

Ki Tavo and the Practice of Joy

“And you shall be joyful in all the good that YHVH your God has given you” (Deut. 26:11)

1) This is a great rule of service: Beware of depression as much as possible! Weeping is a great evil, for a person must serve in joy. Only if the weeping comes from joy, then it is a great good. Therefore, don't multiply worries over everything that you do, for this is the intention of the *yetzer* (negative impulse), to make a person fear that he won't be able to fulfill his obligations, and to bring him to despair. And despondency, despair, is a great hindrance to true service. And even when you really stumble in transgression, don't become overly anxious that you are unable to serve. Simply feel sadness over the transgression, and then return to rejoicing in the Creator.

(The Baal Shem Tov, From “Testament of BeShT,” reprinted in Hebrew Ethical Wills, Israel Abrahams)

2) Take good care that your mind not flee you; I mean the thoughts of your own better self. Just as you guard your money or your possessions, making sure no one runs off with them when you are turned away, be even more careful to guard your mind, the one you use in serving God, from “the accusers.” The best guard is joy, to be happy always over the mitzvot you are doing and have done already. The sages spoke of one “who does not stop smiling all day” (Talmud, *Berachot* 9b), when she was doing mitzvot. A person who gets to go to the royal palace should be very happy; how much more so if it is the palace of the Divine One! And not only this, but if you rejoice in the mitzvot you have done or are still to do, you can partake also of this-worldly pleasures, such as eating and drinking, and other permitted pleasures, without having your head turned by them. For you are used to enjoying true pleasure and joy, the joy of mitzvah. But if you don't take joy in the joy of mitzvah, then eating and all the rest of this-worldly pleasures will become very important to you, and you will be overly drawn to them. For everyone wants some pleasure! But this path of worldly pleasures will lead to too much corporeality and materialism and distance from Godliness, down to the very lowest places. Therefore, “I will surely delight in YHWH, my soul will exult in God”....Note that in the rebukes passage in the Torah (Deuteronomy 28), no sin is listed [as the cause of all those curses]. It only says: *Because you did not serve YHWH your God in joy* (28:47), for that is what guards a person.

(R. Moshe Yehudah Leib of Sasov, 1745-1807)

3) A person must gather all of her resources to be constantly happy. As a result of day-to-day problems, human nature tends toward depression/sadness. Everyone has problems. A person has to work very hard to force himself to be constantly joyful and to do whatever he can to make himself joyful—even with silly things. It is true that a broken heart is very good. But that is only for a limited amount of time. A person should set aside a certain amount of time every day to break her heart and speak to God in her own words. But for the rest of the day, she must be joyful. It is much easier to shift from a broken heart to depression than it is to lose control as a result of joy. So a person must be constantly joyful, except for a specific time when he has a broken heart. (Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav, *Likkutei Moharan* 2:24, in *Chambers of the Palace*)

4) THE JEWISH BUDDHA SAYS: Drink tea and nourish life: with the first sip, joy; with the second sip, satisfaction; with the third sip, peace; with the fourth, a Danish.