

JOY: HOW TO... WITH WHAT...

written by Chaim Kramer
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You’d think that being told to be happy is superfluous. Who doesn’t know this? Is it really necessary to coax, urge and encourage people to make sure they’re happy? It’s a natural desire, not one that has to be worked on. So you’d think. Or would you? Rebbe Nachman certainly didn’t. “True joy is the hardest thing of all,” he insisted. “You must *force yourself* to be happy all the time” (*Advice*, Joy 35).

Be joyous, always. And serve God with joy. Even if there are times when things look dark and difficult, strengthen yourselves with the “good times” gone by. This can be compared to a blind man who once had the power of sight. Although now

he can't see at all, he knows there's light – he's witnessed it. Therefore, strengthen yourself with joy – the joy you once knew. If you do, then eventually the “good days” will return (*Likutey Moharan* I, 222). Elsewhere, Rebbe Nachman teaches that even within a problem, it's possible to find a “reason” to be happy (see *Likutey Moharan* I, 195). Just put yourself outside your situation for a minute or two. You'll realize that with everything crashing down all around you, there are ways in which it could have been even worse.

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It is easy to be happy when you feel good and things are going smoothly. But what should you do when you do not feel happy, during the times when there's nothing to be joyous about? The Rebbe taught that we should find ways to make ourselves happy. His suggestions include the following:

Forcing ourselves. One of the Rebbe's suggestions for achieving happiness when it's not there, is forcing yourself to be happy. The importance of joy is so great that every effort must be made. It can be compared to a group of people who are dancing in a circle and pulling others in to join them. They join in the happiness while their depression stands off to the side. However, when the newcomers stop dancing, their depression returns. Though the few minutes of joy are valuable, it would be better to bring the depression itself into the circle of happiness and keep it there (*Likutey Moharan* II, 23). Forcing yourself to be happy will eventually turn the cause of your unhappiness into a real source of joy.

Someone asked Reb Noson how could he become happy when he had so many problems and difficulties. Reb Noson answered, “Borrow the happiness!” (*Siach Sarfei Kodesh* 1-736). When it comes to money, we rarely hesitate to borrow against a future paycheck,

dividend, etc. Well, sadness makes a person feel he's missing something. The thing to do, as Reb Noson advises, is to borrow from whatever you can think of that makes you happy. Besides, there's a big difference between owing money and owing happiness. When money is paid back it hurts a bit. However, with happiness,, when we pay it back we again have happiness. Thus, forcing joy and happiness actually pays fantastic dividends.



Rebbe Nachman taught that we should find ways to make ourselves happy!

Remembering your good points. Another way you can become joyous when depressed, is by acknowledging that you have at least some good within you. Even if you feel far from God, be happy and praise Him that "He did not make you a heathen." Simply be happy that you can feel proud and joyous about your heritage, which is not even your own doing, but a gift from God.

Faking it. Even if you don't feel happy, you can fake it. Pretend to be happy. Who says that if you're feeling down, you can't smile. We fake a smile often enough when trying to be polite, why not now? Try it. A smile, even a put-on smile, is

contagious. Not only will it make others happy when they return your smile, but, as studies have shown, smiling relieves tension and really does make your outlook on life a lot brighter (cf. *Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom* #43).

Do something silly. In talking about making every effort to be joyous, Rebbe Nachman said that this even included resorting to acting a bit silly. The price one pays for a little silliness is far less than the price of depression and lethargy. [Unfortunately,] it really doesn't take much for us to act a little silly. Who knows? It might even be a bit of an improvement over many of the "serious" things we do.

Song, music and dance. Music clears the mind and makes us happy. Music has the power to help us pour our heart out before God. It also has the power to sharpen our memories and enable us to concentrate on our goals (*Advice*, Joy 14, 15). Therefore, the Rebbe taught that it's a very good habit to inspire ourselves with a melody. The spiritual roots of music and song are very deep and can arouse our hearts and raise our spirits (*Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom* #273).

Elsewhere, the Rebbe talks about the special power which dancing and clapping have to make us happy and mitigate the negative things affecting us (*Likutey Moharan* I, 169). It is customary in every Breslov synagogue to dance each day after the Morning and Evening prayers. Many Breslover Chassidim dance after learning together, while some even dance daily by themselves. It's a surefire way to arouse a feeling of real joy and happiness.

Reb Noson once said to Reb Moshe Breslover, "I will give you a way to repent. Dance every day!" (*Aveneha Barzel* p. 62).

(taken from the book: *Crossing the Narrow Bridge: A Practical Guide to Rebbe Nachman's Teachings* – chapter 2: Joy pp. 27-30)