work in the physical dimension, but not in the spiritual. In the spiritual, completion does not result from merely combining together parts. The *neshamah* is called “a portion of G-d from above”. *Simchah* is the completion that one attains in becoming attached to the Creator.

There is a long path to traverse until one attains *simchah*, and indeed, it is this aspiration which we need to direct ourselves, throughout our life.

[ONE OF THE FIRST RECORDED SHIURIM OF THE RAV, SHLIT" A]

<sup>10</sup> *Divrei HaYamim* 16:27

<sup>11</sup> *Avos D'Rebbi Nosson* 43:9; see also *Kesubos* 8a

## ARABS VS. ERETZ YISRAEL

**QUESTION** 1) There has always been a burning issue regarding who was in *Eretz Yisrael* first, the Jews or the Arabs. What are the sources about this matter?

**ANSWER** See Rashi to *Beraishis 1:1*: “Why did the Torah begin with the creation of the world? So that if the nations of the world will say to the Jews, “You are robbers, for you conquered the land of *Eretz Yisrael* from the seven nations who were living there”, the Jews can reply to the nations, “The land belongs to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, He created it and gave it to as He saw fit, and with His will He took it from them and gave it to us.”

**QUESTION** 2) Does the Rav think that anything can be done to make peace with the Arabs? Or do we need to wait for Mashiach who will come and make peace in the world?

**ANSWER** It is the *galus* of being amongst Yishmael (the Arabs) and we can only go out from it through Mashiach. Right now there are ups and downs to it, and the most we can achieve with them is only a partial level of calmness.

**QUESTION** 3) Is the Torah’s view that we need to stand up to claim our inherited land even if that will cause tension with the Arabs?

**ANSWER** The issue has an external and internal layer to it. On the external level, part of standing up against the Arabs is just to protect the country from terrorism, but part of the standoff is just to put more pressure on them. At the inner level, though, it is about the Jewish people returning to *Eretz Yisrael* through the “light” of the *Geulah*, and this is a part of a long, drawn-out process of the light becoming revealed. Especially since the year 1840, when the gates of wisdom opened up [as is known] it was like when Noach turned 600 years of age, which was when the windows of Heaven opened up (causing the Flood to descend), which also is a hint to the end of the 6th century when the gates of wisdom and inner dimension of the Torah will open up.

That is all with regards to the light of the Redemption, but with regards to the “vessel” that holds this light, the *Erev Rav* rules over *Eretz Yisrael* and therefore we have no part in this at all. The entire return to *Eretz Yisrael* has happened in a manner of the *medina's* (government's) control, as opposed to the way that the *talmidim* of the Baal Shem Tov and the talmidim of the Gra came to *Eretz Yisrael*. It is not Hashem’s will, it is the control of the *Erev Rav*. [Archive of Bilvavi Q&A]