

Marbim B'simcha Purim

By Rabbi Jason Miller

This entire Jewish month is a sort of February 29th since we are in a leap year. And because the holiday of Purim always falls in this additional month of Adar, called Adar Sheni - the second Adar, the command to marbim b'simcha is applied to this month. Marbim b'simcha means that we are directed to increase or enhance our happiness during this month.

But how are we to really understand this? Especially this year? What are we supposed to be happy about? It would be easier to list the reasons why it's difficult to be happy at all during our current world situation. Shouldn't we just be satisfied if we can feel any sense of joyousness these days, let alone increase our joy? There is an impending war with Iraq. North Korea and Iran are flexing their despotic muscles at us. Israelis are in a constant feeling of the unknown. And as Americans, it seems more and more that we have very few friends in the rest of the world. And on top of all that it feels like spring is never going to come!

So, how are we to understand our charge to increase our happiness this month? As I've learned from studying Talmud, one needs to be versed in science as well as comfortable with the tricky language of Aramaic. There are many different measurements in the Talmud and one interesting measurement is a tefach sameach. Now a tefach is the equivalent to our inch, but what is a tefach sameach? A happy inch? No, it's actually just a little longer than our average tefach.

The rabbis, I believe, thought of this tefach measurement that was longer than a tefach but not quite 2 tefachs to be happier than the average tefach. I think of this little guy stretching himself, trying with all his might to reach the two tefach mark. Maybe he was just happy to be a little more than his normal size. In increasing his size, he increased his happiness, his simcha.

And that's also my suggestion for what it means to increase our joy during this dark time. It is natural for us to walk around with our heads hanging low now when the evening news is so depressing. But that is all the more reason for us to hold our heads high and stretch with everything we have to find new levels of joy. This year, it is not so much our task to increase our happiness, but rather we must work hard and stretch like the little tefach to be open to embrace the happiness that is around us, but is hidden behind all the sadness and despair.

It is very natural for us to be sad or resentful with the current situation being what it is. But we must also be on the active search for happiness and joy. Andy Rooney is quoted as saying that one thing he's learned is that when you harbor bitterness, happiness will dock elsewhere. Monday night might just be the joyousness we've been searching for all year.

Purim is a time for celebration. Our people survived the plot of an evildoer, and we, the Jewish community centuries later is still celebrating. If you've forgotten what it is like to really express yourself with simcha, with sheer joy and merriment, I encourage you to come to the synagogue on Monday night and just watch the children on Purim. We have given this holiday to the children for good reason - they are our examples for joy.

I'll close with a blessing. Eloheinu v'Elohei Avoteinu v'Imoteinu, Our God and the God of our ancestors, during this most challenging time in which our world seems more fragile than ever, grant us the ability to find moments of happiness and increase our joy. And let us all say, Amen.

Shabbat Shalom

