

Real Happiness

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What would life be like if everything was just fun and games? Many dream about such an existence. The drudgeries of a day job, the responsibilities of raising a family and the endless tasks at home make the easy life sound so appealing. But would throwing away all of life's difficulties and just having fun be so great after all?

Rebbe Nachman famously taught that it is a great mitzvah to always be happy. Curiously, the Rebbe explained that sometimes it's not enough to just act in a joyful manner and let sorrow or anxiety melt away on their own. Sometimes one must forcefully transform pain and sorrow into joy and happiness (*Likutey Moharan* II, 23). The reason is that there are elements of pain and sorrow that refuse to become a platform for holiness. When we have a good time and act joyfully, these elements refuse to take a permanent leave. They later return to haunt us, never allowing us to reach an optimal level of happiness.

A great example of living with permanent spiritual bliss is

Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's two sons who served as Kohanim in the Mishkan. They chose not to marry because the thought of dealing with all the mundane aspects of married life did not appeal to them. They preferred to live a worry-free spiritual existence. But they met their match when they were unable to perform an essential part of the Mishkan service: the bringing of the *ketoret* (incense-offering).

The *ketoret* was a mixture of eleven spices that was offered up to God. It had two distinct features. First, one of its ingredients was galbanum, something that is terribly foul-smelling. Second, offering the *ketoret* was the single greatest way to uplift the holy sparks from the lowest of places on earth. These two features are very much connected. The *ketoret* embodies the idea of transforming pain and sorrow into joy and happiness. The foul-smelling galbanum represents the sorrow found in the lowly places in this world. When included together with the other spices, its foul odor is transformed to create a "heavenly aroma."

However, Nadav and Avihu had never married. Happy as they were with their spiritual existence, when they released the foul odor of galbanum, they lacked the tools to deal with this challenge. Pain and sorrow are an extension of death and bereavement, which is why these emotions are experienced at those times. The sorrow of the galbanum overcame Nadav and Avihu to the point of death.

How can we force the elements of sorrow to be elevated to the point of holiness and joy? We can turn them on their head by recognizing that if I feel sad right now because of my lowliness, then shouldn't I be happy that even a "lowlife" like myself can accomplish some measure of goodness?! For example, if I am sad because I feel far from God, isn't it amazing that God must love me so much that He still helps me do many mitzvot like giving *tzedakah*, wearing *tzitzit*, saying Psalms, and many more!

Rebbe Nachman was once speaking with someone who complained bitterly about his terrible behavior. This man wanted very much to draw closer to God and change his behavior for the better. But each time he tried, the temptations grew stronger and stronger. The days turned into years and the man grew dejected. The Rebbe said, "Then I have no one to speak to, because everything is totally bad." At this the man got excited and exclaimed, "But I do try to fight back at times and get closer to what I should be as a Jew!"

The Rebbe knew that the only way to restore this Jew's spirit was by helping him feel that if the argument of the sorrow was really true, then he finally possessed enough perspective to appreciate his good points in contrast to his destitute spiritual stature. When we, too, come to this recognition, there is hope indeed.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Piryah VeRivyah 3