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# GROWTH

## At The

# YOM TOV TABLE

*Special Holiday Double-Sided Edition*

BS"D  
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5785

## SIMCHAT TORAH

### One Year Later

One year. How it flew by, but how long it also felt. Words cannot properly capture or describe what a year this was for the Jewish people; the depth of the tragedies and extent of the horrors are beyond human imagination. The victims of 10/7... the hostages... the soldiers... the families... and the nightmarish year that followed, where we watched the world turn upside down.

As we reach the anniversary of the day this all began one year ago, one can't help look back and reflect.

We learnt many things over the past year. We were reminded that we are still in exile, and, especially with the finish line marking redemption being closer than ever, we cannot get too comfortable. Not yet...

We felt how when one of us gets cut, we all bleed.

We experienced countless instances of open miracles, with clear signs of G-d looking out for us and protecting us.

We saw that there are so many holy and brave souls that put *Am Yisrael* above their own lives, dying in the front lines just to protect their brethren.

We found that there is truly no other nation like ours, who can respond to such painful atrocities with indescribable unity and voluntarily dedicate itself globally to assisting through financial, medical, and spiritual aid.

We discovered through our enemies that, despite what some may have doubted, we are indeed the same timeless Jews as our ancestors, and haven't lost an ounce of our vigor, vitality, or identity.

We learnt that now more than ever, the world needs the Jewish People. As was the same throughout history, we were stationed here as ambassadors of G-d, in a planet filled with madness and confusion, to serve as beacons of light, hope, and moral clarity. Over the past year, we became aware of just how much meaning and purpose we have in life, seeing firsthand that we weren't just born Jewish, but born to be Jews.

May Hashem comfort *Am Yisrael*, and may we elevate the Jewish souls that were slaughtered over the past year by never forgetting what they died for, and by remembering what we have to live on for...

### Beresheet: Torah & Science

I once heard the following mind-blowing *chiddush* from R' YY Jacobson that attests to the clear truth behind the principle that Torah learnt in its most organic form and genuine science ultimately complement each other.

Many "scientists" believe that to satisfy the core tenet of our existence being predicated upon the creation of time, space, and matter, they need to come onto some absurd theory involving a "Big Bang" without the presence or providence of a Creator.

However, the Torah, being the blueprint of reality, answers that question in the very first verse. The most literal and widely accepted understanding of *בראשית ברא אלוקים את השמים ואת הארץ* is "In the beginning, G-d created the Heavens and the Earth."

Interestingly, reading this *pasuk* with a deeper lens opens up an incredible scientific insight: G-d created (*ברא אלוקים*) the 3 core elements that were necessary for this world: time (alluded to in the word *בראשית* [in the beginning] - a reference to time), space (*את השמים* - the Heavens), and matter (*ואת הארץ* - and the land). Brilliant!! What took physicists thousands of years to postulate has been referenced in the Torah all along.

This is just one of countless examples which demonstrate that Torah and science were both created by the same G-d, and how learning both with an unbiased objective of truth leads to a beautiful place of understanding and appreciating Hashem on a profound level...

## "So What?"

R' Menachem Goldberger shared a touching story with a profound message.

After the Holocaust, Reb Shlomo Carlebach would often travel to random towns and villages on the mission to be *mekarev* as many Jews as he could, scattered from all over. On one such travel, he happened to be in a small city in Texas. As he was on his trip, he realized that he didn't come across any Jewish communities or Jews at all in the area. It was Erev Shabbat, and he wasn't sure how this would end up playing out. He decided he would make his way to the nearest *mikveh* and immerse himself in its purifying waters before Shabbat. When he finally arrived, he was shocked upon finding another person at the *mikveh*. What raised Reb Carlebach's eyebrows was that the other man didn't look Jewish at all; he was in fact dressed as a cowboy. "What's a cowboy doing at the *mikveh*?" he couldn't help pondering. But he didn't have to wonder for long. As they made conversation, the cowboy told his story, and Reb Carlebach listened attentively.

*"My family lived in Europe before the war. I grew up in a chasidish home, and we were part of the Vizhnitz community. Every Shabbat the Vizhnitzer Rebbe had a tisch<sup>1</sup>, and while all the grown-ups sat around the Rebbe, we kids would have our spot under the Rebbe's table. There we would play and hang around. I was usually the last one awake after all my friends fell asleep, and I remember how the Rebbe took note of that, too. He was the nicest Rabbi; he would often give me attention, pass me food under the table, and display genuine care for me. One week, at his tisch, he was giving a special speech I'll never forget. He told us that the yetzer hara does anything he can to prevent us from doing a Mitzvah, one of his biggest tactics being to play mind games. Many times, people feel enthusiastic about going to learn, or to perform a mitzvah, and the Satan whispers, 'You? You think your learning or your mitzvot are significant? You don't remember getting angry earlier today, or looking at something you shouldn't have yesterday? How about when you spoke lashon hara about that other guy? It's not like you're a perfect tzaddik anyway... forget about going out of your way for a mitzvah; it's not like you have a perfect streak to maintain...' I remember how the Rebbe looked at his crowd and then yelled out: 'SO WHAT?! That's what you respond to him! SO WHAT?! Let me be a tzaddik for only two minutes, then!' The crowd was drinking his words of wisdom with thirst, and after he concluded addressing his message, the Rebbe turned to me, looked me in the eyes, and said it again. 'Never feel that you're unworthy to do what's right. Even if you aren't perfect, you can at least be a tzaddik for those two minutes!'"*

*"Not too long after, World War II broke out, and my entire family had been killed. After the Holocaust was finally over, I went my own way and moved to a small town in the middle of nowhere to rebuild my life, away from it all. But every here and there, I feel the urge to do something good, and I feel motivated to do something holy. And that's when the Vizhnitzer Rebbe's words flash back in my mind: 'Even if you aren't perfect, you can still be a tzaddik at least for the next two minutes!' To this day, I occasionally get these flashbacks with the Rebbe speaking in his loving voice, and today happened to be one of those days. I craved some form of spirituality, and decided to go to the mikveh. Without the Vizhnitzer Rebbe, you wouldn't be meeting me in a mikveh today."*

There are many lessons one can derive from this touching story. Of them is that while it is definitely important to make an accounting with oneself to see what areas can use improvement, it is nevertheless crucial to not lose sight of what you have accomplished thus far and to feel triumphant and fulfilled in the areas you are improving in. To be satisfied but not content is a healthy outlook; dwelling in past mistakes and allowing them to have an outcome in present and future opportunities is nothing but a delusion of the *yetzer hara*, who wants nothing more than for you to despair.

*"All of the Jewish People have a share in the World-to-Come, as it is stated, And your people, all of them righteous, shall possess the land for all time..."<sup>2</sup>*

1. A *tisch* is a gathering where a Rebbe (a spiritual leader) shares teachings, sings, and eats with his followers; a social and spiritual event in Hasidic communities.

2. Found prefacing every chapter of Pirkei Avot; the verse quoted is Isaiah 60:21.

## Just One Thing

The Gemara comments that one who learns something 100 times is incomparable to one who reviews it 101 times. Is this coming to diminish the one who reviewed the *sugya* 100 times? Is that a small feat?

R' Igal Haimoff once shared a beautiful insight. Indeed, the one who reviewed the *sugya* 100 times has accomplished something tremendous. However, the Gemara means to teach that the 101 reviews is on a much higher level, because he went ahead and took the extra step to come *even* closer and bring *even* more *nachat ruach* to Boreh Olam through that extra stretch.

Hence, Chazal are setting forth a powerful theme, that the difference between great and even greater is just another step in the right direction. Any extra moves we put ahead to bring more and more *nachat* to our Father is tremendous, and that one extra push makes all the difference...

## Outsmarted

In one of R' Ovadia Yosef's years spent living in Egypt, he was given a difficult time after he erected his sukkah. The holiday was fast approaching, and the local anti-Semites were harassing the rabbi about his "illegal extension." R' Ovadia knew that they were just looking to cause trouble, and so, rather than feed in to their aggression by resisting, he calmly responded, "No problem. Just give me a week and I'll have it taken down." They were satisfied, having thought that they caused him an inconvenience; little did they know that a week later, sukkot would already be over...<sup>1</sup>

As Sukkot comes to a close, we now enter the next phase of carrying the *emuna* and *bitachon* throughout the year, into our regular day-to-day routine. Are you up for the challenge?

1. Anecdote shared by R' Yaniv Meirov

**"Simchat Torah is the day we celebrate the fact that we never stop dancing with the Torah."** (R' Jonathan Sacks)