

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Mishpatim

“AND THEY GAZED UPON HASHEM AND THEY ATE AND DRANK.”
(SHMOS 24:11)

The elders of the Jewish people had some form of prophetic vision

THE TARGUM ONKELOS teaches us a fascinating interpretation of the above *pasuk*: “And they saw the glory of Hashem and they were happy with their offerings, that were accepted [by Hashem] with good will, as if they had eaten and drunk.” According to Onkelos, at the time of the giving of the Torah, the elders of the Jewish people had some form of prophetic vision of Hashem’s glory, and reached a state of *simcha* from having their sacrificial offerings accepted. They rejoiced as if they had feasted with food and drink. In other words, the spiritual ecstasy they attained reached a level that was equal to the happiness and satisfaction of a sumptuous banquet.

The Torah’s description of the emotional state of these distinguished elders seems strange. If the *pasuk* was dealing with common people of a different generation, with little connection to the spiritual realm, it would be understandable to describe their epitome of joy as being a delicious meal. Such individuals revel in physical pleasures and it is only logical and consistent to use the analogy of gastronomic enjoyment as a yardstick of their happiness. However, the *pasuk* is describing the nobility of the Jewish people, just moments after receiving the Torah at Sinai and experiencing a prophetic vision of Hashem. Such righteous people rejoicing in the acceptance of their offerings by Hashem are on a peak of spiritual happiness. It seems inappropriate to use imagery of a sensory pleasure to describe such holy and esoteric emotions. Imagine describing Moshe Rabbenu’s *simcha* upon receiving the Torah directly from Hashem as, “The joy of a good steak and a beer.” The metaphor crashes on one’s sensibilities.

All our deeds should converge on one focal point

In truth, there is no inconsistency. The *pasuk*, according to the Targum Onkelos, is revealing to us the heights of human perfection. Our sages teach us that all our deeds should converge on one focal point: the service of Hashem. As codified in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 231), our mundane activities such as sleeping, eating and even recreation, should be performed with this lofty goal in mind: “I am doing this action in order to be healthy and refreshed to serve Hashem better.” One who has this lofty intention in mind can transform his daily humdrum routines into *mitzvos*. The *tzadikim* mentioned in the *pasuk* were on such a celestial level that their eating was a spiritual experience, a spiritual joy, and one of such a high degree that it served as the description for the happiness derived from the sacrificial offerings at Sinai. Perhaps this “joy of feasting” is even greater than any purely spiritual *simcha* because it has the support of the physical body sensing pleasure together with the spiritual soul.

Infuse every moment of our lives with spiritual meaning and inspiration

We can elevate our daily activities – by having the correct intentions – and convert them into *mitzvos*. Every bite of food we take, every second we sleep and every moment of exercise can be done with the purpose of Hashem’s service in mind, and thereby transformed into *mitzvos*. Merely having the proper thoughts can boost these actions into an entirely different orbit of human behavior. Let us take a moment to think about our purpose in life, and our ultimate goal, so that we infuse every moment of our lives with spiritual meaning and inspiration. All our deeds will become *mitzvos*, with new depth and sanctity, and our lives will be permeated with the incredible fulfillment, satisfaction and joy of serving our Father and King, Creator of the Universe.