

Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant. (28:47)

If we ever have needed clear, incontrovertible proof that a joyful attitude in life is important, we have it in this *pasuk*. Furthermore, the Torah is teaching us that *mitzvah* performance sans joy is of little significance. In fact, it leads a person to renege his observance eventually. Proof positive is the fact that the Torah attributes the cause of the ninety-eight curses, maledictions, punishments to our lack of joy in *mitzvah* observance. We translate *simchah* as joy. In contrast to happiness, which is a state of being, joy is a state of the moment. One can be surrounded with unhappiness and gloom and still elevate himself to a joyful state. Joy is an emotion that is central to the fabric of Jewish life and living. The ethos of Jewish observance is undermined when we have no joy in fulfilling the *mitzvah*. The *simchah shel mitzvah*, joy of *mitzvah* fulfillment, defines the quality of the *mitzvah* performance.

Horav Nachman Breslover, zl, acknowledges *simchah* as the key to success, both in religion and in coming closer to Hashem. Depression is the toxin whose noxious attitude destroys not only the meaning of what the individual does, but also the joy of the people around him. One who is in the presence of a melancholic person becomes affected by his sullen attitude. *Rav Nachman* posits that the primary bite of the *nachash*, serpent, aka the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, is depression. When a person falls into a morose attitude, nothing seems to perk him up. He has lost his *joie de vivre*, joy of life.

What is the antidote for the serpent's venom, for the crushing depression that impedes a person from functioning, from caring, from living? What does a person do when he feels that he has reached the end of the rope? He has lost all hope. Where does he go now? *Rav Nachman* quotes *Chazal*, who state that we each have a bone in the body called *luz*, which is indestructible. One could take a sledgehammer and bang it with all of his strength – it will break the hammer. The *luz* bone remains intact, despite repeated bangs. It is from this bone – the only bone in the body that will not decompose or disintegrate – that Hashem will resurrect the dead. The entire body will return to life, because of that one tiny bone. “The powerful lesson which we derive from here,” explains *Rav Nachman*, “is that regardless of a human being's emotional descent, his plunge notwithstanding, there exists an indestructible part of him that can form the basis of his resurrection – his new life.”

Rav Nachman encourages us to focus on our *luz*. Ask Hashem to guide you to find that part of your consciousness that is indestructible, that essence of yourself that no sin or misfortune can eradicate. Embrace that aspect of yourself; fasten yourself to it and focus on it to the point that it enlivens you. Thus, even when you find yourself in the throes of morosity and desperation, without a vestige of hope, you will find your way out and back. The key to a life of joy amid a still sea of turmoil is to hone in on the good, the pure, the indestructible – that self-restoring feature that exists

within us all, from which we can reset our lives.

Simchah is a shared experience. One achieves true joy when he brings joy to others. The *Pele Yoetz* writes: "It is not sufficient for one to gladden only himself. He should also reach out to those who are unfortunate, troubled and depressed to the extent that he is able, so that they too should experience joy. The more he can honor and elevate them, to give them pleasure, it will be viewed as a great *mitzvah* on his behalf."

Rav Nochum was the designated *shliach tzibbur*, *chazzan*, in the Batei Machseh *shul* in which *Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl*, davened. Shortly before *Rosh Hashanah*, *Rav* Nochum took leave of this world, his *neshamah*, soul, returning to its holy Source. Since he had been the regular *chazzan* for years, his passing left a void which needed to be filled very soon. *Rosh Hashanah* was looming closer every day, and a replacement *chazzan* had yet to be appointed.

At the end of the *shivah*, seven-day mourning period, one of the *shul* members offered his services as *chazzan*. He went so far as to remind *Rav* Yosef Chaim (who had the deciding say) that *Rav* Nochum's son could not succeed his late father during the year of mourning, since a mourner does not lead the services on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*. *Rav* Yosef Chaim listened, but did not respond. When other worshippers voiced their query, *Rav* Yosef Chaim replied, "It is not yet *Rosh Hashanah*. We will have a *chazzan* in time for the services." *Erev Rosh Hashanah* arrived, and the feeling among the worshippers was that *Rav* Yosef Chaim himself would lead the services.

Yom Tov was about to be ushered in. The *shul* was filled to capacity, everyone waiting impatiently to see whom *Rav* Yosef Chaim had selected to lead the services. *Rav* Yosef Chaim arose from his seat, walked over to *Rav* Shimon, *Rav* Nachum's son, and motioned for him to lead the services. At first, *Rav* Shimon said that he was an *aveil*, mourner. *Rav* Yosef Chaim stopped him and said, "Go to the *amud*." The service was beautiful, with his son vocalizing *Rav* Nachum's *niggunim*, tunes, and unique style of chanting with passion and fervor. The baton had been passed.

Following the conclusion of the service, the heads of the congregation approached *Rav* Yosef Chaim, seeking an explanation for his choice of *shliach tzibbur*. After all, *Rav* Shimon was an *aveil*, who is normally not permitted to lead the *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* services. *Rav* Yosef Chaim explained the following: "The reason that *halachah* disapproves an *aveil* leading the *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* services is *kavod ha'tzibbur*, congregational honor. Everyone is aware that *Rav* Nachum's widow would be attending the services and that this would be the first time that the *shliach tzibbur* leading the services would not be her husband. Imagine the emotional pain that she would experience when she hears someone else's voice replacing her husband's. We will have caused a widow to suffer great pain. That certainly is not *kavod ha'tzibbur*. By having her son succeed his father, the *nachas*, pleasure, that she would experience, albeit bittersweet, would supersede whatever feelings of sadness she might have."

Rav Yosef Chaim was teaching the congregation that *simchas Yom Tov*, the joy one should

experience on *Yom Tov*, can only truly be felt when everyone shares in that joy. If one's personal joy is experienced at the expense of another person's joy or if one person's joy does not take into consideration the feelings of others – then this is not true joy. This is not *simchah*.