

What Makes You Feel Alive?

Yitzchak, Entertainment, and the Sweetness of Torah

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01 A world that cannot stop watching

There was a time when work filled much of a person's day. When he finished, darkness itself limited what he could do, and he went to sleep. Earlier generations certainly had recreation, but modern conditions have given entertainment a much larger place in ordinary life. We now have hours of activity after sunset, and an enormous industry devoted to filling them.

We live in a world that has become extraordinarily good at entertaining people. Think about how many people, how much money, and how much ingenuity go into making sure that we are never bored. There is always something to watch, something to hear, something to follow. And today, we do not even have to go anywhere to find it. We carry it around in our pockets.

A person comes home after a long day and says, "I'm finished. I have no energy left." Ask him to do one more thing, and he looks at you as though you have asked him to climb a mountain. But then a game comes on. Suddenly, he is interested. He is involved. He is sitting forward in his chair. And if it goes into overtime, apparently he has strength for overtime too. Where did that strength come from?

If we understand what people are looking for when they play, when they laugh, and when they become absorbed in entertainment, we can understand something very deep about our own neshamos. And eventually, we will understand something about the name Yitzchak.

Let's begin with Source 1, Bereishis 21:6.

SOURCE 1 | Bereishis 21:6

ותאמר שרה צחק עשה לי אלקים כל השמע יצחק לי

Sarah said: "G-d has brought me laughter; everyone who hears will laugh with me."

The birth of this child brings laughter into the world. And laughter becomes his name: Yitzchak. Now, we understand why Sarah is happy. We understand the extraordinary joy of this birth. But this is one of the Avos. His name expresses something fundamental about his life and his contribution to Klal Yisrael.

Our opening question: Why should laughter express the essence of an Av?

The word sechok includes laughter and play. We are exploring the delight expressed through them: enjoying an experience for its own sake. That is the thread connecting a child at play with the name Yitzchak. Keep that question in mind. First, let us look at a ball.

02 The same ball and a different experience

Suppose I approach someone and say, “Could you do me a favour? There is a ball at one end of the field. Would you please bring it over to the other end?” He is a nice person. He does me the favour. Then I say, “Thank you very much. Now could you please take it back?” He looks at me. “Why?” “Because I would like it back at the other end.”

Perhaps he does it once more. But if I keep asking him to move this ball back and forth, how long is he going to continue? At some point he will say, “Rabbi, I’m sorry. I have other things to do. This is tiring. What exactly are we accomplishing?” And he would be right.

Now put that same person into a game. He runs after the ball. He chases it down the field. Someone takes it away, so he runs after that person. He gets it back and runs in the other direction. He works much harder than he would have worked doing my little favour. And when the game finishes, he may ask whether there is time to play a little longer.

What changed? The ball did not become lighter. The field did not become shorter. His legs did not suddenly become stronger.

Moving the ball as a task was a burden. Moving the ball as a game was a pleasure.

That is the distinction we need to understand. If pleasure simply meant avoiding effort, games would make very little sense. People willingly put tremendous effort into them. So what is the pleasure?

Let's look at Source 2, a short excerpt from the discussion of play.

SOURCE 2 | Tiferes Shimshon, Vayeira, p. 226 | excerpt

“שחוק” עניינו — פעולות ללא קביעת מטרה מסוימת.

“Play” means activities undertaken without establishing a particular objective.

He means an objective beyond the activity itself. Of course, a game has rules, and the players want to win. But the game does not have to produce something useful outside itself in order to be enjoyable. The enjoyment is in playing.

03 The pleasure of being alive

Watch a little child running around a room. He runs there. He runs back. He jumps. He laughs. Ask him, “What did you accomplish?” He will hardly understand your question. He was having a wonderful time. What we are seeing is the pleasure of life itself. The child is moving. He is active. He is experiencing his own vitality. He does not need to turn it into a product or an achievement. He enjoys being alive.

We adults also have that capacity, but much of the time it becomes covered over. There are things to finish, things to repair, people to answer, and problems to solve. We can become so occupied with managing life that we scarcely notice the gift of life. Then something happens that makes us notice.

Imagine someone who has been in danger and is brought to safety. A moment earlier, he did not know whether he would survive. Now he is standing on solid ground. He takes a breath. What is so wonderful about that breath? He has been breathing his entire life. But now he feels what he ordinarily takes for granted. He is alive.

Of course, a person will tell you that he enjoys competition, suspense, skill, and winning. Those experiences awaken his abilities. He is thinking, reacting, moving, and exercising his powers. The rules give those powers a setting in which to express themselves. Beneath the particular excitement is the pleasure of experiencing his own vitality. He does not have to think, “I am enjoying being alive,” in order to experience it.

Play gives a person a way to experience that vitality. For a while, he is absorbed in the activity itself, enjoying the exercise of his powers.

The pleasure of the game makes the exertion itself desirable. As a favour, moving the ball was something to get through. As a game, it was something he wanted to experience.

Now we can ask a deeper question. Why should life itself be so sweet? We know that we want to live. But what is the source of the pleasure contained in life?

04 Where the sweetness comes from

Please turn to Source 3, Tehillim 36:10.

SOURCE 3 | Tehillim 36:10

כי עמך מקור חיים באורך נראה אור

For with You is the source of life; in Your light we see light.

Hashem is the source of life. That is a statement we believe. But think about what it means right now. There is a difference between the things that sustain our lives and life itself. You can put food in the refrigerator for tomorrow. You can put money aside for next month. You can prepare clothing for next season. Can you store away tomorrow's life? Can you say, "I have enough life in reserve; I won't need any more for a while?"

Our existence is being sustained at every moment. We feel as though we are standing on our own. But beneath that feeling is a continuous gift from Hashem. The profound sweetness of life is rooted in its source. Hashem is the source of life, and the pleasure of life ultimately comes from Him. A person may never think about that connection. He may be entirely absorbed in the game. Nevertheless, this is the spiritual root beneath the human experience.

We should distinguish the root of this pleasure from our awareness of it. We can receive life from Hashem and enjoy it without recognizing its source. Enjoying a game does not automatically mean that we have developed conscious attachment to Hashem. But recognizing where our life comes from allows us to turn toward Him deliberately. The same gift that we once took for granted can become the beginning of a conscious relationship.

Life's sweetness is rooted in Hashem, the source of all life.

That brings us to a statement many of us have learned, but perhaps have not connected with our everyday experience of pleasure. **Let's read Source 4, from the opening chapter of Mesillas Yesharim.**

SOURCE 4 | Mesillas Yesharim 1 | supplementary excerpt

שהאדם לא נברא אלא להתענג על ה' ולהנות מזיו שכינתו, שזהו התענוג האמיתי והעידון הגדול מכל העידונים שיכולים להמצא.

A person was created solely to delight in Hashem and to enjoy the radiance of His Shechinah, for this is the true pleasure and the greatest delight of all the delights that can exist.

The Ramchal explains that the complete realization of this pleasure belongs to Olam Haba, and that this world is the place of preparation. But notice what the ultimate destination is: delight in Hashem. We understand delight. We understand looking forward to something. We understand wanting an experience to continue. Our capacity for delight can find its deepest expression in a relationship with Hashem. And that changes the way we can think about Torah.

Let's look at Source 4A, from the conclusion of Mesillas Yesharim.

SOURCE 4A | Mesillas Yesharim 26, as cited in Tiferes Shimshon p. 228 | excerpt

הנה הדבק בו ית' דביקות גמורה, יוכל למשוך ממנו ית' אפילו משך החיים עצמם, שהוא מה שמתייחס לו בפרט יותר מן הכל.

One who cleaves to Him completely can draw from Him even the flow of life itself, which is associated with Him particularly, more than anything else.

That is why the argument goes deeper than enjoying our own energy. The life we enjoy is continuously being received from Hashem. Attachment to the source of life is therefore the deepest possibility contained in the pleasure of life.

05 Learning that we want to stay with

Let me ask you a question. Why do we learn Torah? One answer is that we need to know what to do. We need to know how to keep Shabbos, how to make a brachah, and how to conduct our business honestly. Another answer is that learning Torah is itself a mitzvah. Both answers are true. But there is something further to discover. Can Torah become something we love being involved in? Can a person reach the point where he opens a sefer because he wants to be there?

Let's look at Source 5, Mishlei 8:30.

SOURCE 5 | Mishlei 8:30

ואהיה אצלו אמון ואהיה שעשעים יום יום משחקת לפניו בכל עת

I was beside Him as a master craftsman; I was a delight day after day, playing before Him at all times.

In the translation, “master craftsman” is an interpretive rendering of amon. For our discussion, notice the words that follow: delight, day after day, playing before Him. Here is the description of Torah as sha’ashuim. Now, that word needs care. We are speaking about something profoundly serious. Torah requires accuracy, concentration, responsibility, and effort. But seriousness and enjoyment can exist together.

But we still owe ourselves an explanation. How does delight in a passage of Torah become delight in Hashem? Surely a person can enjoy many subjects. What is distinctive here? **Let's look at Source 5A, the formulation cited through Nefesh HaChaim.**

SOURCE 5A | Formulation cited through Nefesh HaChaim, Shaar 4, in Tiferes Shimshon p. 229

תורה דא קוב"ה

Torah is the Holy One, blessed be He.

Torah is profoundly united with Hashem. These words do not describe Hashem as a physical object or a book. They express why delight in Torah itself is a form of attachment to Hashem. We can enjoy understanding an explanation, but the depth beneath that enjoyment is our engagement with His Torah. Intellectual stimulation is part of what we experience; beneath it, Torah brings us into attachment with the source of life Himself.

Think of someone who loves working through a difficult problem. He may spend a long time on it. He may become frustrated. He may try one explanation and discover that it does not work. Why does he continue? Because the question has engaged him. He wants to understand. Then suddenly something becomes clear. A word in Rashi that he had passed over now opens up the whole discussion. He looks again. "How did I miss that?" He wants to tell someone. That pleasure is real. And the effort was part of reaching it.

But there are two pleasures here that we must distinguish. Understanding a difficult explanation brings intellectual pleasure. There is also something deeper: the pleasure of life itself. Delight in Torah reaches beyond the successful solution. A person can come to cherish involvement in Torah itself, through which he becomes attached to Hashem. He may still be working toward the answer and yet treasure the learning. That matters especially for someone who learns slowly. His relationship with Torah is not measured only by how quickly he solves a problem.

Remember the ball. The presence of effort does not prove that something is a burden. People exert themselves willingly when they love the activity. We should therefore be careful about assuming that someone who spends hours learning must be living a life of constant deprivation. There can be enormous pleasure within that learning.

Let's read Source 6, Tehillim 119:92.

SOURCE 6 | Tehillim 119:92

לולי תורתך שעשעי אז אבדתי בעניי

Had Your Torah not been my delight, I would have perished in my suffering.

Dovid HaMelech does not say that he had no suffering. He says that within his suffering, Torah was his delight. There was somewhere his soul could live.

Can learning be more than a task we complete? Yes. It can become something that nourishes us and that we want to return to.

06 The spiritual root beneath the experience

To understand this more deeply, we need to consider the worlds, the different levels through which Hashem brings creation into existence. In our physical world we see many separate things: living creatures, time, place, and the forces of nature. These realities have spiritual roots. Hashem gives existence to them through an ordered creation.

The same principle applies to the underlying life that animates creation. The experience of life reaches toward the Divine vitality sustaining the whole. In a higher world, that connection is elevated. In our world, it can appear in an extremely low form: a person becoming absorbed in an activity without any worthwhile purpose beyond it.

That helps explain a paradox. The underlying power can be very deep while the activity that awakens it can be very empty. We must therefore ask both questions: what is the root of the pleasure, and with what form of life am I attaching myself through it? The fact that the root of life is Hashem does not turn every expression of amusement into a holy activity.

A profound source of pleasure does not make every use of that pleasure holy.

07 What our pleasures do to us

Until now, we have spoken about what pleasure feels like and its spiritual root. Now we need to ask what pleasure does to us. When we enjoy something deeply, when we give it our attention and become absorbed in it, it enters us. This is something that forms the substance of our inner life.

We can see part of this in ordinary life. A person who repeatedly enjoys mocking others becomes increasingly comfortable with mockery. He begins to look for the next opportunity. His eye becomes trained to notice someone's weakness and turn it into a joke. But the effect of pleasure reaches deeper than this familiar process of character formation.

The same power can work in a very different direction. A person delights in the honesty of a Torah argument. He admires the care with which a distinction is made. He learns to appreciate a question rather than dismiss it. Those pleasures also leave something inside him.

Let's turn to Source 7, on page 231. This excerpt describes what happens when someone delights in Torah itself.

SOURCE 7 | Tiferes Shimshon, Vayeira, p. 231 | excerpt

כאשר הוא משתעשע בתורה, בלי מחשבות על תועלת עתידית כלשהי, אלא משתעשע עם עצם המהות — הריהו סופג את עצם מהות התורה אל תוכו, נעשה דבוק בתורה, והוא עצמו הופך למציאות של תורה.

When he delights in Torah, without thoughts of some future benefit, but delights in its very essence, he absorbs the essence of Torah into himself, becomes attached to Torah, and he himself becomes a reality of Torah.

That is a remarkable claim. He learns Torah, enjoys it, becomes attached to it, and it helps form the person he becomes. This is why the things in which we become absorbed matter so much. The concern goes beyond the clock. Of course time matters. But there is also the question of what we are welcoming into ourselves.

Think again about chess or watching a game. The mind enjoys skill, suspense, and involvement. Underneath these experiences is our capacity to delight in being alive. That capacity comes from Hashem. We should not call its source the *sitra achra*. The question is where we invest the capacity and what attachment we cultivate through it.

When amusement becomes an absorbing world of its own, the concern goes beyond the Torah we could have learned during that time. By taking our deepest delight in something empty of spiritual purpose, we can acquire an inward attachment to that emptiness. Something enters the soul through the pleasure itself. Calling this merely an undeveloped capacity would miss the seriousness of that effect.

There is also recreation that helps a person rest, recover strength, or enjoy time with family. We should not turn this argument into a blanket condemnation of every game. We are asking what becomes the home of our inner life: what we live for, what we long for, and where we find our deepest delight.

That is a more demanding claim than our example of mockery. It concerns attachment to purposeless amusement even when the person is not laughing at someone else or doing something openly cruel. The contrast is between absorbing emptiness and absorbing Torah. The pleasure that attaches us to something also gives it a deeper place within us.

The question is not only what I could have learned during that time. What has this enjoyment introduced into my neshamah?

Empty amusement can become a cherished inward attachment. We have to ask what place we are giving it within ourselves.

What we delight in helps shape us. What am I teaching myself to enjoy?

Ask yourself, “What do I look forward to? What holds my attention? What am I teaching myself to enjoy?” We cannot simply command ourselves to enjoy something and expect the feeling to appear immediately. But we can give a taste the opportunity to develop. There are subjects we once knew very little about that later became fascinating. Someone explained them properly. We began to understand the questions. We noticed details we had never noticed before. Torah deserves that opportunity.

Sometimes a person says, “I tried learning. I didn’t enjoy it.” We should listen carefully to that. Perhaps he was learning material that was too difficult for him at that stage. Perhaps he never had the vocabulary. Perhaps everyone else seemed to understand, and he felt embarrassed to ask. Those are things we can work on. There may be a teacher, a chavrusa, or a different area of learning that helps him discover what he has not yet tasted.

Sweetness often grows through patient learning. Difficulty does not mean that Torah has failed to reach us. We are asking for an attachment that can deepen through the effort. We can seek clearer teaching and a better way into the subject while continuing to learn even before the enjoyment fully develops.

08 Worldly wisdom and what we do with it

Here is a question people sometimes ask: if Chazal possessed such extraordinary wisdom, why did they not develop electricity, cars, aircraft, and the inventions that make modern life easier? We cannot answer that merely by saying that Torah is more important. We need to understand what kind of wisdom is involved, and what draws a person to develop it.

First, acknowledge the achievement. There is extraordinary wisdom in discovering the hidden powers of the physical world and learning how to use

them. The wisdom is real. But even the most astonishing discovery about our physical world is still wisdom within this level of creation. In the language of the spiritual worlds, it belongs to the world of action, Asiyah. Torah wisdom reaches toward attachment to Hashem, beyond the physical workings of this world.

Now ask a different question. Why does a human being set his mind to one discovery rather than another? What is he looking for? The things we long for draw our intelligence into their service. A desire for a certain experience can generate tremendous ingenuity in finding ways to provide it. That brings us back to play and the pleasure of life.

Take electric lighting. Before it, the end of daylight brought a natural limit to much human activity. People worked, ate, and went to sleep. Artificial light extended the hours of wakefulness. Electricity also serves practical needs, and inventions can serve healing, safety, and work. Here our focus is the spiritual danger of using that expanded power to fill life with idle conversation, sin, and material indulgence. Communications and films can provide ever more elaborate ways to fill the available time. Greater technical power does not by itself establish what kind of life we will live.

There is also a deeper connection between desire and discovery. The desire for amusement can itself be a force that calls forth ingenuity. The heart wants a new experience; the intellect works out how to supply it. That does not mean that every invention arose from a wish for empty pleasure. It means that tremendous intelligence can be drawn into the service of that desire. We need to ask both what level of creation a form of wisdom investigates and what the human heart is asking that wisdom to provide.

This is the answer to the question about Chazal. The question assumes that greater Torah wisdom should necessarily produce greater technical mastery of the physical world. But those are different measures of achievement. Chazal's wisdom and delight were directed toward attachment to Hashem. The absence of these inventions is not a measure of the depth of their Torah wisdom. We cannot measure that achievement by asking how much additional mastery or pleasure it produced within the physical world.

What a person longs for draws his wisdom into its service. We must ask what desire the brilliance is serving.

There is a deeper way to express the distinction through the words "wisdom emerges from ayin." Ayin means "nothing," but it can point in opposite spiritual

directions. At the higher level, “nothing” means beyond what our minds can grasp: the Divine source cannot be contained within our ordinary categories. At the lower level, “nothing” means an experience with no worthwhile content beyond itself. These are opposite meanings. The shared language exposes two very different directions in which wisdom can develop.

At the higher level, wisdom unfolds from its Divine source and leads us toward attachment to Hashem. At the lower level, a longing for empty amusement can generate the ingenuity needed to supply more of it. The two meanings are not the same. They reveal the distance between wisdom that brings kedushah inward and brilliance employed to deepen attachment to emptiness.

Chazal describe the beis vaad, the place of assembly, becoming a place of immorality before Mashiach. Those are the words of Chazal; the explanation we are developing reads their contrast as a transformation of a gathering of wisdom. The wisdom can become a means of producing forms of pleasure pursued without worthwhile purpose beyond them. Brilliance alone does not determine the spiritual character of what it serves. At the higher level, wisdom serves attachment to Hashem; at the lower level, it can serve an expanding appetite for empty experience.

And Torah has its own sha’ashua. Great Torah teachers can spend their lives delighting in the deepest sugyos, in the wisdom and kedushah of Torah itself. They are becoming attached to Hashem through the very Torah in which they delight. When a Jew tastes that sweetness, he absorbs that closeness into himself. That is what we ask for when we say Veba’arev na: make Your Torah sweet in our mouths.

09 Why children begin with korbanos

There is a surprising example in the way we begin teaching children. **Please look at Source 8, the teaching about young children and korbanos.**

SOURCE 8 | Teaching of Tanchuma, Tzav 14, as cited in Tiferes Shimshon p. 233

יבואו טהורים ויתעסקו במעשה טהורים.

Let the pure ones come and engage in the matters of the pure.

The Midrash connects the purity of young children with the korbanos, explaining why their learning begins with this material. Consider how surprising that is. If you were designing the beginning of a child’s education, would you

start with the details of korbanos? You might choose something much easier to understand.

A child can understand Avraham welcoming guests. He can understand a person speaking kindly. But the details of an offering, the avodah, and the laws surrounding it are much harder. So why begin there?

Something is taking place even before the child understands the full depth of what he is learning. The child is becoming involved with the purity of Torah. His learning has an element of sha'ashua, and through that engagement, something enters his neshamah.

Early learning forms an attachment and brings purity into the child, alongside the understanding that develops over time.

This does not mean that we should neglect understanding or make a child's learning unintelligible. Attachment and purity can begin to enter before the child grasps all the depth of what he is learning. Understanding must continue to develop. And this extends beyond children: great people can remain absorbed in Torah throughout their lives because the Torah itself is their delight.

Think about how this can affect the way we learn with children and grandchildren. When a child brings a Torah question to the table, we have an opportunity. We can rush through it. Or we can show interest: "That is a good question. Let's think about it." We can let the child experience the pleasure of discovering something together.

And that opportunity belongs to adults too. A person can be seventy years old and still discover an area of Torah that makes him feel like a beginner in the best possible sense: curious, interested, and eager to understand.

10 The laughter of Yitzchak

Now we are ready to return to Yitzchak. We began by asking why laughter should become the name of an Av. **Let's read Source 9, on page 234. This is a selected excerpt about Olam Haba.**

SOURCE 9 | Tiferes Shimshon, Vayeira, p. 234 | excerpt

והרי בעולם הבא, מה יעשו הצדיקים בכל הזמן האינסופי? ישתעשעו ויתמלאו עם השחוק, היינו שיספגו אל תוכם יותר תורה ויותר קדושת השי"ת.

In the World to Come, what will the righteous do throughout that endless time? They will delight and be filled with that delight; that is, they will absorb into themselves more Torah and more of the holiness of Hashem.

Yitzchak is connected with this delight in Hashem. There is a relationship whose depth does not come to an end. We sometimes think that if an experience lasts long enough, surely we will become bored. But that assumes that we have exhausted what there is to discover. We are describing an attachment to Hashem that continues to deepen, and Yitzchak's life was filled with that attachment.

There is a striking expression of Yitzchak's attachment: Hashem is called Elokei Yitzchak during Yitzchak's lifetime. **Let's look at Source 9A.**

SOURCE 9A | Bereishis 28:13 | supporting excerpt

אני ה' אלקי אברהם אביך ואלקי יצחק

I am Hashem, the G-d of Avraham your father, and the G-d of Yitzchak.

Yitzchak was already so attached to Hashem and to the life of Olam Haba that he was, as it were, beyond ordinary attachment to this world while still alive in it. That gives substance to his name. His laughter expresses a life of delight in Hashem, not merely a cheerful temperament.

Think of someone absorbed in a computer game. Hours pass without his tiring of his involvement. This gives us a small, limited comparison for the intensity of attachment possible in Torah and in the life of Olam Haba. The absorption is familiar, even though the spiritual value of the experiences is entirely different.

The answer to our opening question: Yitzchak's laughter expresses the delight of a life attached to Hashem.

Now, we are not being asked to pretend that we have reached Yitzchak's madreigah. We are being shown a direction. We can begin with a moment in which learning becomes precious. A question we want to understand. An explanation that gives us pleasure. A passage we find ourselves thinking about after we have closed the sefer. And we can ask Hashem to help us.

Please turn to Source 10, the request in Birchos HaTorah.

SOURCE 10 | Birchos HaTorah | excerpt

והערב נא ה' אלקינו את דברי תורתך בפינו ובפי עמך בית ישראל.

Please, Hashem our G-d, make the words of Your Torah sweet in our mouths and in the mouths of Your people, the House of Israel.

We ask for sweetness because that sweetness can draw Torah deeply into us. And there is a further effect we need to understand.

11 The pleasure that purifies

When we attach ourselves to empty amusement, that emptiness enters deeply into the soul. At the same time, the kedushah we have acquired through Torah and mitzvos is displaced. This is why the spiritual effect of the experience matters beyond the hours that pass.

Delight in Torah works in the opposite direction. Through that delight, attachment to Hashem and the kedushah of Torah enter the neshamah. That attachment helps cast out the spiritual dirt that has clung to us through materiality and sin. This is purification: kedushah fills our inner life and helps drive out what has stained it.

The sweetness of Torah does more than make learning enjoyable. It draws kedushah inward and helps displace what has stained the neshamah.

That is why we have to keep returning to our question: what am I teaching myself to enjoy? We are giving something access to the deepest part of ourselves. When we learn to delight in Torah, we are allowing its holiness to become more deeply our own.

Our practical beginning can still be small. Take that one question seriously. Learn it with someone who can help. Give it enough attention to taste something

in it. And when we ask Hashem to make His Torah sweet in our mouths, let us ask for the attachment that the sweetness can bring.

12 More than one doorway to sweetness

But someone may be listening and thinking: I understand the idea, but learning does not yet feel sweet to me. Where do I begin? We should keep working to find a doorway into Torah: a subject that speaks to us, a teacher who understands us, a question we want to resolve. Difficulty enjoying learning today does not close that door.

At the same time, our avodah includes other opportunities to taste the joy of closeness to Hashem. In tefillah, it may begin with one sentence we actually mean. We stop rushing and recognise that we are speaking to Him. At the Shabbos table, it may be a line of a zemer whose meaning reaches us: we are grateful to be here, celebrating Shabbos with the people Hashem has placed in our lives.

And there is chesed. A person needs a lift. Someone is lonely. A family could use a meal. We can do the task while watching the clock, or pause long enough to recognise its meaning: Hashem has given me the opportunity to bring kindness into this person's life. I can make someone's burden lighter. This small act can become an act of serving Him.

The pleasure may begin with seeing someone smile or knowing that we have helped. We can deepen it by remembering Whose kindness we are trying to express. Then we are learning to enjoy the relationship within the mitzvah. We need not manufacture an intense feeling every time; tiredness and difficulty do not make our service less precious. We are cultivating a taste, patiently, in the opportunities already before us.

Begin with one moment of connection: a sentence of tefillah, a little Torah understood, or a kindness done with the awareness that we are serving Hashem.

Let me give you two stories. The first is about discovering sweetness in learning. The second is about finding joy in doing what another person needs.

13 The teenager who discovered the sweetness

Rav Shach had returned exhausted from giving a shiur. A group of prominent donors was waiting for a meeting. Then a father arrived, asking for a brachah for his teenage son, who had no interest in learning. Rav Shach asked to meet the boy.

The teenager admitted that he neither enjoyed nor understood his learning. He wanted to leave yeshiva and work. Rav Shach asked what he was studying. It was a sugya in Bava Metzia. He had a Gemara brought and began learning with him, carefully, drawing his attention to the words and questions.

They continued for an hour and a half. Gradually, the boy became absorbed. Afterwards, Rav Shach asked whether he enjoyed learning. The teenager's answer was that he wished he could always feel what he felt at that moment. Rav Shach kissed him and gave him a brachah for success.

Think about that. The boy had already encountered that Gemara. The words were familiar. The page was familiar. Yet this time, someone helped him enter it. He experienced the questions. He began to see the precision. He became involved. And his relationship with the learning changed.

14 The joy of being there

In a 2019 interview with Yisroel Besser in Mishpacha, Rav Aryeh Elyashiv spoke about helping his grandfather, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv. For eighteen years, he helped protect his grandfather's ability to learn. That included practical concerns: meals, medicines, and keeping the apartment warm, alongside managing access to him.

These were daily responsibilities, through illness and pressure as well as easier times. Yet when Reb Aryeh looked back, he described the opportunity to help as a gift. In his words: "I felt like I won the lottery every single day."

Listen to the change in perspective. The daily needs still had to be met. The work still took time. Yet he experienced being there as a privilege. Here was someone finding joy in service itself.

Of course, serving a great Torah scholar gave that opportunity a particular meaning. But we can bring this awareness into the kindnesses within our reach. The next examples are ours: taking a neighbour to an appointment, bringing supper to someone who is struggling, or calling a person who spends too much

time alone. Each is an opportunity Hashem has given us to care for one of His children.

We began with the same person moving the same ball: exhausted when it was a favour, energised when it was a game. Now let us bring that question into our avodah. Can we begin to discover the life within the mitzvah? In Torah, the delight of entering Hashem's wisdom. In tefillah, the privilege of speaking to Him. In chesed, the privilege of expressing His kindness. Start with one small act. Give it your attention. Ask Hashem to help you taste its sweetness.

“Hashem, make Your Torah sweet to me. Help me find joy in speaking to You and in caring for Your children. Help that closeness shape the person I become.”

Attribution and references

Adapted from Rabbi Shimshon Dovid Pinkus, Tiferes Shimshon, Bereishis, Vayeira, the maamar on laughter and delight, printed pages 225–235. The historical contrast, spiritual argument, criticism of empty amusement, discussion of worldly wisdom, Yitzchak explanation, and concluding purification theme follow that maamar. Its discussion of technology is abridged. Contemporary illustrations, educational applications, and both closing stories are added. The practical extension to sweetness in tefillah, Shabbos, and chesed is an application developed for this class; the original’s central application remains delight in Torah. The recreation qualification is an editorial clarification, not a separate ruling attributed to the original.

Sources 3 and 4 are supplementary supporting passages. Source 4A reproduces the wording cited in the maamar from the conclusion of Mesillas Yeshtarim; Source 5A gives the formulation cited through Nefesh HaChaim, Shaar 4. Source 8 follows the maamar’s wording of the Midrashic teaching. Source 9A supplies the relevant pasuk. All Hebrew excerpts are followed by complete English translations. Lettered sources preserve the original source numbers for the accompanying notes.

Closing account: Toras Reb Kalman, “A Giant in Torah A Giant in Sensitivity,” section “Not Just a Blessing,” recording A154. [Read the published account](#). Retold in summary without invented dialogue.

Second closing account: Yisroel Besser, “The Zeide I Knew,” Mishpacha, April 16, 2019, sections “Every Day a Gift” and “Torah, Torah, Torah.” First-person recollections of Rav Aryeh Elyashiv. [Read the interview](#). The ordinary neighbour and family examples that follow are applications, not incidents reported in the interview.