



**Simcha is a  
CHOICE**



TORAH**UMESORAH**UK

# Simcha Is A Choice.

## A message for Chodesh Adar

**Geared towards high school students**

By Mrs R Moore, Torah Umesorah Manchester

**LO:** Students will learn what being truly בשמחה really means. They will learn by analysing Jewish history how happiness is a choice that can be chosen by anyone, no matter what is going on around them. They will also realise how by building up their own שמחה, they will inevitably be spilling over to everyone around them too.

**Intro:** As we find ourselves in אדר, the month where we increase our שמחה, let us dig into what שמחה really means and how truly applying it; can change our lives forever.

### It's all about our mindset

**Discuss:** Teacher should ask the class the following question and then discuss answers in a spider diagram.

When you think of the word 'poverty', what comes to mind?

**Explain:** We usually associate poverty with money matters.  
"כל ימי עני רעים": (משלי טו טו) says: שלמה המלך

Our financial ability may spill over and affect many areas of our life.

However, the פסוק is not finished yet: "וטוב לב משתה תמיד" – "a good mind is at a constant banquet".

We can see that it's not referring to financial poverty, but rather to something much worse; poverty of the mind.

It is a warped kind of thinking to feel that we're no good, when 'ד wants us to see just how good life is. It's very easy to focus on the negative, when looking at the world, but it has the effect of pulling ourselves down, when the task at hand is to elevate ourselves and focus on the positive. 'ד wants us to know that a good mind is constantly at a banquet; it's possible to see the good!

When משיח comes, we'll no longer have to say the ברכה of האמת דיין ברוך because, when we see something that seems to be going wrong, we'll only be able to say הטוב והמטיב ברוך - we'll understand that everything that happens is truly good. Whatever we see as negative is actually an invitation from 'ד to enable us to become stronger.

איזהו עשיר? השמח בחלקו. (פרקי אבות פרק ד' משנה א')

As we say every morning in our ברכות: שעשה לי כל צרכי. We thank 'ד for giving us all we need.



Happiness and satisfaction do not result from the quality or quantity of our possessions, but from how we view and accept what 'ד has given us.

We can see from here how big the impact of שמחה is upon ourselves and how it can literally change our lives.

## Learning from History

In פרק כ"ח, we see the קללות came because the people had no שמחה. We see how important the מידה of happiness must be; if all of these bad things could happen only because we didn't do מצוות בשמחה.

**Discuss:** Why should a person who didn't serve 'ד with a positive mind, deserve a difficult life? The reason is that whilst I had the good, I was accounting for the bad in everything.

Maybe we do have a right to count the bad, but if we do have this right, then at least we need to be consistent with our logic and say what's good too!

Once we really begin to count what's good in our lives, then we'll see that it's endless. The length of our list is potentially unlimited and then we'll hopefully realise what really overrides what!

**Discuss:** If we look back throughout our history, at who achieved great things, we'll observe that it was not because they had easy lives. We will discover that in fact, their lives were probably full of tremendous adversity and suffering- in some way or another. Yet, nevertheless, they were still able to find good in themselves.

**Who can you think of?** (Brainstorm the answers on the board.)

**Activity:** Students should be split into small groups and pick a character from our history, who achieved tremendous things, despite all that they went through. They should analyse the events in this person's life that lead up to their achievements and prove how it's possible for a person to still remain happy and reach their goals.

Once the groups are done, the teacher should arrange for them to be presented in front of the class.

**Here are some ideas:**

How would we rate the pain of parental betrayal on a scale of 0-10. 0 being no pain?! It's right off the charts! Ask anyone!

- Look at the life of א"א- betrayed by his father to נמרוד.
  - He goes through a famine
  - Asked to sacrifice his only son- to slaughter him.
  - His wife was kidnapped twice.
  - Barren for 90 years- was this easy?!
  - הגר is immediately blessed with a child; who rebels against his father's lifestyle.



- Did שרה have an easy life?!
- Did יצחק?
- Did יעקב with his twin brother עשו?
  - Losing his wife רחל
  - Losing his favourite son יוסף
  - Potentially losing בנימין
- יוסף?!- He went through tremendous suffering.
  - Betrayal of his own brothers- who wanted to kill him.
  - His brothers changed their minds and sold him as a slave.
  - Ended up at age seventeen- completely isolated.
  - Falsely accused by his own master- after total dedication- so was thrown into prison for four years.
  - With one minor attempt to get himself out, ד' punished him with another two years- because he did too much השתדלות!!
  - What then was יוסף's response, after הקב"ה took him out and almost immediately raised to the ranks as second in command? His brothers turned up and he had the perfect opportunity...
  - They found out who he was and what did יוסף say to them? "It wasn't you who sent me here, it was ד'.
  - יוסף had every reason for revenge- yet held himself back and saw everything as ד' יד- as ד' running the world. In modern times, יוסף could've left the התורה דרך years ago- what reasons did he have to hold him back?!

- Sarah Schenirer! What a contribution she made to כ"י!! Did she have an easy life?
  - Married twice.
  - No children.

• She could've totally thrown in the towel- yet no, she tried once, tried twice- no luck. We can clearly see here how circumstances do not dictate who we become. They provide us with a wider choice of whom we can become because of them.

Sarah Schenirer saw how these girls listened to the professor's lecturers on Darwinism, evolution, socialism, Marxism and all the other isms out there. Too many people fell into these traps, thinking these were above and beyond anything they've experienced in אידישקייט.

So Sarah Schenirer started a campaign- looking for leadership to back her- which was not easy. Yet this woman against all odds, more than anyone else in that century- impacted the entire Jewish people!!

Speak to any תלמידה of a תלמידה of Sarah Schenirer and ask them what was the secret of her success? They'll all say שמחת החיים. She had such a joy in being- it was contagious- that one could not help but feel the love she had for life- for ד'- for the Jewish people!!

- R' Nosson Tzvi Finkel, at age 18-
  - Clean shaven, American boy playing baseball.
  - Ambition: undecided.
  - Here was someone who created a phenomenal impact - towering in his love, upon



thousands of students. It doesn't matter where we came from- what matters is who we want to become.

**Discuss:** We may notice that very often 'ט will give us circumstances that contradict the person whom we think we want to become. Why? (discuss answers)

To make it harder? No! just the opposite- to make it easier.

It's precisely when we are faced with a negative and difficult circumstance, that we can choose our mindset and become strong.

Then from the inside out we can build!

## How our attitude affects others

Since we have learnt that שמחה can be viewed as a lens with which we view our lives, it therefore affects everything and anything that we come into contact with.

The word שמחת החיים is plural. (Rabbi J Rietti, "Happiness in life") The word חיים in single is non-existent. לשון הקודש preceded reality- ד' created the world with this language. So שמחת החיים is 'happiness of lives'- as we invest in ourselves, then by default, it's like a cup of water, we pour in and then we drink. If it's from a full cup, then it will start going down- but what if we only drink as we keep pouring into the cup? Then what we're drinking from is only from the spill over and if it's more than we can drink, then the spillover is for others too!

This is what we need to do- to ensure that we pour in so much, that the spill will spill over to others- our family, friends and community. Therefore, the more we're giving to ourselves, the more, in truth, we're really giving to others as well!

**Discuss:** How does our שמחה affect the lives of:

### Our community

"R' Yisroel Salanter taught that a person's face is considered as part of the public domain. We have the obligation to look happy, even when we feel pained on the inside- for our negative expressions negatively affect others." (Rebbetzen S Feldsbrand, Simcha, page 258+)

Imagine a huge pothole in the road; besides for it's ugly appearance, it's bang in the middle of the way and makes bypassing extremely frustrating.

The same is too with a bad-tempered individual- he's a public menace. To be happy is part of our אחריות to the people around us. We live in a world of others, and it's our expressions both in our attitude and in our facial expressions, that can dramatically impact those in our environment.

The more we think about our own sorrows, the more we express and talk about it, the more we feel it. If a person is miserable, he dislikes others' happiness and successes.





“Just as in chess, so too in life- the king and the pawn are laid to rest in the same box!!”

Only a happy person is able to realise this. This is because, someone who is happy, has reached that level of inner satisfaction- where he is happy within himself, he doesn't need other people/ things to make him feel good. This type of person therefore accepts everyone, because there's nothing holding him back from loving every kind of איד. “X”'s wealth doesn't bother him, neither does “Y”'s health/ מזל/ נחת etc.

One who feels content is one who feels secure in his goals- he sees his path clearly marked for him!! (As mentioned just above) it's only a person without clear objectives, who becomes confused and dejected- his questions multiply: Should he accept this job?! Is this the right thing to do??!

This “doubt” is actually the weapon of עמלק- his גימטריא is equal to that of “ספק” (doubt). עמלק epitomises the יצה”ר, whose primary goal is to form doubt in people's minds, to hinder their spiritual growth. This is what we must rid ourselves of- confusion, because it weakens our spirit and disrupts our duties in עבודת ד'.

“I do not expect of you to always recognise the יצה”ר right away” Reb Shlomo of Radomsk told his חסידים, “and to be able to keep your distance from evil before it reaches you. But when a person cracks open an egg he does not have to eat the whole thing to discern that it's rotten!” (Simcha, Rebbetzen S. Feldbrand, page 103+)

### Our relationship with ד'

שמחה of course greatly affects our relationship with ד' too... As we mentioned earlier; Everything done בשמחה is so much more enhanced. One cannot compare serving ד' by performing His מצוות and תפילה with שמחה, to doing so without it... אינו דומה! The מצוה is so much more meaningful- it now has an entirely new dimension to it!

Joy is an outgrowth of completeness; when one feels complete, one experiences joy.

Since a מצוה is that which brings a man to total completeness, it should be performed with joy. When it is, the person doing the מצוה is fully worthy of having ד' being with him- because ד'’s שכנינה is only able to rest in an atmosphere of joy.

The reason why ד'’s שכנינה can only rest in an atmosphere of joy is because ד' connects with that which is complete- since He Himself is complete in the Ultimate sense. It's only when מצוות are done with שמחה, that they are considered complete, which makes the connection to ד' possible! The שמחה in the picture is the final touch that allows ד' שכנינה to rest with us!! (Artsroll Nesivos Olam, Nesiv Hatorah, Maharal M'Prague, pg 385)

Let us realise that the joy we feel after we do a מצוה, is in itself a מצוה!!



## What stands in the way of our being בשמחה

Teacher should discuss this question with the class: "What stands in the way of our being בשמחה?"

### We constantly compare ourselves.

Comparisons in reality are counterproductive and demoralising. A person has to focus on improving themselves- by overlooking defects and blemishes and injecting that joy into our life outlook.

We have to remember that ד' would never favour one child over another- we all have an equal chance at life! (Although sometimes it may seem that the packages of some are longer and heavier to carry. We have to note that on this, ד' our loving Father will only give us packages that we can carry, therefore the bigger the load- the stronger ד' obviously thinks you are!!)

We can each accomplish our תפקיד in this world- with the tools we have and it's something that will fill us with tremendous שמחה, once we get the hang of it. Instead of trying to use someone else's tools for our mission or our tools for their mission- that simply won't work and will just cause the person to become upset and depressed.

### Challenges and troubles

We do have challenges as we mentioned above; physical suffering, emotional turmoil, financial troubles, relationships gone sour and many other problems too.... It's certainly normal for a person to feel upset, yet how do we see these challenges- as an annoying stone counting as an obstacle or as a stepping stone into our future?! (Simcha, Page 276, Rebbetzin S Feldbrand)

One morning when he was still a young child, R' Aharon of Belz accompanied his father R' Yissocher Dov to the מקוה. The water was very hot and little Aharon called out "Oy! Oy!" Soon enough he was saying, "Ah! Ah!" His father commented "that's the story of life. First the "Oy" of anguish and then the "Ah" of contentment! (Admor M'Belz)

"Suffering may come to enable us, to purge our thoughts of superficiality and to expand our horizons. It helps us to refine our commitments and clarify our goals, thus improving the faults in our personality. It enables us to concentrate more intensely on life's meaning.

Adversity refines our character and produces capability which would otherwise have remained dormant and it reveals strengths which would have been unknown. It gives us the opportunity to grow. It's ד' way of teaching us what our soul needs to experience to grow and develop our character and through this process come closer to achieving our potential."

### Not focusing on OUR goals



Look at how excited people become over games. Not just when they play but when they watch too- what is it that makes a game so exciting?

The answer lies in winning. Winning is what makes everything fun and creates a sparkle and shine. The players are trying harder and harder, the crowds cheer them on. Everyone is alive.

On the other hand, what is it that makes daily life/routine so tedious?! Work- boring? Study- dull?! The same answer must apply, because there's no prize to win, no goal to reach or competitions to compete at.

Yet this isn't true. People do work and study for a reason. This is their goal. This is the dream they dream and hope to realise. They toil to win. Why then are they not excited?!

We have to say that whilst they have targets, hopes, dreams, schemes, they are often not actively aware of them. They don't focus on them. They don't see themselves as winners or losers. They sometimes even forget why they are working at all. As such, their labours become a hard, heavy burden.

Look at outstanding players playing, or watch super sports people perform. You'll notice that they focus totally on their game. They only look to their target. They ignore the crowds; their attention is on the goal and THIS is what makes them stars. This is how they excel!!

Whatever their profession- top players dedicate themselves. This dedication helps them shoulder many burdens, it turns long, dull, distressing chores into simple and easy actions. Their job doesn't bore them, they see how it brings them closer to victory and they fulfil it with joy.

This is another path to שמחה. Focus on a target, on a goal that you want to reach. Ignore the crowds and watch yourself excel. This feeling of accomplishment brings forth real שמחה! (The need to be great, A.T Schwartz, Chapter 2)

### **Not smiling often enough**

Try locking yourself into a room for five minutes and during that time, put a fixed grin on your face. You'll find something very interesting happens to your emotions, it's very hard to cry, whilst you're smiling. Try this when you're feeling down and bingo, the magic of a smile. A smile releases hormones which will inevitably make you feel better. (Rabbi Akiva Tatz, "The paradox of happiness")

### **Thinking selfishly**

Teacher should conduct the following experiment with the class. The teacher can also use this as a starter and then come back to explain the message we learn from it here. If there is not enough time, then the teacher should just read it out instead.

Once a group of 50 people was attending a seminar.



Suddenly the speaker stopped and started giving each person a balloon. Each one was asked to write his/her name on it using a marker pen. Then all the balloons were collected and put into another room.

Now these delegates were allowed into that room and asked to find the balloon which had their name written on, within 5 minutes.

Everyone was frantically searching for their name, pushing, colliding with each other, and there was utter chaos.

At the end of 5 minutes, no one could find their own balloon.

Now each one was asked to randomly collect a balloon and give it to the person whose name was written on it. Within minutes everyone had their own balloon.

The speaker explained: This is exactly what is happening in our lives. Everyone is frantically looking for happiness all around, not knowing where it is. If we would only understand that our happiness lies in the happiness of other people, our problems would be solved! Give happiness to others and you will automatically achieve your own happiness.

Have you ever noticed that sometimes you gave a compliment to someone else and when you saw how much it meant to them, you felt warmed inside yourself! It makes you realise that you have actually made two people happy. You made the other person happy and as a result you left feeling extremely good yourself too.

We can learn this from the word ונתנו; the word is a palindrome and can be read both ways. We see from here that when we give, we are actually receiving ourselves! We often talk about this concept in relation to צדקה, but we can see that it applies to שמחה just as much. When we do something to make someone else happy, we end up making ourselves very happy in the process.

## Conclusion

The Chasam Sofer once met a man who had lived for over 100 years. He asked him how he had merited such a long life. The ד"א explained that his father had trained him never to doubt or complain. "Is that all?" the Chasam Sofer wondered.

The ד"א elaborated, "My father taught me that if a person questions the behaviours of The Creator, he is taken to the world of truth, where it's possible to perceive how everything is fair and just. In this world of falsehood, the truth cannot be comprehended. It's only because I never ask for explanations, that I haven't been called up yet!" (Simcha, Rebbetzen S. Feldbrand, pg 295)

This all really boils down to a solid בטחון. By just putting our entire existence onto 'T and trusting Him completely, not only will we live a much happier life, knowing that whatever is happening is because He wants it to happen, but we will be able to accomplish so much more too!!



We have to realise the following and keep it in mind constantly: If I am in pain, it was decided by 'ט. How I handle it though, is in my hands. Do I prolong it or do I release the pain?!

## In summary

In today's lesson we have learnt a number of things.

- A rich person is one who is happy with what they have. שמחה is a choice that we have to make.
- Looking throughout history, we saw how even though people went through tremendous pain, they didn't allow their circumstances to affect them and still made the choice to be happy.
- Our שמחה doesn't just affect ourselves, but it spills over to everyone else around us too!
  - We can overcome the obstacles that may stand in our way of achieving true שמחה.
  - We can focus on ourselves and make sure not to compare our lives with others.
  - We can make the choice to rise above the pain and let it 'make us' rather than 'break us'.
  - We can focus on a set goal to achieve and ignore all the distractions that may arise around us.
  - We need to smile more, even if we don't feel it.
  - We need to think of others and not just of ourselves.
- Our lives have been planned by the Master Planner. We need to trust that everything that is happening is for our good and is there to bring out the best in us. We don't need to allow it to affect our choice to be happy.
  - **If I am in pain, it was decided by 'ט. How I handle it though, is in my hands. Do I prolong it or do I release the pain?!**

Let us be wise and make the choice to be happy. We will see how this will only benefit us and ensure that we enjoy our lives to the fullest.

## Bonus

- Students should be given the accompanying 'summary' notebook, so that they can jot down notes and fill in the appropriate answers, during the lessons.
- Teacher can use the accompanying poster to hang up in the classroom, or it can be printed in small, as a keyring for the students to carry around with them as a reminder.



