

Mussar HaTorah

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

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Shavuos

“AND BOAZ ATE AND DRANK AND HIS HEART WAS GLADDENED...”
(RUS 3:7)

**This happiness was
due to one factor**

AFTER A SUCCESSFUL HARVEST, Boaz went to the threshing floor to sleep there for the evening, guarding his produce from thieves. Before retiring for the night, he ate and drank, and then, the *pasuk* testifies, Boaz’s heart was gladdened. Rashi, quoting our sages in the Midrash, explains that this happiness was due to one factor: Boaz was learning Torah.

The wording of the *pasuk* does not seem to be describing a purely spiritual state. The verse doesn’t say that Boaz was inspired, sanctified or spiritually elevated. It states that his heart was happy – the simple, physical feeling of joy. The flow of the words also implies this: just as Boaz engaged in eating and drinking, so too he experienced the pleasure of gladness of the heart.

**Why weren’t these the
activities that triggered
Boaz’s happiness?**

Let us examine the factors that could have caused this physical elation. Boaz had many reasons to feel exceptional happiness at this moment: He had just concluded a highly successful harvest after ten years of famine. Imagine the mindset of a landowner who has endured a decade of lost crops during the years of hunger, and now a bumper crop has been harvested. He goes down to his threshing floor and sees himself surrounded by all the bounty he has been granted by Hashem. To top it all off, he has a satisfying and enjoyable meal. Surely he would have great reasons to be celebrating his success. Why weren’t these the activities that triggered Boaz’s happiness? Why was Boaz’s physical joy kindled by his Torah study when all his material success did not achieve it?

Genuine happiness requires a blending of the two components of a person in one harmonious response. The physical and the spiritual must join together in a joyous symphony. This defines the difference between pleasure and happiness. A good meal may stimulate the palate and a storehouse full of grain can create feelings of wealth, but that merely provides a transient sense of pleasure. The nerve endings in the body and the mind may respond, but the soul does not join in the party. Real happiness, on the other hand, is a deeper, more permanent feeling of well-being. It is a joint experience of physical and spiritual rejoicing together in meaningful, enduring accomplishment, not mere fleeting pleasures of this world.

In this brief comment of Rashi, our sages are enlightening us to the fact that there is no greater avenue to true feelings of happiness than Torah study. Being able to delve into the depths of Hashem’s Torah provides us with the greatest sense of satisfaction. Thus, Boaz only found ultimate gladness of the heart in his Torah study that night, surrounded as he was by all the material blessings of his successful harvest.

**It is not only the GPS that
steers us on the roads to
the world-to-come**

As we celebrate on *Shavuos* the giving of the Torah, Hashem’s greatest gift to our people, let us appreciate that it is not only the GPS that steers us on the roads to the world-to-come, and helps us avoid wrong turns that would lead us to unpleasant destinations and unimaginable suffering. It is also the ultimate handbook to authentic happiness and enduring satisfaction, even in this world. It gives us the recipe to combine the physical with the spiritual, giving us not only transient pleasure but true gladness of the heart. How fortunate are we to be the recipients of this greatest gift of love from Hashem, our loving Father and Creator! *Ashreinu ma tov chelkeinu!*