

On Joy and Sadness

(*Aharei Mot-K'doshim* 5780)

It is so wonderful to share a moment of *simhah* – of joy together – during this time when we need it so badly, even if it is only through Zoom.



This week many of us were able to come together for *Yom Ha'atzmaut* – Israel's 72nd birthday. Not only did we hold an amazing [Zoom ceremony](#) (watch here!) with the [Deputy Consul General Daniel Agranov of Israel](#) – which these days is becoming *di regeur* – but we also held a

[Rami's](#) falafel pickup and [Israel day car parade](#) (click to watch Facebook Live Feed.)

I thank Me'ir and Kfir for organizing the delicious food and music; and thank our amazing set-up, traffic, and food delivery support from Rabbi Kling Perkins, Raveetal and Graham Celine, Tova Weinronk, Adam Samansky, Michael Roskind, and Claudio Trindade.

In case you were or are curious:

Yes, our plan was approved by medical experts.

No, participants did not get out of their cars.

And yes, we all wore masks and gloves.

While the over 100 cars that came (we were planning on 20-40) did not quite fit into the parking lot for the car parade, the feeling was quite special. Just to see one another, even behind windows and masks, we could feel the connection.

We honked our horns and waved Israeli flags. We stopped, sang *Hatikvah* and jammed out to Israeli music.



And that sense of community only deepened through Zoom an hour later – lighting torches, sharing, and singing together. I am grateful to Harvey Lowell, our Israel Committee chair, and Yael and Eyal Dvir for coordinating that and to Rachel Raz who coordinated our most meaningful *Yom Hazikaron* – Israel’s memorial day commemoration where we remembered all those who fell in Israel’s wars and terrorist attacks – family and friends whose lives live on in our memories.

Each year, I am struck anew by the sheer genius of holding Israel's independence day right after its memorial day, but this year I felt it even more. While it is hard to move from one emotional state to another, it is real, it is honest.

One can only fully appreciate joy if one knows sadness and vice versa. Joy and sorrow go hand in hand.

During this unprecedented pandemic, I feel like I am on a roller-coaster as emotions and moments literally change – sometimes from one happy Zoom, to a sad Facetime in the next. Sometimes they are all woven together. In one moment a baby naming, followed by a funeral – sadness and joy together.



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As Talia explained in her insightful *dvar* Torah, this week we are reading a double portion, two Torah readings: *Aharei Mot* and *K'doshim*. *Aharei Mot* means “after the death” and *K'doshim* means “Holy.”

The opening verse reads: “Adonai spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they drew too close to the presence of Adonai.”

And then, the text shifts to an instruction to Aaron and when he can enter the Holy of Holies, where God’s presence is most intensely felt.

This is an abrupt shift.

Aaron’s sons died tragically in the previous *parashah* and the loss lingers into the beginning of our reading. But suddenly, Aaron is instructed how he is to enter the innermost shrine, how to have a moment of holiness.

And what is the purpose of this moment?

To help the Israelites be forgiven on what we now know as *Yom Kippur*. A day when we pray that we are given life. A day when we wear white, imagining ourselves renewing our covenant with the Divine, as in a wedding; beginning with a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate. And at the end of the fasting, we imagine ourselves full of joy, ready to eat and celebrate the new year.

Joy and sorrow all coming together.

The rabbis refer to this in the Talmud as “*gilu b’re’adah*” – you should rejoice with a sense of trembling. Judaism stresses that even in our most

joyous moments we are aware of sorrow. The rabbis taught that even in the wedding, we incorporate moments of sadness, like breaking a glass, recalling the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*, the Temple in Jerusalem.

And in moments of sadness, we are aware that we also need to smile, to feel some happiness. When someone adds some humor to a funeral or a *shiva* at the right moment in the right manner, that can bring such a sense of relief, allowing everyone to breathe, to relax a bit.



The rabbis based this idea on Psalm 2, verse 11 which reads:

“עֲבֹדוּ אֶת-ה' בְּיִרְאָה, וְגִילוּ בְרַעְדָּה. ” (תהילים ב:י"א)

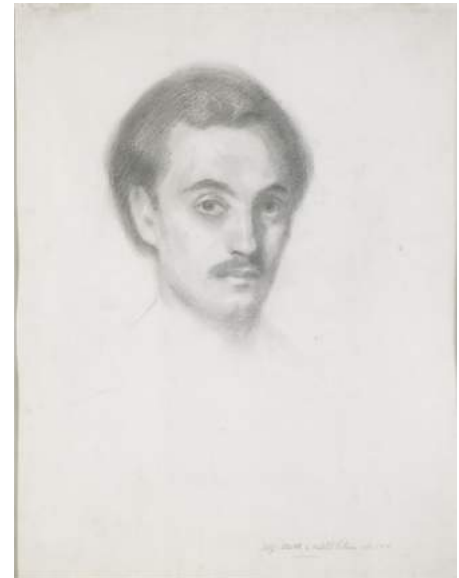
“Serve God in awe, and rejoice with trembling.”

We find in the *Talmud* (Yoma 4b) that Rav Adda bar Mattana said that Rav taught: Where there is the joy of fulfilling a *mitzvah*, there will be the trembling of the awe of Heaven there. When we are experiencing a moment of happiness, we are still aware that we are mortal, that we are fragile, and vice versa.

In order to feel our humanity most deeply, we are called to become aware of our fragility and our strength, our sorrow and our grief.

Through this process, we become aware of our different emotional states; we appreciate the complexity of the world and how multifaceted people are.

As the great poet Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) beautifully described this in the following poem, joy and sorrow are woven into the very fabric of the human experience.



“On Joy and Sorrow”

Then a woman said, Speak to us of Joy and Sorrow.

And he answered:

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.

And how else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain. Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter’s oven?

And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

Some of you say, “Joy is greater than sorrow,” and others say, “Nay, sorrow is the greater.”

But I say unto you, they are inseparable.

Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.

Verily you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy.
Only when you are empty are you at standstill and balanced.
When the treasure-keeper lifts you to weigh his gold and his silver, needs
must your joy or your sorrow rise or fall.”

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Friends, we are living in such a time. A time when joy and sorrow are woven even more tightly into one another, more than usual. We now know that this is not a pause of a couple of weeks, this is not a short-term hiatus. We are living through a slow-moving world-wide trauma that is impacting every aspect of our lives from how we celebrate a wonderful *Bat-Mitzvah* as we are this morning to how we mourn and hold funerals. It is upending our economy and will have long-term impacts on us, our communities, and our institutions. We know that there will be many changes, many we do not even begin to imagine.

On Thursday, we received the news that many camps were going to close for this summer. While not all is determined yet, there is great disappointment. We do not know when this will end or how things will look in the future.

And there is suffering, there are losses as more and more succumb to this devastating virus and others struggle around the globe to eat, to survive.

Everyone is impacted.

And yet, we cannot remain like this for weeks or months or maybe even years.

We will need to figure out how to live, how to experience moments of joy together, how to celebrate. That's why sharing a *Bat-Mitzvah* fills us with hope, with meaning, with joy.

We will need to figure out what we can do to continue to connect with one another as best we safely can.

Let us be grateful for this amazing Emunah community, this family, that has grown over six decades and while it looks like our Emunah 60 celebration on Sunday, May 31st will be held by Zoom, we still must hold it. We must find ways to share joy!



Joy and sorrow have always been woven together; today, we feel that most intensely. Let us renew our commitments to this community, to sharing and supporting and showing up for each other via Zoom.

Let us hold both the joy and the sorrow of this time.