THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JOY AND HAPPINESS – PURIM A TIME FOR JOY.
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FEBRUARY 19, 2010

This has been an incredibly difficult and sad week in our community. The tragic deaths of Adir Vered a student at New Community Jewish High School and of Avi Schaefer the 21-year-old son of our friend and colleague Rabbi Arthur Gross-Schaefer confound our community. So to the numerous deaths and illnesses that have befallen families in our congregation have made these first days of the Hebrew month of Adar an unfitting start to what our tradition says is supposed to be a month of increasing joy and rejoicing.

In the Talmud, and also in the Code of Jewish Law, it says: "*Mi SheNichnas Adar, Marbim b'Simcha*" meaning – "whoever enters the month of Adar, will increase in joy". Now I should mention, that I am being particular in how I translate the Hebrew word *simcha*. We often translate *simcha* as happiness, but happiness is not what our tradition promises for happiness is an emotion usually directly related to circumstances that are currently happening, not those that are projected and on the horizon as with the month of Adar. Happiness, we should note is fleeting, while joy is lasting and enduring.

Consider the two words happiness and joy, and their meaning for a moment. When circumstances are good and going our way, we feel happy. On the other hand, when things break, get old, disappoint, when we do not get what we want, or when things do not go our way, we feel sad and are not happy.

Joy on the other hand is something entirely different from happiness. Joy, in the Jewish context, is not an emotion. Joy is and attitude of the heart, the comportment of the spirit. Happiness is found on your face; Joy rests deep in your soul; it is not necessarily based on something positive happening. Joy is something that lasts; happiness is something that is temporary. When happiness fades away joy remains, it nourishes and sustains us. Happiness is a sugar rush from a chocolate bar, joy is the satiation that comes from a good, well balanced meal.

The reason joy increases in the month of Adar is because this the time of miracles for our people. Adar is the month that contains Purim the most joyous of holidays when we celebrate the salvation of our people from the hand of Haman. After Purim follows the holiday of Passover another celebration of our freedom and salvation from an evil tyrant, in this case Pharoah. Passover happens in the month of Nissan, a month whose name literally means miracles, and so the Rabbis through a bit of exegetical linguistics make the point that joy begins with Adar and increases up through Purim, then Passover, culminating with Sha'voth when we celebrate the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

Put more succinctly our tradition makes the point, that from this time forward till June we should feel a daily increase of joy as we look forward to and are reminded

of the miracles that God did for us in our times of greatest need and distress.

Why do I find this helpful, so much so that I share it with you tonight? Because, when I feel low and removed from God, as I do right now, when I feel the burden and deep sorrow that comes with losing ones you love, and the pain you feel for your loved ones. When it seems that the mounting difficulty, struggle, physical, emotional, economic, social has no end. When I think, as the news would have us believe, that the world is coming to an end, in Haiti, in our own country, in the middle-east - that all hope is lost; I am reminded that we have been this low before and we have endured. Our people, our nation, our community, our families – we've known sorrow and suffering, and so too we know that it doesn't stay that way. Hamen is defeated, his name is blotted out; Pharoah and Egypt are left behind for a promised land that is once again our home land this very day; God greets us in the desert on Mount Sinai and gives us Torah which has added profound meaning to our existence.

Why were all of these things possible? Because even in our greatest despair our faith, our tradition, our belief in a power greater than ourselves did not abandon us. The key word for me is not the promise of *simcha*, be it joy or happiness but the word that proceeds it, *marbim* / increase. Our tradition doesn't try to argue that when the calendar page flips to Adar that suddenly we all become happy, it doesn't promise a quick fix, a band-aid on our emotions. It is not Bobby McFarin, don't worry be happy Judaism. A 'happiness band-aid' won't salve our pain, despair, or sorrow. No rather Judaism promises us a gradual increase in joy, a growing sense of wholeness, contentment, hope and satisfaction, *marbeh torah, marbeh hayim* / increase Torah, increase life!

Joy is something that is bigger than you and I and our current circumstances. Joy brings us peace in the middle of a storm. Joy is something that God deposits into us, when we lift up our eyes and our hearts and believe in the possibility that things will get better, because things do get better. Time does heal wounds, painful memories do fade and are replaced with colorful and joyful ones; even tragic deaths are juxtaposed with birth and joyful baby namings as we shared this evening.

Mi SheNichnas Adar, Marbim b'Simcha, we have entered the month of Adar, perhaps slowly, perhaps with fits and starts, but joy will increase, hopefulness will return, things will get better. That has been the history of our people through all that our people have endured. If we the Jewish people, a people so beaten down and assaulted by history can still find joy and hopefulness to look forward to in the weeks and months ahead, then certainly we can do the same as individuals. Joy endures. I feel a little better now, a little closer to God, I pray you do too.