

## Joy in Exile

### Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Nefilat Apayim 4:5-6*

It is a great mitzvah to constantly be happy (*Likutey Moharan II*, Lesson #24).

Now, with our fellow Jews being murdered in our homeland, with a war going on, more than ever.

A number of people have asked me - myself among them - how it is possible to be happy and optimistic in these trying times. Besides being difficult, isn't it totally inappropriate in the face of death, destruction, and mourning? First, we have to remember that depression paralyzes us, at best. Happiness, on the other hand, enables us to do what we have to do. Stepping up our prayers is part of what we have to do, and we can use Queen Esther's words, "Let my life be granted as my wish, and my people as my request" (*Esther* 7:3).

To realize the value of happiness in such times and a strategy for achieving it, we offer the following selection from Reb Noson's *Likutey Halakhot*. It is abridged and freely rendered.

This is the reason for the tremendous merriment of Purim: the drinking, the joking and the clowning-around. Rebbe Nachman wrote many, many times that we have to constantly maintain a happy frame of mind.

The Rebbe noted, however, that since so many upsetting things happen in life, it's impossible to stay happy without some jokes and joking around. One has to work hard to be happy and stay happy. "It seems that it's impossible to be happy without acting a bit silly."

This is why many of the great tzaddikim had "court jesters" among their chassidim - to maintain a joyous atmosphere. Nothing is as detrimental to serving God as depression. Because our exile is so bitter, so filled with troubles - physical, emotional, financial - the only way to build happiness is comedy. Even the Sages of Mishnaic and Talmudic times told jokes. Rav Hamnuna the Elder told jokes to his colleagues, the members of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai's inner-circle (*Zohar* 3:47b).

When the Jews are in exile, the Shekhinah is in exile. The main reason the Jews are in exile is because others don't let them rejoice in God and His Torah. So, if Happiness is in exile the Shekhinah and the Jews are in exile.

The forces of evil are happy only because the Shekhinah is in exile. About such happiness King Solomon writes, "Of levity I said, 'It is confusion!' Of mirth, 'What good is it?'" (*Ecclesiastes* 2:2). It is confusion, because they take their capacity for joy, which is extremely holy, and spend it on lust.

Now, because Happiness is in exile, if a Jew wants to rejoice in his Jewishness, he must engage in some sort of nonsense. When he does so, he is helping to lift the Shekhinah out of exile, for when a Jew is happy, Happiness immediately moves toward freedom.

"Of David, when he feigned madness in Avimelekh's presence, who then sent him away and he left" (*Psalms* 34:1). (See below to review this episode in King David's life.) King David

was an aspect of the Kingdom of Holiness and of the Shekhinah. The crux of King David's struggle against Evil was overcoming depression and being happy. This is the essence of the ten types of song which constitute Psalms (see *Pesachim* 117a).

This is why the holy Zohar refers to him as the King's jester. Even when he brokenheartedly confessed his sins, he did not leave his path of joy (*Zohar* 2:107a).

When the Philistines captured King David, they wanted to kill him. He realized that only if he were happy could he defeat them and escape. But he was literally in their clutches! He knew they wanted this to be his final hour. The exile was deep and dark - how could he possibly bring himself to be happy?!

God graced King David by giving him this idea: Play the fool. He did and they sent him away.

{"David was very much afraid of [the Philistine] King Akhish of Gat. He acted like a lunatic, mad in their sight, scratching graffiti on the doors of the gate and drooling down his beard. Akhish said to his servants, 'Look! A lunatic. Why have you brought him to me? Am I lacking madmen that you brought this one?'" (I *Samuel* 21:13-16)}

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