

# JOY

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**It is a great mitzvah to be happy always. Strengthen yourself to push aside all depression and sadness! (Rebbe Nachman)**

“Serve God with Joy!” (Psalms 100:2).

Rebbe Nachman teaches: It is a great mitzvah to be happy always. Strengthen yourself to push aside all depression and sadness. Everyone has lots of problems and the nature of man is to be attracted to sadness. To escape these difficulties, constantly bring joy into your life – even if you have to resort to silliness (*Likutey Moharan* II, 24).

Joy is the hardest of all levels to attain and maintain (*Rebbe Nachman’s Wisdom* 20). When contemplating our daily pressures and workloads, this is very easy to understand. Happiness is

not specified in Torah as a separate mitzvah. Yet, throughout the Talmud, Midrash and Kabbalah, joy is given centrality in all areas of Judaism. The renowned Safed kabbalist, the Ari (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, 1534-1572), asserted that he attained his exalted spiritual level only because of the great joy with which he performed the mitzvot (*Sha'ar HaKavanot, Shemini Atzeret*). Indeed, not many of the subjects discussed in Breslov literature receive the detailed attention given to joy and happiness.

Reb Avraham Chazan commented: If Rebbe Nachman taught that it's a great mitzvah to be happy always, then we must believe that there is what to be happy about! (*Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Rosen*).

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF JOY

One of the reasons we find ourselves distant from God is because we fail to concentrate on our goals. With *yishuv hada'at* (tranquility) a person can think clearly. However, this tranquility cannot be attained without joy. Like exile, depression leads one's mind astray, but joy is freedom. "With joy shall you go out [of the exile]..." (Isaiah 55:12). With joy we can direct our minds – exercise the *freedom* to choose our direction and prevent our thoughts from straying afar. But how do we find joy? We can cultivate joy and happiness by finding good qualities in ourselves. Even if we cannot find anything good in ourselves, we still have what to be happy about: "I am a Jew!" (*Likutey Moharan* II, 10).

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But is there really something to be happy about? Aren't our daily lives filled with sufficient cause for worry? How are we

going to meet the mortgage payment? What did you say happened to the car? Who did you say you're bringing home for dinner?! The list is endless.

Rebbe Nachman teaches: Depression is the bite of the Serpent (*Likutey Moharan I*, 189). Just as a serpent strikes suddenly, so does depression. Suddenly it hits, and you're left wondering how you can ever be happy again. If only you had some room to breathe, you'd be happy. Not necessarily. My Rosh Yeshivah used to say, "People think that difficulties are unexpected in life. They're surprised when sadness comes. But, even if a person were to live for a thousand years, he would still have a long list of problems waiting for him. When one leaves, another is sure to follow on its heels. This is an axiom of life."



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Why, then, do we become shocked and upset when something "unexpected" happens to us? It is not unexpected. At least it shouldn't be. It *always* is this way. There is always "something else" – something to bring us down to the depths of depression. Rebbe Nachman also taught that depression and inertia are synonymous. They lead to anger, to a lack of

tolerance, and are the main reason why a person fails to succeed (*Likutey Moharan* I, 155). It's a cycle. Something unexpected happens and we get annoyed. The doldrums and depression, still mild, are on the horizon. We're already less tolerant of whatever happens next. Naturally, we anticipate everything going wrong. And it does! At the same time, we get angry, experience greater failure, become more depressed and feel more discouraged and lethargic. The serpent of sadness has struck, without our being aware of what actually happened.

But why is there depression, sadness and suffering? Our Sages teach: Whoever mourns Jerusalem will yet share in its rejoicing (*Ta'anit* 30b). Without experiencing sorrow and mourning, there is no way for us to appreciate its opposite. We have nothing with which to compare our happiness. Therefore, we must experience suffering. Only then can we know the true taste of joy. And, because some sadness and suffering are necessary, Rebbe Nachman urges us to strive for joy. We have to use all our strength to attain happiness, since only by being happy will we have the necessary faith, courage and strength to face our sorrows and burdens and overcome them.

Reb Noson once wrote to Reb Ozer of Uman: I heard that you are very, very religious. I heard from Rebbe Nachman that the main thing is joy... and [being] religious too! (*Aveneha Barzel* p. 63).

(taken from the book *Crossing the Narrow Bridge*, chapter 2: Joy pp.25-27)