בראשית תשמ"ט

ברכה - מאת סבתא יוכבד מילצין

Josh - Nov. 25/89 - בראשית "ג" תשמ"ט

Although this is also a family simcha, it is more specially your simcha, so I want to direct my comments more specifically to you.

In the portion of the Torah, בראשית כ"ג, which it will be our privilege to hear you read tomorrow, we learn about the death of Sarah, Abraham's wife. A major part of the Torah reading is dedicated to Eliezer, Abraham's servant, finding a suitable wife for Yitzchak, as ~~directed~~ commanded by his master Abraham. And then towards the end we read of Abraham getting married once again, after Sarah's death, to Hagar, his former concubine. Only now her name is given as Ketura. The reason given for the name-change is that she repented from her former erroneous ways and that her deeds were now as pleasing to God as is the sweet smell of incense, the קטורת in Hebrew.

All of this sounds like a good speech for a חתן who is about to be married. But what has it to do with you, a Bar-Mitzvah, Josh?

Well, part of the answer is given by the ברכת כהנים that we shall ~~have~~ hear your grandfather give you tomorrow, God-willing. The Priestly Blessing is one of the מצות that you ~~are~~ are required to perform ~~on becoming~~ now that you are Bar-Mitzvah. But there are certain authorities who say not to perform this precept until the חתן is married. Because this מצוה of ~~performing~~ pronouncing the Priestly Blessing is supposed to be done with joy, שמחה, and a man does not know true joy until he is married.

You, Josh, are truly blessed with parents who have real joy with each other & with their family.

Mitzvos, Josh, are in fact supposed to be done with joy, in general. We read in Tehilim: עבדו את ה' בשמחה - Serve the Lord with joy. In the ברכות that you will read tomorrow after the Haftorah, the 3rd ברכה ends with: משמח ציון בבניה ... "Who makes Zion rejoice with her children." Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet has a numerical value: א-1, ב-2, and so on. The numerical equivalent of שמח

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ציון תגדל בשמחה is 613, the number of מצות in the תורה. The implication is that Zion, the Land of Israel, can only rejoice when her sons, her Bar-Mitzvahs, observe the commandments of the Torah.

Barbara + I would like to share a story about שמחה, joy, to explain part of our reasons for being here.

R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev one of the leading figures of the Chassidic movement in the last century, was present at a Simchas Torah celebration. One of the many Jews dancing was one who was not known as being particularly religious or learned. And yet here he was holding a sefer Torah close to himself and dancing with all his might.

"Excuse me, Reb Yid" said Reb Levi Yitzchak as he approached him. "Have you learned so much Torah that you take such pleasure in holding it and dancing with it?" To which the Jew replied -

"It is true that I am not familiar with even one iota of Torah, but all my brothers, my fellow Jews who have learned Torah and live a life of מצות are dancing with joy. When my brother is happy, when he is making a שמחה, I too am happy with him and want to participate. Because my brother's simcha is my simcha."

And to that, Josh, we wish to add,

Our nephew's simcha is our simcha.

And to all of you, Annette, Lionel, CJ, Josh, family, friends - your simcha is our simcha. For us, it is a privilege to be here with you; May you continue to have much joy both with each other and in the performance of G-d's mitzvos and may we share many more simchas together.