

**Good Yom Tov Everyone.** It is customary to make a "siyum" - a celebration upon the completion of study of parts of the Torah. Thus, on Simchas Torah we celebrate the conclusion of the weekly readings of the holy Torah. There does not seem to be any secular concept of a "siyum." For example, when one finishes high school or college, lhavdil, one celebrates their graduation. Graduation usually signifies the end of studying. Many students even throw away or even burn their books at the end of the semester or upon graduation. In Judaism, however, after finishing one part of learning, we immediately commence the next part or we just start all over again. Thus, on Simchas Torah we read the last portion of the Torah and then "rewind" it the beginning and read "Bereishis." One of the lessons therefore of Simchas Torah, is that to be a Jew means that one continuously learns Torah and never sees him or herself as being "done with learning." One of the ways we "psych" ourselves up to want to learn is by celebrating "siyums." Thus on Simchas Torah, we sing and dance with the Torah to reinvigorate our interest in Torah learning. Let us therefore tell the following true story in which we see the power of "song and dance" to inspire amazing things in life.

Inside the tank, the soldiers were silent and grim-faced. They knew they were in trouble. Where were the other tanks? Where was the rest of the unit that had accompanied them into Jenin, the Arab-occupied city to which they had been dispatched? Their mission — finding and destroying a terrorist cell that was planning an attack against Israel — had been successfully completed. The men in the tank should have been exulting, feeling the giddy pleasure of their escape from danger. Instead, they felt a sense of dread roll in, thick as fog upon the ocean. The West Bank was no place to make a wrong turn, but that was apparently what this tank had done. Now Noam and his fellow soldiers found themselves deep in hostile territory, protected by their vehicle's heavy, clunking armor and yet vulnerable as a lifeboat lost at sea. It took only a few moments for their tank to attract a fleet of Palestinian vehicles filled with armed men.

The pop of Molotov cocktails and persistent pounding of gunfire against the tank's metal exterior told them that they were surrounded and under intense attack. It was very difficult to shoot back at the wild Arabs who surrounded the giant tank like ants would crawl over a turtle. There was little doubt where this would end. Their names would soon be added to the list of the dead, or worse yet, the captured. The men began to glance around at each other, quickly catching the raw panic in each other's eyes.

Noam, however, was more confused than frightened. How could this be? How could the new life he had found be snuffed out before it had even had a chance to take root? He thought about his friends at the Stoliner beis midrash. Would they miss the young soldier who had wandered into their midst and then stayed? It was only a few months ago that Noam, a confirmed secular Israeli, had heard the thunder of davening as it boomed out through the windows of the Stoliner beis midrash into the Yerushalmi street where he had been strolling.

It was a Shabbos morning. The stores were all shuttered and the normally bustling neighborhood was quiet. The sound of the davening was not like anything Noam had ever heard before. It was loud and exuberant, as if the men were literally trying to shout to the heavens. Noam had stepped up to the door of the beis midrash and then, ever so cautiously, peeked inside. He knew the men were praying, but it was not like any prayer he had ever heard in the synagogue his family occasionally attended. There, the prayers were formal and cold. Here, the prayers were bursting with emotion, shooting up like molten lava from the core of the men's souls. Their faces were etched with expressions of intensity and joy. This, he surmised, was what prayer was supposed to be. He could not think of anything in his presumably free and pleasure-filled life that came close to the simchah he saw in this shul.

From that day on, he kept coming back. Whenever he had time off from his army obligations, he was there among the Chassidim, absorbing all he could of the Torah and holiness that flowed freely among them. And now, as quickly as his new world had revealed itself, it would be taken from him. At least, he thought to himself, he would die a baal teshuvah. As he sat inside the cramped tank replaying the scenes of the past few months in his mind, his fellow soldiers sat silently as well, each man buried in a mound of fears and regrets that had crashed down upon him like a sudden avalanche.

Noam looked at their faces and suddenly realized — this was not the way. If he was leaving this world, why leave it with terror etched on his soul? But more importantly, why not reach out to Hashem? Why not use the overwhelming power he had discovered at the Stoliner beis midrash? His favorite Stoliner niggun began to play in his head. Soon, he began to sing it out loud — a beautiful melody that needed no words to do its work. The other soldiers stared at him, thinking that, in his panic, he had lost touch with reality.

But Noam told them, no, he was well- connected with reality — a truer, higher reality than this death-trap of a tank and these marauding mobs around them. "If we're going to die, what's the point of going in fear?" he asked them. "Let's go out praising Hashem!" With the space available to him, he rose to his feet and began to dance, waving his hands in front of him and singing his niggun, an ecstatic Chassid in army fatigues. His joy pulled irresistibly at the other soldiers' souls, and they rose to their feet to join him. As they danced in the limited space and sang to Hashem, their beleaguered tank became a peaceful island of spirituality in a cruel, raging sea. Then came the explosion. It was a thunderous boom that shook the men from their heads to their feet. From the sound of it, they had taken a direct hit. They scrambled back to their posts and tried to assess the damage. Peering cautiously out of the tank, they could not believe the sight before them. The explosion had not come from Palestinian fire, but from Israeli tanks and trucks that had come to their rescue. They were saved! "Hodu l'Hashem ki tov, ki l'olam chasdo — Give thanks to Hashem because He is good and His kindness is forever!" the men shouted.

The soldiers were certain down to their very depths that they had been the fortunate recipients of a modern-day miracle. That night, Noam was consumed with the desire to go to the Stoliner Rebbe and tell him of the day's amazing events. He could not wait a day, not even a minute. He frantically rushed through the streets until he reached the beis midrash. Breathless, he told the Chassidim present in the room that he had an urgent need to speak to the Rebbe. "I'm sorry, Noam," said one man. "The Rebbe has gone home for the night. He isn't available anymore today. What is the problem? Maybe one of us can help you." Noam recounted his story to a circle of avid listeners. He told of the mission in Jenin, the wrong turn, the attack on his seemingly doomed tank and of course, the niggun and tefillah that had saved his life. "Tell me," asked a member of his rapt audience, "which niggun was it?" Noam began to sing, and the Chassidim around him started to hum along. Within a few moments, they were all singing aloud. The men, dressed in their long black coats and round hats, began to dance around Noam, who stood in the center, clothed in his army uniform. Their voices blended and rose together, lifting their souls aloft as well. It was a day to celebrate — a day in which courage, hope, and faith in Hashem had triumphed over all. (Stories for the Jewish Heart II, p. 167, R. Binyomin Pruzansky)

Let us all be inspired by the singing and dancing on Simchas Torah! **Good Yom Tov Everyone.**

**A Refuah Shleimah to Shusha Malka bas Golda "Anyone who brings merit to the masses, no wrongdoing will come into his hands."**

Avos 5:21 To sponsor a drasha: M. Wolfberg 19 Koritz Way, Suite 212, Spring Valley, New York 10977 (845) 362-3234 **THIS PAPER CONTAINS HOLY WRITING AND SHOULD NOT BE DISPOSED OF IN THE GARBAGE**