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JOY

- › **WHAT IS JOY?** Define joy as an innermost expression of self, with examples.
- › **HOW DOES ONE ACHIEVE JOY?** Define service, and its connection and correlation to joy.
- › **HOW CAN WE EXPERIENCE JOY?** Explain purpose, and elaborate how to feel joy with our souls.
- › **IMPLEMENTING JOY.** The approach and tactic of Chassidus for implementing joy through action.

We live in a world with increasing freedoms and material benefits. Yet, this doesn't seem to be reflected in our happiness level. In fact, since the 1960's, income per person has risen, while the happiness level has remained the same. How can we ensure that improvement in our material benefits and social freedoms impact our happiness?

› What is joy?

Chassidus explains that “the nature of happiness is to break boundaries.” (*Sefer Hamaamarim of the Rebbe Rashab 5657*)

This means that joy has the distinct ability to remove the limitations of learned habits and demeanor, and express a person's essential self. Happiness removes the veneer of rote, and disencumbers our inner self.

An example of this can be found in King David's expression of joy at the arrival of the Ark of Testimony in Jerusalem:

“David danced with all of his strength before G-d...”

(*2 Samuel 6:14*)

Leaping and dancing might seem to be inappropriate actions for someone as honorable as the king of Israel (and, in fact, David's

wife was not impressed with what she perceived as an unseemly display of unkingly lack of restraint). Nonetheless, David is praised for his dance, because its very lack of restraint proved his immense joy in welcoming the ark—and, by extension, G-d—to an eventual permanent home in the Temple. So joy, as it were, is the emotional state in which one's essence is lifted out of the layers of self that obstruct it, giving it clear expression.

This isn't just an abstract example, but something we experience often. Take something as trivial as a spilled cup of coffee. If you've just had a disagreement with your spouse, you're late for a project at work, and your home team has just lost in the playoffs, that spilled cup of coffee will really irk you. Imagine though, that you had a wonderful date the night before, you're in line for a promotion, and your new shoes have just arrived. That spilled cup of coffee will be easily dealt with and seen as just that—something trivial! Much of our experience of happiness is linked to our perspective.

When you're happy, the toughest tasks are a cinch, and the strongest adversaries are easily vanquished. If you're down, on the other hand, even simple challenges seem overwhelming. Winning the lifelong battle against temptations and self-centeredness, as well as simply doing the right thing, is largely dependent on staying bright, happy and optimistic.

› How does one achieve joy?

“Serve G-d with joy, approach him with exultation.”

(Psalms 100:2)

There is a strong correlation between service and joy in the Torah. One of the more notable times joy [simcha] is mentioned in the Torah is in the context of service. **“Because you would not serve the L-RD your G-d in joy and gladness.”** *(Deuteronomy 28:47)*

Service, the literal translation of the Hebrew word *Avodah*, can also mean worship or observance. Referring to serving G-d, this

ranges from the study of Torah, prayer, or simply behaving morally and ethically as delineated by the Torah.

Many of the characteristics of service have a strong connection to joy. A mainstay of service is transcendence. When one serves G-d and places G-d's interests above one's own, one transcends the ego and reaches the soul. When one experiences joy, one can transcend one's ego and reach out to others, uninhibited and sincerely.

The Torah understands that purposeful service leads to joy. The more cognizant and aware we are of our purpose, the easier it is to experience joy.

- **“Many persons have a wrong idea of what constitutes true happiness. It is not attained through self-gratification but through fidelity to a worthy purpose.”** —*Helen Keller*

- **“The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.”** —*Mark Twain*

DISCUSS: What do you think is the connection between joy and purpose? Do they complement each other, and if so, how?

› How can we experience joy?

“Everyone who is of the seed of Israel, ought to be joyous over G-d's joy, since G-d rejoices greatly in making His home in the lowest of worlds.” (*Tanya, Chapter 33*)

The Midrash states, **“G-d desired a dwelling for Himself in the lower realms”** (*Tanchuma Naso 16*). The Tanya, based on this Midrash, explains a meditation one can use to achieve joy. We should contemplate that G-d placed us in this physical world, seemingly independent of G-dliness, tasked with a mission to make it His home. Every action that we do can be part of this holy and awesome undertaking. Realizing how valued and cherished our

actions are, can be a great source of joy and happiness.

Chassidus further explains that specifically through uplifting the material world for G-dly purposes one can attain the most powerful connection to G-d, as the essence of G-d's will is for the reality of G-dliness to be exposed in the mundane.

-“Ever more people today have the means to live, but no meaning to live for.”—*Victor Frankl*

DISCUSS: What do you think your purpose is?
Do you feel joy when you pursue it? Why?

At the core of every Jew is a G-dly soul, mired in our physical body, and tasked with elevating it. When that soul acts through the body, it achieves immense joy. It fulfills its purpose.

When we fulfill our purpose, we are engaging our G-dly soul. We're fusing the Divine with the physical, and allowing G-d's truth to be felt in the world. We're revealing the essence of our soul, and allowing its natural joy and passion to run untethered.

Torah understands our objective in this world as being to elevate the material to the spiritual, the mundane to the holy. Our mission is to uncover the good and pristine of the world, and create a “comfortable” dwelling place for G-d. This is accomplished not by ignoring the mundane and the material, but by embracing and influencing it.

The more in tune we are with our purpose, the more effortless our journey will be to joy. When we reach deep into our souls, we change what happiness means. It isn't something we run after, rather it's something that helps us run. We don't reach it as much as we let it reach us.

DISCUSS: Are humans naturally happy?
What are some ways you can try to feel your G-dly soul?

› Implementing Joy

One of the most powerful teachings of the Tanya regarding the impact of our actions can be found in Chapter 4. Intuitively, it is understood that our feelings and ideas form the primary character of a person. (These, of course, are shaped by our soul.) Behavior is understood as a direct result of one's ideas and feelings. The Tanya, however, highlights that our behavior is not only a result of our character, but actually impacts and accentuates our character. When we say kind and tender words, we magnify our love. When we lash out harshly and sharply, we magnify our anger. Similarly, Chassidus explains that when we act and speak with joy, it amplifies and intensifies our joy!

This Chassidic teaching gives us a powerful tool to implement joy. We're able to coax and grow our joy when we act *with* joy. When we speak joyously, when we act joyously, and when we enter that joyous frame of mind, our inner joy blossoms and percolates. Joyous behavior acts as a catalyst to more joy. Our smiles, dance, and words of joy don't just express our joy; they exacerbate it. They bring it to the forefront and help implement our joy. Something as effortless as a smile or as invigorating as a dance, and even simple words of joy—all these help our journey to joy.

A soldier enters the fray of battle to the tune of a joyous march, not with tears. It is by the power of his joy that he is victorious even in the most dangerous and challenging endeavors. (*Tzemach Tzedek, Third Lubavitcher Rebbe*)

› Story

The two brothers—the famed Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk and Rabbi Zushe of Anipoli—often wandered about together, posing as simple beggars. They would mingle with the masses, listening, teaching, speaking, helping and guiding whomever and whenever they could.

Once, while they were traveling with a group of vagabonds, members of their group were accused of being thieves, resulting in the entire bunch being thrown into jail. Confident of their innocence and eventual release, the two brothers sat quietly. As the afternoon progressed, Rabbi Elimelech stood up to prepare himself to pray the afternoon service.

“What are you doing?” his brother asked. “I’m getting ready to pray the afternoon service,” replied Rabbi Elimelech. “Dear brother,” advised Rabbi Zushe, “it is forbidden to pray in this cell, because there is a pail that serves as a toilet nearby, making the room unfit for prayer.” Dejected, the holy Rabbi Elimelech sat down. Soon after, Rabbi Elimelech began to cry. “Why are you crying?” said Rabbi Zushe. “Is it because you are unable to pray?” Reb Elimelech answered affirmatively. “But why weep?” continued Rabbi Zushe. “Don’t you know that the same G-d who commanded you to pray also commanded you not to pray when the room is unfit for prayer?”

By not praying in this room, you have achieved a connection with G-d. True, it is not the connection that you had sought. Yet if you truly want the divine connection, you would be happy that G-d has afforded you the opportunity to obey His law at this time, no matter what it is.” “You are right, my brother!” exclaimed Rabbi Elimelech, suddenly smiling. The feelings of dejection banished from his heart and mind, Rabbi Elimelech took his brother’s arm and began to dance from joy as a result of performing the mitzvah of not praying in an inappropriate place.

The guards heard the commotion and came running. Witnessing the two brothers dancing— with their long beards and flowing tzitzit—the guards asked the other prisoners what had happened. “We have no idea!” they answered, mystified. “Those two Jews were discussing the pail in the corner, when all of a sudden they came to some happy conclusion and began to dance.” “Is that right?” sneered the guards. “They’re happy because of the pail, are they? We’ll show them!” They promptly removed the pail from the cell, and the holy brothers then prayed the afternoon service undisturbed . . .

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