



## Week 6

### שמחה

This guided learning sheet explores the *middah* of *simchah*—happiness. Sources are accompanied by commentary and discussion questions to facilitate personal reflection and group dialogue.

In addition to the main questions included with each source, you will find a box of boxes below and at the end of the packet. The first set of questions are general questions about participants' experience of working on *middot* and remain the same from week to week. These questions are a helpful tool to check in and reflect on growth over time in a consistent manner. Even though the questions remain the same, the answers will naturally change depending on which *middah* is being explored. You may choose to start or end your learning session with these questions. The questions in the boxes at the end of the packet are additional discussion questions related to *simchah*.

### **General questions when reflecting on the *middah* of the week:**

General questions remain the same from week to week and are helpful tools to reflect on growth over time. The answers will vastly change depending on the *middah* of the week.

1. What did I learn about myself this week?
2. What felt difficult when working on this *middah*?
3. What felt natural or easy when working on this *middah*?
4. How has practicing this *middah* improved your life or how does it have the potential to impact your life?
5. Does anyone in the group have a story of how this *middah* came up in a real situation (this week or beyond)? How did you respond?
6. Does anyone in the group have insights, advice, or tips to keep in mind when working on this *middah* going forward?

***Simchah is not merely happiness or elation—it is a deep, steady joy that emerges from clarity, purpose, and alignment with Hashem’s will. As we prepare for and/or reflect on Shavuot, the time of receiving the Torah, we are invited to see how the Torah is the truest source of enduring joy and inner happiness.***

### **Source 1**

*In Sefer Devarim, the Torah commands us regarding the mitzvah of simchah on Chag HaShavuot. While the preceding verses that deal with Chag HaPesach do not command us regarding the mitzvah of simchah, we see that simchah is part and parcel of Chag HaShavuot.*

#### **דברים טז:ט-יא**

שְׁבַע שָׁבָעַת תִּסְפֹּר לָךְ מִהַחֵל חֶרְמֶשׁ בְּקִמָּה תַחֵל לִסְפֹּר שִׁבְעָה שָׁבָעוֹת וְעֵשִׂיתָ חַג שָׁבָעוֹת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִסֵּת נִדְבַת יָדְךָ  
אֲשֶׁר תִּתֵּן כְּאֲשֶׁר יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשִׂמְחָתְךָ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ וְהַלּוּי אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ וְהַגֵּר  
וְהַיִּתּוּם וְהָאֵלֶּמְנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁכֹּן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם:

You shall count off seven weeks; start to count the seven weeks when the sickle is first put to the standing grain. Then you shall observe the Feast of Weeks for your G-d, offering your free will contribution accordingly as your G-d has blessed you. You shall rejoice before your G-d with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the [family of the] Levite in your communities, and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your midst, at the place where your G-d will choose to establish the Divine Name.

**Takeaway:** *This joy is not private or individual, but inclusive and communal, spanning every sector of society. Shavuot is described as a time of communal and inclusive simchah. Happiness is shared and rooted in connection —with family, community, and especially with those who are often overlooked.*

### **Discuss**

1. What does this source teach us about how happiness is related to community? What does this passage teach us about who should be included in our joy? Have you ever experienced joy by gathering and sharing with others?
2. Why do you think Shavuot specifically includes a mitzvah of *simchah*, while Pesach does not?
3. What might be the connection between the giving of the Torah and the *middah* of *simchah*?
4. Have you ever experienced joy through shared Torah learning?

## Source 2

*Hashem chose Har Sinai for the giving of the Torah because it was the lowest of mountains.*

### במדבר רבה יג:ג

ושפל רוחו יתמך כבוד, זה סיני שהשפיל את עצמו לומר שאני נמוך, ועל ידי כך תמך הקדוש ברוך הוא כבודו עליו ונתנה עליו התורה וזכה לכל הכבוד הזה, כמה דתימא (שמות יט, כ): ויירד ה' על הר סיני.

And the lowly spirit will attain honor, this is Sinai, that humbled itself, saying: 'I am low.' As a result, the Holy One blessed be He rested His glory upon it. The Torah was given upon it, and it merited all this honor, just as it says: "The Lord descended upon Mount Sinai" (Exodus 19:20).

**Takeaway:** *Torah resides where humility is found, while vanity and haughtiness is a barrier to Torah and the resting of the Shechinah. Har Sinai did not boast or rise above other mountains, and precisely because of this, Hashem chose it as the site for Matan Torah.*

### **Discuss:**

1. What message is Hashem conveying by choosing the "lowest" mountain for the giving of the Torah?
2. How does this challenge our assumptions about where greatness or Divine revelation is found?

## Source 3

*Arrogance creates a spiritual blockage, as the Divine Presence cannot rest where ego dominates.*

### ערכין ט"ו ב

אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: אין אני והוא יכולין לדור בעולם, שנאמר: "מלשני בסתר רעהו אותו אצמית גבה עינים ורחב לבב אתו לא אוכל", אל תיקרי "אותו לא אוכל" אלא "אתו לא אוכל", ואיכא דמתני לה על גסי הרוח

The Holy One, Blessed be He says about him: He and I cannot dwell together in the world. As it is stated in the verse: "Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, I will destroy him; whoever is haughty of eye and proud of heart, I will not suffer him" (Psalms 101:5). Do not read the phrase as: "I will not suffer him [oto]," but as: With him [ito] I cannot bear to dwell. G-d is saying that He cannot bear having this person in the world with Him. And there are those who teach this notion of G-d's not being able to tolerate a certain type of person in reference to the arrogant, i.e., they apply it to the last part of the verse: Proud of heart.

**Takeaway:** *True closeness with Hashem requires humility.*

### **Discuss:**

1. What does this statement imply about how ego or pride might block spiritual joy or connection? How does humility make room for G-d's presence—and how might that presence be a source of joy?
2. How might humility make someone more open to receiving truth or growing in Torah?

#### **Source 4**

*Har Sinai's low stature teaches that Torah resides where humility is present. Simchah too flows from a place of humility and authentic self-worth—not from ego or comparison.*

**Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski (Simchah: It's Not Just Happiness, The Shaar Press, p.118).**

Vanity is a desperate defense whereby one seeks to escape from the distressing feeling of unworthiness... A person who has an inherent feeling of worthiness has no need to be vain.

**Takeaway:** *Vanity is not real self-confidence—it's a cover for insecurity. Real joy and Torah acceptance come when we are humble and feel inherently worthy, without comparison or a need to prove ourselves to others.*

#### **Discuss:**

1. Why might vanity (an inherent feeling of unworthiness) actually prevent us from experiencing real happiness?
2. Do you strive to be “low” like Har Sinai, or do you sometimes feel pressure to be “tall” and impressive? How does that choice impact your sense of joy or fulfillment?

#### **Source 5**

*A sense of inner worth is so crucial that Hashem introduced the giving of the Torah by bestowing upon our nation the exalted status of being His treasured people:*

**שמות יט:**

וַעֲתָה אִם־שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סִגְלָה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ:

Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine.

**Takeaway:** *Before giving us the Torah, Hashem affirms our worth and uniqueness. This foundational sense of being cherished prepares us to receive Torah with happiness and dignity.*

#### **Discuss:**

1. Why might Hashem emphasize our value *before* giving us the Torah?
2. How does this inner worthiness help us receive Torah and experience *simchah*?

#### **Source 6**

**Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski (Simchah: It's Not Just Happiness, The Shaar Press, p.118).**

Every person should think of himself as a ‘beloved treasure,’ unique to Hashem... Reenacting the scene at Sinai should enable us to have the emotions of worthiness, sanctity, and humility, which will result in refinement of one’s character.

**Takeaway:** *This affirmation of value is foundational to inner happiness and motivation.*

**Discuss:**

How might this joy of inner self-worth and knowing Hashem values us impact our motivation towards spiritual growth?

**Source 7**

*This refinement of character, which Rabbi Dr. Twerski mentioned, includes attaining the middah of simchah through Kabbalat ha'Torah, as the Psalmist teaches:*

**תהילים יט:ט**

פְּקוּדֵי ה' יִשְׂרָיִם מְשֻׁמְחִי-לֵב מִצְנֹת יְהוָה כְּרָה מְאִירַת עֵינָיִם:

The testimonies of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart, the instruction of the Hashem is lucid, making the eyes light up.

**Takeaway:** *Shavuot—and the ongoing, daily re-acceptance of Torah—teaches us that Torah and mitzvot are not just obligations, but deep sources of joy. Torah uplifts, guides, and clarifies our lives, lighting up both the heart and mind.*

**Discuss:**

1. How have you experienced joy through mitzvah observance and Torah learning this year?
2. Are there particular areas of Torah that “gladden your heart”?
3. How does Torah provide clarity in your life (“making the eyes light up”)?
4. Why might this clarity lead to joy?

**Source 8**

*Rabbi Dr. Twerski quotes Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch on the above verse from Tehillim:*

**Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski (Simchah: It's Not Just Happiness, p.118-119).**

“The laws of Hashem are in perfect accord with the nature and purpose of the creatures with which they deal and also with the nature and calling of ourselves, to whom they were given. Therefore, they rejoice the heart. There can be no substitute for this feeling of quiet joy and serenity, secure in the knowledge that we have done what was expected of us in life. For there is only one true joy, eternally bright... The joy that comes from a life of duty fulfilled, of consecration of all our desires and achievements to the fulfillment of the will of Hashem”

**Takeaway:**

*Simchah flows from living a life of meaning—a life in which our nature and actions align with our higher purpose and Divine expectations. This joy is not fleeting but enduring, grounded in knowing we are fulfilling Hashem's will.*

### Discuss:

1. Have you ever experienced a moment when Torah felt completely aligned with your inner nature or the world around you? What was that like?
2. How does this synthesis of our unique nature and submission to Divine will lead to happiness?
3. Have you ever experienced such a moment of being “secure in the knowledge that we have done what was expected of us in life” which led to inner happiness?
4. What is the difference between joy and pleasure, and why might Rav Hirsch highlight “quiet joy and serenity” over excitement or passion?
5. How do you distinguish between pleasure and joy in your own life, and what role does effort, commitment, or spiritual purpose play in creating true happiness?
6. How can we balance personal goals with spiritual duty (“consecration of all desires and achievements to the fulfillment of the will of Hashem”) in a way that leads to happiness?

### Source 9

*The great Tanna, Rabbi Akiva, who is closely associated with the time period of Sefirat HaOmer, says the following:*

#### פרקי אבות ג:יד

הוא ה'יה אוֹמֵר, חֲבִיב אָדָם שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְּצֶלֶם. חֲבִיב יִתְרָה נֹדֶעַת לוֹ שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְּצֶלֶם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בראשית ט) כִּי בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם. חֲבִיבֵינָּו יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנִּבְרָאוּ בָּנִים לְמִקּוֹם. חֲבִיבָהּ יִתְרָה נֹדֶעַת לָהֶם שֶׁנִּבְרָאוּ בָּנִים לְמִקּוֹם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דברים יד) בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. חֲבִיבֵינָּו יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנֶּתַן לָהֶם כָּלִי חֲמֻדָּה. חֲבִיבָהּ יִתְרָה נֹדֶעַת לָהֶם שֶׁנֶּתַן לָהֶם כָּלִי חֲמֻדָּה שֶׁבִּן נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (משלי ד) כִּי לִקְחַת טוֹב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם, תּוֹרָתִי אֶל תַּעֲזוּבוּ:

He used to say: Beloved is man for he was created in the image [of G-d]. Especially beloved is he for it was made known to him that he had been created in the image [of G-d], as it is said: “for in the image of G-d He made man” (Genesis 9:6). Beloved are Israel in that they were called children to the All-Present. Especially beloved are they for it was made known to them that they are called children of the All-Present, as it is said: “you are children to the Lord your G-d” (Deuteronomy 14:1). Beloved are Israel in that a precious vessel was given to them. Especially beloved are they for it was made known to them that the precious vessel with which the world had been created, was given to them, as it is said: “for I give you good instruction; forsake not my teaching” (Proverbs 4:2).

**Takeaway:** *Simchah arises when we cherish the gift of Torah as a treasure and tool—a Divine inheritance that empowers us to fulfill our unique role in the world.*

### Discuss:

1. How does viewing the Torah as a gift change your relationship to it?
2. Have you ever felt the Torah was a “precious vessel” in your life?

### Source 10

*David HaMelech compares the joy of Torah discovery to the elation of discovering a fortune:*

**תהילים קי"ט:קס"ב**

שש אנכי על אמרתך כמוצא שלל רב:

I rejoice over Your word like one who has found great spoils.

**Takeaway:** *When we learn Torah with curiosity and discovery, it becomes a source of joy and meaning—not just obligation. This reflects both excitement and appreciation of its depth.*

#### Discuss:

1. When was the last time Torah learning felt like discovering a treasure?
2. What helps you approach Torah with this sense of discovery, leading to both excitement and depth?
3. How can we cultivate an attitude of discovery, rather than obligation, in learning?
4. What is something you've learned in Torah that felt like "finding treasure"?

### Source 11

*This Mishnah extols the spiritual and interpersonal effects of sincere Torah study. Learning Torah sincerely and for its own sake doesn't only transform the individual—it uplifts one's entire environment.*

**פרקי אבות ו:א**

רבי מאיר אומר כל העוסק בתורה לשמה, זוכה לדברים הרבה. ולא עוד אלא שכל העולם כלו כדי הוא לו. נקרא רע, אהוב, אוהב את המקום, אוהב את הבריות, משמח את המקום, משמח את הבריות...

Rabbi Meir said: Whoever occupies himself with the Torah for its own sake, merits many things; not only that but he is worth the whole world. He is called friend; beloved; one that loves G-d; one that loves humankind; one that gladdens G-d; one that gladdens humankind...

**Takeaway:** *Real Torah joy is not private—it radiates outward. Learning Torah cultivates connection and simchah that spreads beyond ourselves. Torah study refines our character and awakens awareness of others, enabling us to bring joy to both G-d and our fellow human beings.*

#### Discuss:

1. What does it mean to "bring joy to G-d and others" through Torah learning? Can you think of a moment where your own Torah engagement uplifted someone else—directly or indirectly?
2. How can your Torah learning create ripple effects in your relationships?
3. Have you ever felt that your enthusiasm for Torah brought joy to others?
4. How can we help others (children, students, friends) find joy in Torah?



### Source 12

*In the days of Ezra and Nechemiah, the Jewish people cried upon hearing the Torah read for the first time in many years. Their response reframed Torah not as a source of guilt, but as a cause for joy and renewal.*

**נחמיה ח':י'**

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לֵכוּ אֲכִלוּ מִשְׁמָנִים וּשְׁתוּ מִמֵּתִקִּים וְשִׁלְחוּ מְנוּחַ לְאֵין נֶכֶן לֹא כִי־קָדוֹשׁ הַיּוֹם לְאֲדֹנֵינוּ וְאַל־תַּעֲצֹבוּ כִי־חֲדַנְתִּי  
יְהוָה הִיא מַעֲזָכֶם:

He further said to them, “Go, eat choice foods and drink sweet drinks and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared, for the day is holy to our Lord. Do not be sad, for your rejoicing in the Lord is the source of your strength.”

**Takeaway:** *Klal Yisrael were told to celebrate—not weep—because reconnecting to Torah is a cause for joy and strength. Even when Torah challenges us or reminds us of our distance from Hashem, reconnecting should be a joyful return.*

#### Discuss:

1. Why do you think reconnecting with Torah and Hashem joyfully is “strength”?
2. Can joy be a more powerful motivator for growth than guilt? Why?
3. When have you felt strengthened by reconnecting to Torah?
4. Have you ever felt overwhelmed or discouraged in Torah observance? How did you recover that happiness which Torah is supposed to evoke?
5. How can we as individuals or as communities help ensure Torah feels accessible and joyful—rather than intimidating—to our families, communities, or those not yet connected to Torah?

### Source 13

*Pesach celebrates freedom, but Shavuot celebrates what we do with that freedom: choosing a life of purpose through Torah. Torah gives our lives clarity, meaning, and inner joy that lasts beyond any one moment or event.*

**Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski (Simchah: It’s Not Just Happiness, The Shaar Press, p.119).**

The Torah does not ascribe *simchah* to Passover, but does so to Shavuot, because the Torah is the only source of true and enduring *simchah*.

**Takeaway:** *Torah isn’t just about law—it’s about happiness too. Other celebrations may bring happiness, but deep, lasting simchah comes from living with Torah as your guide and companion.*

#### Discuss:

1. Why might Torah be the source of enduring joy over temporary happiness from other experiences or holidays?
2. Which mitzvah or Torah teaching has most deeply elicited your sense of joy or purpose?



**Additional reflections questions about the *middah* of *simchah*:**

1. As you reflect upon your own life and personal experiences (particularly challenging times you may have faced) how have you found that the Torah has brought joy to your life?
2. Do you find more joy in Torah study, mitzvah observance, or both? Why?
3. As a nation, when facing turbulent times, especially with the ongoing war in Israel and the aftermath of October 7th, how can we effectively utilize *limud haTorah* and *mitzvot bein adam la'chaveiro*, to increase *achdut* and *simchah* in our nation?
4. Do you find attaining the *middah* of *simchah* challenging? Is there an internal voice that tells you *simchah* is too difficult to attain? If so, what practical tools and approaches can be used to combat the negativity and make a home for *simchah* within oneself?
5. How can you cultivate more joy in your personal Torah engagement?

**Now that you have learned these sources, you can also use the questions from the question boxes at the beginning of the learning packet for further discussion and reflection.**