**"Shout for Joy, All You That Are Upright in Heart"**

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**The Service of Joy**

The Rambam concludes his remarks about *Simchat Beit ha-Sho’eva* with a general statement concerning joy in the service of God (*Hilkhot Sukka ve-Lulav* 8:15):

The happiness with which a person should rejoice in the fulfillment of the *mitzvot* and the love of God who commanded them is a great service.

Why is joy a great mode of Divine service? Is there anything that man loves more than to be happy? What, then, is the special difficulty of joy?

At first glance, a person thinks that he loves happiness. Were he just able to allow himself to rejoice all the time, he would do that. The person thinks to himself that it is only external constraints that prevent him from being happy at all times: his frustrations, his fears, his quarrels, his disappointments, his anger, and the things that disturb his peace and bother him. Were all these things to disappear, so he imagines, he would truly be happy all the time.

But if this is really true, how then is it possible that two people can undergo the same experience, with one coming out happy, and the other sad, worried, or restrained? Apparently then it is not only external constraints that get in the way of happiness; rather, something in the first person pushes him to rejoice, whereas something in the second person causes him – perhaps unconsciously – to be subdued or even unhappy.

It seems that joy is the true and innermost characteristic of the depths of a person's soul: a flowing appearance of the inner energy stored up in him. One's soul contains many kinds of energy, and when they gush and stream in a natural manner, he lives with a sense of joy and action. There are, however, inner mechanisms that stop the joy, impair it, and do not allow it to appear, and thus they prevent our spiritual selves from reaching full expression.

**Envy, Lust and Honor**

What prevents and confounds joy? Whether or not he is aware of it, a person's daily life is accompanied by many kinds of tension: fears, anxieties, concerns, and worries. A person worries about his honor, his economic and social status, his health, his stumbles and failures. His fear about his success in comparison to others, and the constant competition – perhaps he will succeed, but others will succeed more – fill him with a sense of failure that accompanies him at all times. Envy, lust, and honor, which according to the Rabbis, remove a person from the world (*Avot* 3:21), also disturb his peace, and raise within him feelings that prevent him from bursting out with joy.

In routine times, a person finds it difficult to act at the height of his power. Even when he pushes himself to the fullest, he does not always succeed. Sometimes he slips and stumbles. The less a person succeeds in realizing his inner strength, the less he actualizes himself, and thus he is left unsatisfied, and he worries more.

During his life, a person is tempted to act immorally and unwisely. He is seduced by his passions, he eats harmful foods, he behaves in an unhealthy manner, he hurts others, he lies, he twists and distorts, he causes others to stumble, and he struggles and fights. Any behavior that has even a trace of immorality fills him with unrest, dissatisfaction, agitation, and a sense of having failed to fulfill himself. The more that a person demands of himself, the more his worrying about the fact that he is imperfect disturbs his rest and gives him the feeling that he is worthless.

All of these things disturb the flow of energy in a person's soul. And when the soul is disturbed, this finds expression in sadness, depression, frustration and pain.

In order to be happy, a person need not create happiness *ex nihilo*; joy is implanted within him, and it is the nature of his soul. In order that he be able to express this natural feeling, a person must break free from the endless cycle described above, which stops the soul from freeing itself and prevents joy from appearing.

Indeed, "the happiness with which a person should rejoice… is a great service." It is not only religious happiness, "in the fulfillment of the *mitzvot* and the love of God," as the Rambam puts it, that is an important mission. Happiness itself is a difficult task, and all the more so, the service of rejoicing in God and in the fulfillment of the *mitzvot*.

**To Be Happy Always**

What is the solution to the problem described above? How can a person be happy?

Psychologists and therapists of all kinds try to teach their clients to break free from worries, anxieties and other feelings that impair their joy of life. If they are good, they succeed in making people happy.

It seems to me that one thing connects personal happiness to joy in God and in the fulfillment of *mitzvot*. All anxieties, worries, and frustrations are rooted in some defect in one's service of God, in a disconnection between man and God, and therefore the full release from worries and frustrations can only be achieved through joy in God. God bestows life upon man, and man's soul is hewn, as it were, from him. Man's soul is God's creation, and the less the soul is connected to its source, the more it remains stifled within.

All the anxieties and worries that disturb a person stem from a blocking of the Divine revelation in him. The more that a person believes in God, the less he worries about petty matters, as it is stated: "Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you" (*Tehillim* 55:23). When a person understands that all of the weight of the world does not fall upon him, and he relies upon God and trusts in Him, he becomes more relaxed. The more a person lives his life based on a sense of mission, the better he understands that his job is not to worry about every failure, but to repair it.

Occupying oneself in repairing failures brings a person joy. Worrying about one's honor and status – i.e., jealousy, lust, and running after honor – are behaviors that stand in contradiction to service of God. The more a person tries to serve God and to be a faithful agent carrying out His will, the more he will break free from the tensions around him.

When a person is a slave to his passions, he is filled with anger and disappointment, for: "He that loves money shall not be satisfied with money" (*Kohelet* 5:9). On the other hand, when a person lives the life that God gave him – a life of sacrifice, of devotion, and of thirst to do the will of His Creator – his joy grows. Acceptance of the yoke of heaven frees him from his earthly burdens and from all the worries and frustrations that impede him. When a person lives a full life, he worries less and rejoices more.

Therefore a person's rejoicing in his performance of the *mitzvot* and in his love of God is a great service, and it is also the general service of happiness. When a person finds happiness in God and in the *mitzvot*, he is filled with the true and blessed human joy of life, which brings him to live a good and pleasant life and be a source of blessing to his friends and surroundings.

**The Joy of Purim**

*Chazal* instituted one day of the year as a special day of breaking free from the constraints that shackle us all year long. On the day of Purim one is obligated to drink to the point that he is unable to distinguish between 'cursed be Haman' and 'blessed be Mordechai' (*Megilla* 7b). According to some opinions, one is permitted to get truly drunk, and it is certainly permitted to get a little drunk, to rejoice, and to break free from the worries that strangle us throughout the year.

It is important to set limits, but a person must take care not to allow them to choke him, shut him in, and make him depressed and miserable. All year long a person must feel free and be filled with the joy of life, and on Purim he is offered the opportunity to practice this state with full force, to free himself of all his mental barriers, and to rejoice in the life that God gave him.

The book of Esther reveals the role of God in the most twisted aspects of life – in intrigues inside the palace, in Achashverosh's banquets, and in Haman's decrees. The hand of God runs through all these natural events and His will reveals itself through them.

The Divine dimension inundates all components of life and accompanies everything. The more we succeed in feeling it, so will we break free from the chains that limit us, shut us in, and depress us. With God's help, we will succeed in trusting in Him and thereby freeing ourselves from the chains of our passions, fears, concerns, and anxiety. And then we are promised the gift of happiness, as it is stated: "Many are the sorrows of the wicked; but he that trusts in the Lord, mercy surrounds him. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, you that are righteous; and shout for joy, all you that are upright in heart" (*Tehillim* 32:10-11).