

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 261

Behar-Bechukotai | Joy is the Source of Healing



MESILOT

Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha
of Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l

From the weekly lessons of his son
Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

Dedicated to the hatzlacha of
Michael, David and the Gad Family

...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

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Parshat Behar Bechukotai

The Centrality of Joy

Yossi let out a heartrending sigh: "How can one be healed of the terrible trait of sadness?"

His deep sigh reverberated for a long time until his answer came, and we share it here in this booklet before you:

The *Tikkunei Zohar* states (Tikkun 21, 59a) that one who bears the blemish of sadness cannot draw nourishment of light and vitality from the *Shechinah*.

In fact, sadness is the root of all bodily and mental maladies, while its counterpoint – joy – is the root of all healing.

To emphasize the power and importance of joy and optimism, we bring an excerpt from the words of Rabbi Aharon Roth, of blessed memory, in *Shomer Emunim* (essay "Tzahali Va'Roni," chapter 5):

"Many assume that if they do not feel sadness in their heart, they are therefore in a state of joy.

This, however, is a mistake. Simchah is a feeling—a real emotion that fills the heart and causes one to truly rejoice in G-d. As it is written, 'But I trust in Your faithfulness; my heart will exult in Your deliverance. I will sing to G-d, for He has been good to me' (Psalms 13:6); and likewise, 'Rejoice in G-d and exult, the righteous; shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart' (Psalms 32:11).

There must be an actual manifestation of joy in the mind and in the heart and in a radiant countenance, together with the humility that one must show before G-d; a humility and broken-heartedness along with joy, not with sadness or

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smallness of spirit, Heaven forefend.

Know, dear brother, that through pure joy your nefesh, ruach, neshamah, and your heart will be elevated—'his heart was high in the ways of G-d' (2 Chronicles 17:6)—provided this is joined with shame and submission before G-d.

Through joy, one can give life to many, for one strengthens a fellow's heart and draws him toward trust in G-d and joy; and

a person may acquire his entire world in just one single hour.

Sefer Charedim writes (Introduction to the Commandments, §4) regarding our holy master, the Arizal, of blessed memory, that all the lofty spiritual levels and attainments that he reached, all came by virtue of the greatness of the joy that he felt when performing a commandment..."

After these inspiring words, we begin to delve into the topic.

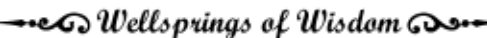
G-d's Abode in Our Midst

My father, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abergel, of blessed memory, said the following in a talk he once delivered (*Imrei Noam*, Bechukotai, essay 7):

"The Torah portions of Behar–Bechukotai, which we read this week, include the following verse: 'I will establish My abode in your midst, and I will not spurn you. I will be

ever present in your midst; I will be your G-d, and you shall be My people' (Leviticus 26:11–12)."

According to Rashi's commentary, the phrase, "I will establish My abode in your midst," refers to the Holy Temple.¹ The intent of the verse is that when the Jewish people walk in the path of Torah and



1. In the words of Rashi (*ibid.*): "'I will establish My abode in your midst' – this refers to the Holy Temple."

the commandments, the Holy One, blessed be He, will consent to cause the Temple to dwell among them, and He will not abhor them and cast them off, like a person who expels something that disgusts him.

However, the holy Ohr HaChaim explained the inner meaning of the verse as it applies and refers to the path of divine service of a Jew, and he explained thus:

“It forever has been His blessed will to dwell within the heart of every single Jew; and this is the meaning of our verse: ‘I will establish My abode in your midst.’”

Though the Holy One, blessed be He, created myriads upon myriads of worlds without end, and in them He created seraphim, angels, and creatures beyond number, He does not derive true delight from them.

His principal delight is when a Jew sanctifies himself and walks in the way of Torah, thereby causing the Holy One,

blessed be He, to dwell within his heart.

Thus, the true purpose of Creation is—“I will establish My abode in your midst.”

This explanation of the Ohr HaChaim accords with the verse, “And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8). As the commentators observed (the Alshich—Exodus 31:13), the verse does not say, “that I may dwell in it” (singular)—meaning that He would dwell in the Temple—but rather, “that I may dwell among them” (plural), implying that the Creator’s will is, in fact, to dwell within the heart of every single one of the Jewish people, in the very manner in which He dwells in the Temple. This is, indeed, the principal mission of every Jew: to prepare his heart to be a worthy vessel for the indwelling of the *Shechinah*.

Yet one might think: the Holy One, blessed be He, is entirely spiritual, pure, and holy—far beyond anything we can conceive; while we, lowly

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as we are, our foundation is dust, creatures of matter. How, then, can something so lofty and spiritual as the Holy One, blessed be He, fix His dwelling permanently in something so coarse and material as we are?

Therefore, the Torah adds: “and I will not spurn you.” As the Ohr HaChaim explains, the Holy One, blessed be He, will render our souls fit and refine them to such a degree that His overpowering light and spirituality can dwell within them, and He will not, Heaven forbid, abhor them.

Still, one might think: perhaps the Holy One, blessed be He, will do this only as a matter of necessity, but He will not derive pleasure from dwelling within us?

Therefore, the Torah adds yet further: “I will be ever present in your midst,” which the Ohr

HaChaim explains to mean that the Holy One, blessed be He, will ‘stroll’ in the midst of our souls with delight and pleasantness, as would a person who takes an enjoyable and pleasurable stroll, and He will derive pleasure and *nachat ruach* from causing His *Shechinah* to dwell within us.

Moreover, by virtue of our divine service in this world, we will merit that our spiritual stature will be raised and exalted, such that it can withstand every kind of undesirable pressure, whether spiritual or material.

Thus Rashi explains, “I will be ever present in your midst; I will be your G-d”—“I will stroll with you in the Garden of Eden as one of you, and you will not tremble before Me. Might you then not fear Me? Scripture therefore states, ‘and I will be your G-d’.”

To Every Person – a Path of His Own

Whose heart does not tremble with excitement at the reading of these verses!

The Holy One, blessed be He, promises us that if we do His will, He will cause His

presence to dwell within us and will empower us, so that we will be able to stroll with Him in the Garden of Eden!

This raises the question: What is this will of His from us? What must we do to merit this great reward?

Surely every Jew is obligated to fulfill all four sections of the *Shulchan Aruch*, and one who violates even a single paragraph in it must repent.

But the divine service of a Jew extends further; every Jew has a path that is his alone, and refinements of the world that he alone can effect and repair. As it is written in *Etz Chaim* (Gate 3, ch. 2): “No day resembles another, no righteous person resembles another, and no creature resembles another. All creatures exist for the sake of the Most High, and not all draw the same nourishment, nor is everyone’s rectification the same; the *chelbenah* ingredient (whose odor is foul) in the daily incense rectifies that which the

levonah (whose scent is sweet) does not.”

Each individual’s unique path finds expression on five levels—intellect, emotion, commandments, the work of *kavanot*, and the work of *birurim*—which we now proceed to explain:

Intellect—Every Jew has his individual share in Torah, a share that only he, with the intellect that the Creator has endowed him, can discover and innovate.

Emotion—Every Jew has unique emotional qualities that he must refine. Generally speaking, there are seven emotions: love, fear, compassion, stubbornness, gratitude, belonging, and lowliness.

But in greater detail, these emotions contain innumerable combinations and particulars beyond count. Every person has his own shades of emotion that are incumbent upon him to refine.

Commandments—Every Jew has specific positive or negative commandments which he must

be particularly attentive to
(Shabbat 118b).²

The work of *Kavanot*—This is the work of joining thought and heartfelt intention with

speech and deed, and each and every person has his own path in this (in accordance with the laws of *Shulchan Aruch*, delineated in Orach Chayim 231).

❧ Wellsprings of Wisdom ❧

2. Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein recounts (Barchi Nafshi, Vayikra – p. 256) as follows:

During one of the gatherings in which we had the privilege of joining the saintly Rabbi Aryeh Levin, I heard him say the following:

"One of the Torah's commandments is the mitzvah to 'Love your fellow as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18). I was privileged to know several Jews who fulfilled this mitzvah with all their might, and who were prepared to sacrifice themselves and their wealth for the sake of others.

But recently, I have come to know that there is even a case where a person gives up his entire World-to-Come for the sake of his fellow Jew, and that is a truly pure form of self-sacrifice. I will share with you the story:

This incident took place with two righteous brothers, disciples of the Gaon of Vilna, Rabbi Moshe Ashkenazi and his brother, Rabbi Yitzchak. Throughout the year, Rabbi Moshe would wander through the towns, teaching Torah to Jewish children and eking out his livelihood with great difficulty. During these wanderings, Rabbi Moshe would

quietly engage in his Torah study and prayers, and he would return home only for the three Pilgrimage Festivals, bringing with him a bundle of gold coins to sustain his family.

As was the custom of the pious in that generation—who sought out one particular mitzvah to which to be devoted with total self-sacrifice—this righteous man was most scrupulous about the mitzvah of tzitzit; thus, he would not move even four cubits without wearing tzitzit.

One day, in the month of Nissan, when he returned home after being away for a few months — carrying the bundle of money he had set aside to purchase the needs of the imminent Passover holiday — he made his way in a wagon driven by a simple wagoner. At one stretch of the road, Rabbi Moshe stepped down from the wagon and went over to one of the boulders that lay by the wayside, at a considerable distance from the paved road, and relieved himself... Upon coming back to the wagon, his tzitzit caught on the rock, and one of the four corners tore off.

Since he was strict and particular about never moving four cubits without tzitzit,

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Rabbi Moshe remained standing, rooted to the spot, and did not budge. He called out to the wagoner from afar and asked him to bring him a tzitzit garment from the nearby town. The wagoner, who knew of this chasid's great stringency in the mitzvah of tzitzit, agreed—on the condition that he receive from Rabbi Moshe, in exchange, the entire bundle of money that was in his possession.

Without hesitation, Rabbi Moshe Ashkenazi took the money he had painstakingly saved over the entire winter and handed it to the wagoner. For the sake of obtaining tzitzit, the chasid put his own livelihood—and the livelihood of his family—into jeopardy, all so as not to compromise even an iota of the Jewish custom that he had accepted upon himself to a most stringent extent.

What happened was that the wagoner turned out to be an utterly cruel, evil-hearted man: he took the money, drove off, and did not return. Rabbi Moshe was now left utterly stripped of everything, without tzitzit and without his hard-earned money. For more than a full twenty-four hours, he remained standing in his spot, not moving, until one of the passersby took pity on him and brought him a tzitzit garment on loan so that he could return home.

Rabbi Aryeh continued to share the story:

Some time later, Rabbi Moshe's brother fell ill — none other than Rabbi Yitzchak Ashkenazi, who was admired by all the

Jews of Lithuania (some say that he was the author of the awe-inspiring book *Brit Olam*, which explains the secret of the 22 letters of the Torah). The doctors had despaired of his life. The family sent for his brother, Rabbi Moshe, from the towns in which he wandered, so that he might pray for mercy on his brother's behalf. Rabbi Moshe was known for the power of his prayers, and therefore, they placed hope in him.

When Rabbi Moshe arrived at his brother's house, he went into the room where the patient lay and asked all those present to leave. However, since the doors were not tightly sealed, a few of the family members managed to peek through the cracks in the door and gaze at Rabbi Moshe's actions. And behold, they saw Rabbi Moshe remove his tzitzit garment, place it on the sick man's bed, turn to the Holy One, blessed be He, and say: 'Ribbono shel Olam (Master of the Universe), there is one mitzvah that I have upheld with all my might, and it is called tzitzit.

Behold, I forgo all of my reward in the World-to-Come for the sake of this mitzvah, provided that the merit of this mitzvah will stand for my sick brother and that he will recover from his illness.'

Thus Rabbi Moshe stood and prayed, with tears and supplications. The family members were shaken to see him giving away his entire World-to-Come for the recovery of his righteous brother.

A short time later, Rabbi Yitzchak recovered from his illness, and to the

Parshat Behar Bechukotai - The Work of Birurim

The work of *Birurim*—Each and every person has some refinements in the world which he alone must elevate through holy and proper behavior. Additionally, one must clarify and refine his fixation of thought. Very often, this fixation

constrains his power and limits his capacities, and these mental constraints must be burst in order for one to advance.

We will now expand upon the subject of mental barriers and blocks that lead to sadness and despondency.

The Work of Birurim

In the Talmud (Ta'anit 21b) it is taught: "Rabbi Yosi says: A person's place does not honor him; rather, a person honors his place."

That is, the esteem one receives is not dependent on the place where one is found, nor on the caliber of the people there.

If one is not worthy of honor by virtue of his deeds, living among important people will not bestow importance.

And if one is, in fact, worthy of honor, honor will reach him no matter where he is.

The attitude of the environment toward a person depends on the person himself, and likewise, a person's attitude toward his own environment and situation depends upon the person alone.

The reality around a person is raw material, and it is the person, through his mindset, who fashions that raw material into the reality he experiences.

Every person, over the course of his life, has formed some kind of "consciousness," a mindset; it fixes the raw

—*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*—

astonishment of all his doctors, he was completely healed and returned to full health.

Rabbi Aryeh concluded and said: From this story I learned that there

is indeed a reality in which a person gives up even his entire World-to-Come for the sake of his brother – and this indeed is true self-sacrifice..."

material and gives it form, and it also defines the boundaries and limits of one's experiences.

Now, following this introduction, we will detail and clarify the type of mindset that leads and causes sadness.

The Many Causes of Sadness

As stated, everyone is locked within his mindset. Thus, if one is sad and depressed, this reveals a problem in his thinking.

For as a rule, the essence of Judaism is expressed with joy, and when this essence shines within a Jew, he feels joy. Only when this point is concealed and disappears does he fall into darkness, and surrounded by *kelipot*, he then feels sadness and depression.

In truth, a Jew never becomes completely distant from the Holy One, blessed be He; a Jew is always embraced and close to Him. Therefore, a Jew can also return to Him at will in an instant and awaken the 'point of Jewishness' that lies within him to shine with a great and wondrous light.

However, one's constrained mindset may be preventing this, and every person has his own mental impediments:

Some think they have done so much evil that there is no chance the Holy One, blessed be He, loves them. Others may think, "What good are my positive actions to begin with, since in any case I might soon fall again... How can I repent when I know how coarse I am..."

Some may simply feel such bitterness and sadness that they give up on themselves—each person with his own mental impediments.

Here, the work of *birurim* comes into effect: a person must seize upon the central fallacy in his thinking that prevents him from rejoicing in the service of G-d.

After he has identified this point, he must explain to himself, in simple terms, why this point is a mistaken one.

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Then, once his error is clarified, he will be able to rouse himself to joy with great ease.

Concerning this work of *birurim*, Isaiah prophesied: “And those captives of G-d

shall return, and come with jubilation to Zion; crowned with everlasting joy. They shall attain joy and gladness; sorrow and sighing shall flee” (Isaiah 35:10).³

❧ Wellsprings of Wisdom ❧

3. In a discourse delivered by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, he explained (Likutei Moharan – Tinyana, Lesson 23):

“Concerning joy. It can be explained with a parable: Sometimes, when people are happy and dancing, they grab someone from outside who is steeped in sadness and melancholy, and they pull him against his will into the circle of dancers, compelling him against his will to be joyful with them as well. Joy works in much of the same way.

When a person is happy, melancholy and afflictions retreat to the side. But it is an even higher virtue to exert oneself to pursue the melancholy itself, and to bring it, too, into the realm of joy, so that the melancholy itself will be transformed into joy. In other words, the melancholy and all the suffering should be turned into joy, just as when someone who is despondent joins a celebration, and then, due to the great happiness and delight, all of his worries, sadness, and melancholy are transformed into joy. Thus, one 'snatches' the melancholy

and forces it, against its will, into the realm of joy, as in the parable above.

“This is the meaning of: ‘They shall attain joy and gladness; sorrow and sighing shall flee’ (Isaiah 35:10) – for sorrow and sighing indeed flee from joy, since at a time of great joy, sorrow and sighing tend to stand off to the side, as mentioned above.

However, one must go to an even greater length and specifically chase after them, overtake them, and catch them to bring them into the joy itself, as explained.

And that is the meaning of ‘They shall attain joy and gladness’ – the joy and gladness will overtake and seize the *sorrow and sighing*, which are running and fleeing from the joy, and they will bring them into the realm of joy against their will.

Thus, the sorrows and sighs that stem from the *sitra achra* (the forces of impurity), which refuse to serve as a vehicle for holiness, and thus they flee from joy, must be therefore, forced into holiness—that is, into joy—against their will.”

Work in Thought, Speech, and Deed

Fortunate is the person who succeeds in this work of refinement (*birurim*).

As with every level in divine service, however, there are always additional ways to attain joy.

Even someone who struggles to identify the mindset that is blocking his joy should know that many other paths to happiness exist.

We quote from our work, *Chelev Ha'aretz* (vol. 3, ch. 8, "Branch" 2):

It is well known that each person has three garments through which the soul is revealed: thought, speech, and action.

These three garments also influence the soul itself. Therefore, when a person instills and infuses joy into these three garments, they in turn affect his soul, and he will merit to have joy manifest within him.

In *Chelev Ha'aretz*, we discuss these paths of divine service in great detail, and here,

we present only the essential points, beginning with the cultivation of joy through the faculty of thought:

Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin wrote the following (*Tzidkat HaTzaddik* §144):

"Where a person's thoughts are, that is where the person himself is. A human being is not defined by the body but by the soul; the soul is not a tangible thing but rather the power of thought, contemplation, and will that exists within a person. Wherever one's thoughts cling—there the entirety of the person's being is in that moment."

A person's vitality and life-force tend to follow his thoughts. If one's mind is consistently attached to holy and pure matters—such as serving G-d, studying the holy Torah, performing acts of kindness, and helping others—then all of one's vital energy dwells in the realms of holiness and divinity. By contrast, someone might sit

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quietly within the four walls of his home, yet his mind and heart may roam to evil and forbidden thoughts—thoughts of anger and heresy, lewdness and other abominations—and thereby his entire essence and life-force are there in practice,

wallowing in a place of spiritual filth.

One who focuses on positive, G-dly things is essentially living in a state of divinity; whereas one who dwells on depraved thoughts is, at that moment, immersed in a cesspool of impurity.

Acquiring Joy of Thought

Surveying our holy books, we have found five principal ways to cultivate joyful thoughts and thereby acquire joy in the mind: faith and trust in G-d, humility, recognizing one's good points, feeling joy in being Jewish, and being cognizant of the World to Come.

We will explain each of these briefly (for further detail, see *Chelev Ha'aretz* there):

Faith and Trust: To firmly anchor joy in one's soul, a person must sharpen and strengthen his faith in the Holy One, blessed be He. The deeper and more ingrained his faith

becomes, the more joy will naturally fill his heart.

Our Sages explain that the commandment to have faith is the foundation of all 613 mitzvot in the Torah. As the Talmud teaches (Makkot 24a), Moses gave Israel 613 commandments, then the prophet Habakkuk came and distilled them all into one principle, as it is written: “But the righteous shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). And among the many benefits (*segulot*) of cultivating faith in G-d is that it constantly generates great joy and fervor in one's heart.⁴

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

4. Once, the Baal Shem Tov heard a proclamation from Heaven that he must

travel to a village near Sanitin to learn the trait of trust in G-d (*bitachon*), and that he

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should take along some of his disciples so that they too might learn the lesson.

The Baal Shem Tov was staying at that time in the city of Talust, and he announced that whoever was able should join him on the journey. A group of chasidim gathered around him, and they set out on their way... Upon arriving, they entered the home of a Jewish innkeeper. The Jew received the Baal Shem Tov's entourage with a kindly countenance, hosted them in his home, and went to great lengths to fulfill all of the fine points of hospitality.

Throughout their stay, the Baal Shem Tov kept an eye on the innkeeper, looking to see an effusive display of his trust in G-d. The next day, as they were standing in prayer, an officer – dressed in red clothing and with a gleaming sword at his side – entered the house, walked up to the table standing in the center of the room, and struck it with his club three fierce blows... The face of the Jewish innkeeper remained cheerful and smiling, and he continued his activities as usual, without paying any attention to the officer or his actions.

The prayers finished, and the innkeeper quickly organized breakfast for his guests, when suddenly... the officer appeared again, baton in hand. He marched to the middle of the room and again thumped the table with three hard thumps... The Baal Shem Tov turned to the innkeeper and asked him, "Is this a natural occurrence here in your village?"

The innkeeper replied with a smile: "No. It's simply that I rented this inn from the local poritz (noble landlord), and when the payment day comes, he sends his most intimidating servant to remind me that I need to pay him. He appears three times and bangs on the table, and if after the third time the payment hasn't been made, that's the end of the story. They take the person who didn't pay and throw him into a narrow, dark prison pit, crawling with venomous creatures..."

"From the calm demeanor on your face, it's clear that you have the money with you," said the Baal Shem Tov. "So why wait until the last moment? Why not go to the poritz now, right after prayers, and pay him the rent? We can eat our breakfast afterwards, when you return..."

"At the moment I don't have even a single coin," the Jew answered, still keeping his serene demeanor. "I have nothing at all yet, but surely the Holy One, blessed be He, will set aside for me what I need... I still have about three hours until the debt is due – so why should I worry...? Come, let's first eat breakfast!" the Jew called out.

The Baal Shem Tov and his disciples sat down at the table. Profound words of Torah were spoken by the Baal Shem Tov. The "mind" of the disciples was attentive to his words, but the "heart"... the heart was seized with enormous fear for the fate of the poor innkeeper. Their thoughts drifted between dreadful scenarios of the

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Jew being thrown into the pit without food or drink... and daring rescue plans...

The only one—the only one!—who seemed entirely unfazed by the whole affair was the innkeeper himself. He sat there with a beaming face, full of joy, listening with rapt attention to the Baal Shem Tov's sacred words. Those holy words of the Baal Shem Tov aroused in his heart a yearning and desire to draw closer to G-d, to pure spirituality, to the sweet Divine light...

And then, yet again, for the final time, the "angel of destruction" appeared and repeated his actions for the third time; a dent was even formed in the table from the force of the blows.

The Jewish innkeeper rose calmly from his place, performed the ritual *mayim acharonim* washing, then recited *Birkat HaMazon* (the Grace after Meals) with composure. After that, he went over to the coat rack, put on his coat, and headed for the door.

The Baal Shem Tov asked him in astonishment, "Have you obtained the money?!"

The innkeeper replied, "Rebbe, I will explain to you. Everyone has a role. The Holy One, blessed be He, His role is to bring me all that I need in time, as it is said: '...and You give them their food in due time' (Psalms 145:15).

My role is to trust in Him and know that He will bring me all that I need, and to merely put in my best efforts. Now the

time has arrived to make an effort, and I am heading out toward the poritz..."

The Baal Shem Tov and his students stood by the window, their eyes following in anxious concern as the innkeeper's figure receded.

But then suddenly, lo and behold, a wagon stopped next to him, and the wagon driver and the Jew spoke with one another. The wagon then continued on, and the Jew went on his way. Five more minutes passed, and the wagon turned around and began to gallop after the Jew; it stopped again, the wagon driver took out a large sum of money and handed it to the Jew, and then they parted ways. The wagon now pulled up at the Jew's inn, and from it came out a wine merchant...

The Baal Shem Tov approached him and asked, "Could you please tell me what transpired between you and that Jew who is the innkeeper here?"

The merchant replied: "This Jew produces very high-quality spirits, and I came here to propose that he prepare for me several tens of thousands of liters for next winter. He agreed, but demanded an enormous advance payment, and I didn't want to give it, so we parted. But afterwards I regretted it, thinking to myself that I need him and his spirits even more than he needs me and my money. So I went back to him and said that I agreed, and I paid him the money..."

Then he told me that he is now going to the local poritz, and that I should wait for him at the inn until he gets back, and then we will draw up a contract..."

Parshat Behar Bechukotai - Acquiring Joy of Thought

Genuine faith causes one to develop trust (*bitachon*) in G-d, and through this trust in the Holy One, blessed be He, a person attains tremendous and constant joy. Trust implants in the heart a palpable awareness that G-d is always at one's side—above, below, before, and behind—watching over him at all times. Sensing vividly that G-d's presence surrounds and encompasses him at every moment brings forth a pure and steady joy in both the heart and soul.

On a related note, the Chassidic masters teach that positive thinking itself has the power to draw down blessings and salvation. In other words, when a person thinks good and remains optimistic, he can

actually change his situation even when, by natural law, there appears to be no hope at all. The very act of trusting and believing that "all will be good," with complete faith in G-d, causes an outpouring of goodness from Above that transcends all natural expectations.

Humility: Another way to attain constant joy in one's heart is by cultivating humility (lowliness of spirit). By practicing self-effacement and submission, a person can arrive at lasting joy. When someone humbles himself and truly recognizes his own smallness and limited merits, his heart will be filled with gratitude toward G-d for his every achievement and success, whether material or spiritual. He then attributes all greatness to its

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom *~*

A shiver ran through the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples. When the innkeeper returned home, they asked him, "Where did you find the courage to initially turn down a deal that could have given you most of the sum?! What if no other money had come in at all?!"

The innkeeper answered with his characteristic tranquility: "Everyone has their role!"

The Holy One, blessed be He, has the role of sending me all the money I need—why should I have settled for less?!" (*Sipurei Chassidim* – Torah–B, p. 79,

by Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin).

Parshat Behar Bechukotai - Acquiring Joy of Thought

true Source, in line with the verse, "For it is G-d your L-rd who gives you the power to prosper" (Deuteronomy 8:18). Such a person gives G-d thanks constantly—for every single breath, and especially for the gift of being a Jew, within whom resides a "portion of G-d above."

Likewise, in the ongoing battle with one's evil inclination, the humble person credits every victory not to himself but to G-d, who grants life—for without the Holy One's help, he could have never overcome his base instincts. This humility engenders a joyful sense of gratitude toward the ever-beneficent Creator. This grateful joy then leads one's soul to ascend to an even more profound joy born of contemplating G-d's greatness, and from there, one may reach an even more powerful constant inner joy that comes from fulfilling the commandments.

Recognizing One's Good Points: A third way to acquire joy is by actively seeking out and counting the good points within

oneself. The world is full of trials, and the evil inclination strives with all its might to weaken a person's heart and mind. It tries to drag him into a constricted state of mind (*mochin d'katnut*), characterized by negativity and despair, which leads to laziness in all good matters and extinguishes one's desire to accomplish anything positive for the sake of Heaven. In such a state, even life itself can begin to feel like an unbearable burden.

This downward spiral can be prevented by accustoming oneself to count his "good points" — the blessings, virtues, and merits that G-d has granted him — just as one would carefully count precious pearls. In practice, this means regularly noting and appreciating all the good deeds one has done and all the positive qualities one possesses by nature.

For example, one could reflect each day on thoughts such as: "*Thank G-d, I have the merit to be a Jew. I woke up this morning and was able to immerse myself*

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in the mikveh. I wrapped myself in tzitzit and put on tefillin. I prayed with a minyan (quorum). I answered 'Blessed be He and blessed be His Name' and 'Amen' to blessings. I spent time in the synagogue and the study hall. I gave charity to the poor. I am fortunate to have a mezuzah on the doorpost of my home and beautiful tefillin. I have a wonderful wife and righteous, holy children."

By consciously enumerating these personal good points as lovingly as one would count gems, an immense and wondrous joy is awakened in the heart. The person is lifted out of the heavy darkness of small-mindedness and ascends to the expanded awareness of *mochin d'gadlut* (a broadened, elevated state of consciousness). In this higher state, a powerful desire ignites within him to live, to grow, and to continue climbing ever higher endlessly.

Even if a person has stumbled and given in to his evil inclination at times, nevertheless, through

the power of joy and positive thoughts, all of the dormant strengths of his soul awaken to help fend off the advances of that inclination. Indeed, once he has attained *mochin d'gadlut*, he becomes like a flaming fire of holiness in his service of G-d and in his diligent observance of the Torah and its commandments. From that point onward, he continues to rise and ascend until he becomes a fitting dwelling place for the Divine Presence, the holy *Shechinah* itself.

Joy of Being Jewish: Yet another path to joy is to internalize that everything the Holy One, blessed be He, does for a person is an act of pure kindness. Every single breath we take and every success or benefit we enjoy — whether material or spiritual — is a gift from Above. Foremost among these gifts is the privilege of having been born into the chosen people, the Jewish nation, to whom G-d gave the Torah of truth, and made him a Jew who can serve G-d, fulfill His commandments,

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and rejoice in his meaningful lot. Indeed, it is said that many of our greatest sages would dance each day while reciting the blessing “*Shelo asani goy*” — *Thank You, G-d, for not making me a gentile!*

How much more will a person's joy grow when he contemplates the unfathomable greatness of the Creator. G-d is the sole reality filling all worlds; His dominion spans every realm and location, and there is no end to His greatness. He feeds and sustains every creature, from the eggs of tiny lice to the horns of mighty wild oxen, and He forgets no one. And yet, despite the Al-mighty's infinite majesty, He watches over a lowly being like me — as insignificant as I may be — with personal Divine providence, bestowing goodness upon me in this world and in the next.

We can illustrate this with a parable: Imagine a king who has countless ministers and nobles attending to him. One day, the king notices a simple slave and

calls out to him, saying: "I want you to serve me. Come stand among the ministers who serve before me. If you serve me properly, I will raise your rank even above the dignitaries here." Surely that slave would be overwhelmed with gratitude and would serve his master with joy, thinking to himself: "The king, with all his glory and power and having no lack, chose me — the lowly one — for my own benefit, to be in his service. How could I not serve him with utter joy and a glad heart?"

In much the same way, recognizing that the King of kings, despite needing nothing, has chosen us to serve Him and elevated us to such a lofty purpose should fill our hearts with ceaseless joy.

Remembering the World to Come: A final path to acquire joy is by recognizing that everything one experiences in life is orchestrated by G-d for a higher purpose — ultimately "for the sake of His Name." All of the trials, pains, and even sufferings

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one endures in this world are designed to refine and rectify the soul, so that after a long life, it can return to its most elevated place in the World to Come.

To explain further, our holy Sages wrote that suffering is actually a great and powerful good for a sin-stained soul, for "there is no righteous person on earth who does only good and never sins." The hardships a person experiences serve to atone for his sins; they purge and purify his body and soul. Therefore, one should rejoice greatly even in the sufferings that come upon him. Embracing a mindset of joy amid challenges will bring a person tremendous delight and benefit, both in this world and in the next.

In fact, the *Shulchan Aruch* (Orach Chaim 222:3) rules: "A

person is obligated to bless [G-d] for the bad with the same wholeheartedness and willingness as he blesses for the good. For whatever appears bad to those who serve G-d is actually their joy and their good, since by accepting what G-d decrees with love, one is truly serving G-d—and that service itself brings him joy." The *Mishnah Berurah* (ad loc. §4) explains that all forms of suffering — whether physical affliction or loss of money — atone for one's sins, so that he will not need to be punished in the World to Come, where the retribution is far more severe. With a relatively small measure of suffering in this world, a person saves his soul from the endless abyss of Purgatory, and he merits to be illuminated by the great and endless light of life in the hereafter.

Acquiring Joy of Speech

So far, we have discussed cultivating joy internally in one's faculty of thought. We now turn to the arena of speech, where we have identified three primary

ways to attain joy through one's vehicle of speech: engaging in Torah study, music and song, and through light-hearted humor.

Torah Study: Without a doubt, the most effective advice for attaining joy through speech is to engage in words of Torah. Our Sages taught that immersing oneself in the holy Torah — the very purpose and essence of Creation — brings a person tremendous joy. G-d imbued the Torah with a special nature such that it gladdens the hearts of those who study it. As the saintly Rabbi Chaim ben Attar writes in his commentary *Ohr HaChaim* (on Leviticus 26:16): "Know that the Torah imparts three qualities to the soul... The third quality is that the words of Torah rejoice the heart, as it is written, 'The precepts of G-d are upright, rejoicing the heart' (Psalms 19:9), and 'Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart' (Psalms 97:11)."

Melody and Song: Another method of infusing joy through speech is by means of joyous music and song. When a Jew plays a musical instrument or sings uplifting melodies with

the intent of praising and honoring our Father, our King — the Holy One, blessed be He — it draws down an immense flow of joy to the world at large, and to his soul in particular. A sure sign that a great joy has indeed been bestowed upon him from Above is that his thoughts become purified. (Notably, the Hebrew letters of *b'simchah* (בשמחה, "with joy") are the same letters as *machshavah* (מחשבה, "thought"), alluding to the idea that working on the trait of joy leads one to refined thoughts.)

Therefore, if someone — Heaven forbid — finds himself in a state of sadness and wants to awaken his heart to serve G-d with joy and gladness, he should summon his strength and sing a joyful tune. His heart will inevitably be stirred to become happy and uplifted. Even if he does not feel his mood improve immediately, if he persists for even a short time, his heart will eventually turn toward joy.

Thankfully, in our times, it is easier than ever to access and

obtain recordings or digital files of Jewish songs and melodies. By listening to holy tunes, a person can fortify his spirit and rejoice in serving G-d. However, as our Sages caution us, we must be careful about the source of the music we listen to. One must avoid hearing songs that impart impure thoughts and evil imaginings.

One who is careful to listen only to melodies sung by those who truly fear G-d and uphold lives of holiness, modesty, and reverence, will be awakened by the very sound of their voices to pure and holy thoughts, and stirred toward thoughts of repentance.

Light-Hearted Humor: Our Sages of blessed memory also taught that one of the keys to maintaining constant joy is *millei d'bedichuta* — a bit of light-hearted humor. The Talmud (Shabbat 30b) relates that the great Sages of the Mishnah and Talmud would begin their lectures with a witty remark or playful jest to make

their students smile, and only afterward would they commence the serious Torah discourse.

Many other righteous individuals followed this practice as well, occasionally doing various things to make themselves and others cheerful. They understood clearly that nothing is as harmful to one's service of G-d as sadness (as is taught in numerous holy books). Sometimes, because of the intense bitterness and the numerous troubles of this long exile — troubles of body, soul, and livelihood — it becomes difficult to be joyful *except* by engaging in a bit of wit or joking. In such moments, it is appropriate to do so for the sake of this great mitzvah of joy, since joy is a great preparation for serving G-d.

Of course, it is crucial to exercise caution and moderation. The joy and humor must never be allowed to devolve into the serious sin of mockery or excessive frivolity. The tractate *Derech Eretz Zuta*

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(ch. 6, Mishnah 4) teaches: “Leitzanut (scoffing or scornful cynicism) is an accessory to the sin of immorality.” In other words, through unchecked mockery and frivolous behavior, a person can stumble into grave transgression, G-d forbid.

Therefore, a wise individual must choose the golden middle

path. On one hand, a person should gladden himself and those around him — especially the members of his own household, but on the other hand, one must be wary of the lurking dangers of mockery that appear when humor crosses appropriate boundaries.

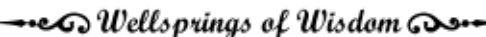
Acquiring Joy of Action

Finally, we turn to action. At first glance, acquiring joy through action seems the simplest of all: it is achieved by being in the company of other joyous people. When a person spends time among companions whose company he enjoys, it naturally arouses a feeling of joy within him. Conversely, one who constantly isolates himself and shuns human company will inevitably fall into sadness.

This idea was expressed by the venerable *mashgiach* Rabbi Meir Chodosh, of blessed memory.⁵ He taught that before the onset of

the Egyptian exile, the Jewish people merited perfect unity, true friendship, and a strong bond of brotherhood. But when the exile began and pressure and pain increased, people's minds became confused by their many troubles, their hearts grew dull, and the powers of their souls weakened — and this led to division between them. In fact, this “division of hearts” was itself one of the principal hardships of the Egyptian bondage.

Along similar lines, Rabbi Yosef Tzvi of Kalisz, of blessed memory, recorded a striking



5. His words were cited in *Or Meir* (Part I – p. 205).

insight from *the Holy Jew* of Peshischa:⁶ “*Exile is one of the hardest experiences a person can endure.*” The essence of exile is that a person finds himself outside of his own place, away from his friends, acquaintances, and community. He walks alone, with no one with whom to share his feelings and experiences. This sense of loneliness, isolation, and not belonging is as agonizing to a person as suffering many types of death.

To fully appreciate the importance of companionship, we bring an excerpt of a letter the Lubavitcher Rebbe once wrote to a woman who was feeling despondent (*Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 18, p. 534):

"It seems I have written this several times already. In my opinion—and I have also seen it proven in practice—every person, without exception, is a social being by nature (though not everyone to the same degree). If

one tries to act against this nature, it inevitably leads to confusion and the like.

For those to whom, for whatever reason, social interaction is difficult, there is no advice other than the one used for learning to swim: you cannot learn to swim by standing on the bank of the river; you have to jump into the water, and then, as a matter of course, you will begin learning how to swim. All the long deliberation while lingering on the riverbank — debating how, and in what manner, one should swim — is useless, for this can only be learned in the water.

With due respect, so it is with you. In your letters you present arguments for and against getting involved in activities that would bring you into contact with people, all while you continue sitting alone in your room (within your own four cubits).

6. In his book *She'erit Yosef* (p. 202).

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It is clear and understood that I do not mean to preach to you. I am merely attempting, once again — in the hopes that perhaps my words will have some effect this time — to encourage you to leap into some activity that will, at least initially, place you among other people outside of your home.

I strongly hope that before long you will no longer need to force yourself, and you will then recognize both the fundamental importance and the great benefit (for you and for others) of being around people. After all, it is not for nothing that man was

created as a social being by nature.

Our Sages have provided us with a wondrous guideline for daily life: every matter of holiness requires ten — not just a crowd, but a complete congregation. It is also well-known, as Chassidut teaches (in the name of several great masters of Mussar and Chassidic thought), that it is worse to be alone in the Garden of Eden than to be in Purgatory together with other Jews...

May it be the will of G-d that at long last you take a decisive step for the good, and that you will have good news to report.”

Shabbat Shalom!



Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. The soul of a Jew is entirely spiritual, and by nature it senses the joy of the Divine at all times. Thus, naturally, a Jew ought to constantly feel joy, but at times a Jew may instead feel otherwise—sad and depressed.

At such times, he must, with all his might, overcome the forces of impurity that seek to lower him into sadness, and gladden himself with all his might.

2. A sad person usually has some warped worldview and perspective that causes him to be sad. Therefore, one who wishes to be happy must identify his mistaken worldview and explain to himself, in understandable terms, why that particular worldview is mistaken.

3. Every person has three garments through which the soul is revealed—thought, speech, and action. These three garments also influence the soul; thus, when a person experiences joy in these

garments, it influences his soul, and consequently, that joy will also be revealed within him.

In *Chelev Ha'aretz*, vol. 3, we elaborated at great length regarding these modes of divine service; see there at further length.

4. Our holy books discuss five principal ways to merit joyful thoughts and to acquire the trait of joy by the power of thought: faith and trust; humility; emphasizing one's own good points; joy of our Jewishness; and awareness of the World to Come.

5. The power of speech can bring one to feel joy in one of three ways: Torah study, song and melody, and a bit of humor.

6. The way to acquire joy through 'action' is to connect with others who are joyful and G-d-fearing.

Fortunate is the person who can overcome sadness and gladden himself always.





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Shabbat Times Behar-Bechukotai

22nd of Iyar ,5786



City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	7:41 pm	8:46 pm	9:12 pm
Miami	7:38 pm	8:33 pm	9:08 pm
Los Angeles	7:25 pm	8:25 pm	8:56 pm
Montreal	7:52 pm	9:02 pm	9:23 pm
Toronto	8:10 pm	9:18 pm	9:41 pm
London	8:17 pm	9:38 pm	9:48 pm
Jerusalem	7:09 pm	8:00 pm	8:52 pm
Tel Aviv	7:06 pm	7:58 pm	8:50 pm
Haifa	7:06 pm	8:01 pm	8:53 pm
Be'er Sheva	7:04 pm	7:59 pm	8:50 pm

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