

**A Life of Simcha**

**Opening Questions to throw out for Class Discussion**

What does the word Simcha mean to you? When in your life would you say you have felt ‘simcha’? Do you think feeling ‘simcha’ is something that can be commanded?

**Part 1-Let’s See what the Torah says about Simcha:**

<p>All these curses shall befall you; they shall pursue you and overtake you, until you are wiped out, because you did not heed the LORD your God and keep the commandments and laws that He enjoined upon you.</p> <p>They shall serve as signs and proofs against you and your offspring for all time.</p> <p>Because you would not serve the LORD your God in joy and gladness over the abundance of everything,</p>	<p>ובאו עליך כל הקללות האלה ורדפוך והשיגוך עד השמדך כי לא שמעת בקול יהוה אלהיך לשמר מצותיו וחקתיו אשר צוך</p> <p>והיו בך לאות ולמופת ובזרעך עד עולם</p> <p>תחת אשר לא עבדת את יהוה אלהיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרב כל</p>
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1. What is the reason the Torah gives for why terrible curses will befall the Jewish people?
2. Does this reason make sense?

**Part 2**

**Difficulty #1:** The Torah says we are punished for not serving God with simcha. Ask students which Mitzvos it makes sense should be done with simcha. What are Mitzvos that it would seem strange to demand they be done with Simcha? [Examples: Getting Divorced, Burial, Mourning, ]

Does God really expect us to perform those Mitzvos with Simcha?

**Difficulty #2:** The **Talmud (Pesachim 117a)** describes the requisite mindset for a Navi to receive Nevuah:

<p>The Divine Presence does not rest amidst a state of sorrow but rather through <i>simcha shel mitzva</i>.</p>	<p>למקדך שאין שכינה שורה לא מתוך עצלות, ולא מתוך עצבות, ולא מתוך שחוק, ולא מתוך קלות ראש, ולא מתוך שיחה, ולא מתוך דברים בטלים. אלא מתוך דבר שמחה של מצוה, שנאמר (מלכים ב ג) ועתה קחו לי מנגון, והיה כנגון המנגון ותהי עליו יד ה'</p>
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Think about the various prophecies in Tanach. Does it make sense that Yermeyahu should have been in a state of simcha when receiving the prophecies of the impending destruction of the Beis HaMikdash & Yerushalayim?

See how Yirmiyahu himself bemoans his own fate & task:

**Jeremiah 20:14**

Accursed be the day that I was born!	אָרוּר הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִלְדַתִּי בְּיוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִלְדַתִּי אֲמִי
Let not the day be blessed when my mother bore me!	אִלֵּי-יְהִי בְרוּךְ:

**Let's explore the deeper meaning of Simcha:**

Rav Moshe Wolfson שליט"א, Rosh Yeshiva of Torah VaDaas

**ולכן אז הוא זמן שמחה, וכמ"ש הרמב"ם (הל' לולב פ"ח) דעיקר שמחת הרגל הוא בסוכות. דע"י שאנו בוטחים בהקב"ה נמשך לנו שמחה, וכמ"ש כי בו ישמח לבנו כי בשם קדשו בטחנו, כי השמחה נמשכת ע"י הבטחון. וכאשר כבר אמרנו שהמלה "שמחה" היא מל' "סומך", שע"י שיש לאדם על מי לסמוך יכול הוא לשמות, וההיפך מזה "עצבות" הוא מלשון "נעזב" כי הצ' והז' מתחלפים, שע"י שהאדם נעזב ואין לו על מה לסמוך הוא נעזב. והאומה"ע "עצביהם כסף וזהב" שהם סומכים על כספם וזהבם אשר באמת אין בהם כדי סמיכה והם נעזבים ונעצבים.**

1. How does Rav Wolfson define the word Simcha?
2. How does he explain the connection between the word 'Simcha- שמחה' & 'Somech'-סומך'?
3. How does he explain sadness?

R' Wolfson defines simchas has having trust in God. He explains that there is a etymological connection between the word שמחה , happiness and סמך, reliance. A person feels 'Simcha' when they know they can rely on God & God is there with them. In this sense we can understand why the Torah expects us to have 'Simcha' in our performance of all the 613 Mitzvos since we should always feel no matter the situation that God is there with us. We are not alone & God has our back whatever the situation is.

Sadness on the other hand means feeling abandoned. Not relying on God & not sensing His presence in the acts we are performing.

**Let's see how R' Sacks defines 'simcha':**

“Happiness is about a lifetime, but joy lives in the moment. Happiness tends to be a cool emotion, but joy makes you want to dance and sing. It's hard to feel happy in the midst of uncertainty. But you can still feel joy.”

*Studies in Spirituality*, (Koren, 2021), p. 258.

“Happiness is largely a matter of satisfying needs and wants. Meaning, by contrast, is about a sense of purpose in life, especially by making positive contributions to the lives of others. Happiness is largely about how you feel in the present. Meaning is about how you judge your life as a whole: past, present, and future.”

*Studies in Spirituality* (Koren, 2021), p. 12.

“Happiness, or blessedness – the terms are almost interchangeable – means living in accord with the word and will of God, which is how the Bible construes the moral life. It means doing well, living in harmony with the fundamental values embedded in the universe by its Creator.”

*Morality* (Basic Books, 2020), p. 103.

1. How can these insights of R' Sacks on happiness answer our original question?

Simcha does not necessarily mean jumping up and down with a smile on one's face. Indeed it would be strange for God demand that type of emotional response in the performing of many mitzvos. However as R' Sacks describes 'simcha' as meaning '*– means living in accord with the word and will of God, which is how the Bible construes the moral life*' we can understand how such a mindset is demanded in all mitzvos. A Jew should feel by each mitzvah he is performing, no matter how 'happy or sad' that he is performing a meaningful & moral act in the eyes of the Creator.

We can also understand how Yermiyahu could receive prophecy despite the sad & harsh message he was called to deliver. While he probably felt sad about the impending destruction, he still would be able to maintain a sense of simcha as being a person carrying out the will of God which brings ultimate meaning to life.