

Leaving the Frat Boys Behind

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Recently I read an abysmal statistic. According to a 2014 PEW Research Center study, the US marriage rate is at a 93-year low! Just about half of the adult population is not married. While there are various opinions seeking to explain why the rate keeps dropping, one of the most popular suggestions is that many young men would prefer to remain in the “frat boy” stage and aren’t at all interested in investing in a serious, demanding and oftentimes difficult relationship. It’s just so much more tempting to have a good time and avoid commitment.

Rebbe Nachman shares an analogy that has a lot to with this issue:

Sometimes, when people are happy and dance, they grab someone standing outside [the circle] who is depressed and gloomy. Against his will, they bring him into the circle of dancers;

against his will, they force him to be happy along with them. It is the same with happiness. When a person is happy, gloom and suffering stand aside.

The Rebbe is describing a popular method used to deal with problems and sadness: *Forget about them*. Allow yourself to be dragged into the circle of fun and joy. The gloominess will remain where it is while you experience happiness. Much of our society has adapted this attitude on various levels. They shy away from dealing with “stuff” and would rather engage in something enjoyable, while leaving their gloom off to the side.

But the Rebbe says this isn't good enough:

Yet greater still is to gather courage to actually pursue gloom, and to introduce it into the joy, such that the gloom itself turns into joy. A person should transform gloom and all suffering into joy.

Finding contentment in marriage is a lot like having the courage to pursue gloom. Unfortunately, married life isn't always as glamorous as the wedding that precedes it. But the skill set that one learns as he or she becomes capable of leading a happy home is priceless. One of our primary missions and a key to living a fulfilled lifestyle is to recognize God's great compassion and kindness in even the most mundane and difficult situations. The commitment of marriage gives us the opportunity to become mindful of God at a day-to-day level. Only by learning to see the good in every situation can you successfully lead a happy household. By doing so, you reveal that Godliness exists even at the most basic level.

In our *parashah*, we read about Nadav and Avihu bringing a voluntary incense-offering. They were punished with death, something that seems very severe for two holy priests who were being sincere in their contribution to God. The *Zohar* reveals the fundamental flaw in their judgment that led to their

error: They never married!

Now, Nadav and Avihu were not part of some priestly college fraternity. They were actually so committed to cleaving to Godliness that they couldn't imagine being forced to deal with drudgery of married life. One of the ingredients of the incense is galbanum. While the other ten ingredients are sweet-smelling, galbanum is foul-smelling. Much like the vinegar included in a tasty condiment, true joy cannot be experienced unless it is enhanced by a preceding challenge. As Nadav and Avihu sought to elevate the incense, they came face to face with gloom and sadness, whose spiritual roots are associated with death. Because they were lacking the experience and know-how necessary to elevate these, they were drawn to those spiritual roots and passed away.

God does not want us to live solitary lives on holy mountaintops, but rather seek Him specifically in the mundane and in our life challenges. If we understand this well, and consequently invest the necessary patience and motivation, we have the ability to develop massive spiritual muscles that will serve us well throughout our lives and beyond. Amen!

Based on Likutey Moharan II, 23