

Dvar Torah for Parshat Yitro

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Based on *Likutey Moharan* II, Lesson #24

There were many preparations the Israelites needed to make for *matan* Torah (the giving of the Torah) at Sinai. One which gets almost no mention at all is *simcha* (joy, happiness). In an unnamed teaching (unofficially titled “The Sad Tzaddik,” which is appended to *Rabbi Nachman’s Stories*), Rebbe Nachman tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu was incredibly *b’simcha* (joyful) when he ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. The Midrash (*Tanchuma, Yitro* #13) tells us that on the eve of the Torah-giving the entire Jewish people cheerfully looked forward to accepting the yoke of Heaven.

This goes hand in hand with a qualification the Israelites needed for *matan* Torah—good health. The purpose of having the Jews leave Egypt was that they receive the Torah. So, asks the Midrash, why the delay? It answers that when the Jews left Egypt they were a physically and emotionally broken people, unfit to be the bearers of God’s holy word. The 49-day interval from Exodus to *matan* Torah gave them time to heal.

Three different Midrashim (*Tanchuma, Yitro* #8; *VaYikra Rabbah* 18:4; *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 4:7) give us slightly differing lists of the ailments from which Israelites suffered when they

left Egypt. The Egyptians had so mistreated and abused them that some were crippled, lame or missing limbs. Others were blind, deaf or mute. Some had become depressives; others had lost their minds. A number were of below average intelligence. Yet, came that great day, everyone was in 100% perfect health.

Although some of my students have called me “Dr. Neshamah” (Soul), I am not an M.D. Nonetheless, I will not hesitate to share with you the following medical insight: happiness and health go together. Rebbe Nachman teaches, “If there is any sort of damage or flaw in [one’s] *simcha*, illness results” (*Likutey Moharan* II, Lesson #24). That’s not all. The Rebbe goes on to say that in the Future, the world’s *simcha* will be so great that there will be no illness at all. Such *simcha* results from a combination of desiring to live by God’s will and actually doing so when the opportunity arises.

How happy are we to be getting the Torah? The difference between Egyptian-slavery which we’ve left behind, and the God-servitude which we have embraced is the freedom of spirit, the *simcha*, with which we perform our duties. In one’s personal history, as in Jewish history, something may happen to cause the joy of Judaism to leak out of life. If that happens, God forbid, one is likely to be frustrated and annoyed when thwarted to live a Jewishness that he *must*, rather than a Jewishness he *wants*.

Matan Torah happens every day. To remain prepared, it helps to remember what the holy Baal Shem Tov said: part of his mission in life was to do away with the *byzeneh lamdan* (irritable Torah learner/scholar). You can’t do all of the mitzvahs all of the time. But you can do some mitzvahs some of the time (and there are some mitzvahs you can do all of the time). Be *b’simcha* that you’ve been called upon—chosen—to receive the Torah and live by the mitzvahs. and be *b’simcha* whenever you do a mitzvah.

Be happy! Be healthy! Be holy! Amen.

agutn Shabbos!

Shabbat Shalom!

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