

A Condition of our hearts – Joy

Daniel, in his list of concerns expressed last Shabbat, was correct in saying His messages over the past few Shabbats have been challenging and sometimes, well perhaps more than sometimes, quite hard. I agree; however, as I have said this many times before, I cannot take the credit for deciding what Abba, through His Holy Spirit, asks me to write. He knows how hard His messages are – He’s the teacher. This week, however, He has asked me to focus on something a little softer – Joy, a condition of our hearts.

Max Lucado is one of my favourite authors. In one of his devotion books, he writes about a parakeet named Chippie. I’ll let Max’s words tell the story.

“Chippie the parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over. The problems began when Chippie’s owner decided to clean Chippie’s cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She’d barely said "hello" when "sssopp!" Chippie got sucked in. The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippie -- still alive, but stunned.

Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippie under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do . . . she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air.

Poor Chippie never knew what hit him.

A few days after the trauma, the reporter who’d initially written about the event

contacted Chippie's owner to see how the bird was recovering. "Well," she replied, "Chippie doesn't sing much anymore -- he just sits and stares."

Abba Father, many of us throughout the years have had the joy sucked right out of us, through trauma, grief or other conditions which sap us dry. Help us understand how Your joy will never leave us, if we but cling to you. In Your precious Name I pray.

Poor Chippie. How unfortunate his owner took the drastic actions she did, resulting in this fragile bird losing the joy in life he once had. Will Chippie ever sing again? Somehow I doubt it. But, for me, this raises the question - what exactly is joy? The dictionary definition is quite clear; joy is a **feeling** of great pleasure and happiness. However, is that all it is – a feeling? Scripture takes us into a deeper understanding, when we learn joy is a state of mind and an orientation of our hearts. (Theopedia) How is joy a state of mind?

We have been given the right, by Yahovah, to choose how we orient our minds and our hearts. We may be optimistic – looking at our world through Messiah-coloured glasses. By the same token, we may choose to be pessimistic – always looking for and, coincidentally, finding the worst in the world. That choice is ours. However, how does Yahovah wish us to orient our minds and hearts? How does He wish us to show-up and be present for Him? To explore this question we need to go to the source – His word.

Joy comes to us through His Word both in the Hebrew and the Apostolic Scriptures. For example, let's read the following passage from Psalm 47, *Clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with cries of joy!* (Psalm 47:1) Why? Because, *ADONAI 'Elyon is awesome, a great king over all the earth.* (Psalm 47:3)

And, then in Isaiah 9 we find, *You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice in your presence as if rejoicing at harvest time, the way men rejoice when dividing up the spoil.* (Isaiah 9:3) In these passages we find the source of our joy is Yahovah Himself and, then, joy becomes an expression of our relationship with the Ruler of the universe and the Lover of our souls. In Ecclesiastes 9 we receive another perspective of joy, namely, *So go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart, for God has already accepted your deeds.* (Ecclesiastes 9:7) Here is where the orientation of our minds coincides with the orientation of our hearts – Yahovah has seen where our hearts are focused and, if they are focused on Him, we do not have to worry about where our next meal will come from – He will provide, so we can eat what He has given us with joy. Now that is something to sing about – HalleluYah!

Joy takes on a slightly different hue in the Apostolic Scriptures, although not unexpectedly. Ya'akov, the brother of Messiah, exhorts us, in James 1, *Regard it all as joy, my brothers, when you face various kinds of temptations.* (James 1:2) How is facing temptation a moment of joy? Ya'akov answers this question in verse 3 - *for you know that the testing of your trust produces perseverance.* (James 1:3) Now this is a concept which turns the world's logic on its head – being joyful in the midst of trials and temptations. Here, though, is then the twist in Yahovah's perspective of joy – hardship within a life led by a God-Centred heart brings blessings, grace and growth of our character and of our faith.

Before we go much further along this track, let's take a moment and examine the elements of biblical joy. The first element of joy is confidence. Confidence is the quality of our minds which accepts or rejects the understanding we are the

children of the Living Elohim. Rav Sha'ul clarifies this for us clearly, when in Philippians 4 he wrote, *I can do all things through Him Who gives me power.* (Philippians 4:13) Imagine, we do not have to create our own confidence, when we accept Yahovah's free gift of power; then there are virtually no limits to what we may do for Him! Now isn't that a cause for rejoicing!

Notice, this power does not come of its own volition or through any effort on our part. Power comes from Yahovah and through our relationships with Him. When He is within us and we are within Him, His power is available for us. From His power, then, comes our confidence.

A second element of joy comes from our belief/faith in our Eternal Elohim, His Son Adonai Yeshua and the Blessed Holy Spirit. There are two parts to belief or faith – the first being trust and the second – action. I've spoken a good deal in the past about emunah – trust in action – but I have not explored this relationship between trust and action for a while. As an element of joy, this would be important.

Am I able to believe in Yahovah's Word without trusting? Isaiah has focused on this issue very clearly in his 40th Chapter. Listen to his teaching for us, in verse 31 - *but those who hope in ADONAI will renew their strength, they will soar aloft as with eagles' wings; when they are running they won't grow weary, when they are walking they won't get tired.* (Isaiah 40:31) What does Isaiah mean by hope in Adonai? There are two words for hope in Hebrew; one is אֵלֶּיךָ , sever, meaning a hope – noun, while the other תִּקְוָה , tiqvah, is a verb – to hope. We see tiqvah used many times in the Hebrew Scriptures in quite unusual ways. For example, in Joshua 2:18, we see Rahab being commanded to believe or hope in the Word of

Yahovah - *you tie this piece of scarlet cord in the window you let us down from.*

(Joshua 2:18) The Hebrew word for *tie this piece*, is tiqshri, a combination of sever and tiqvah. Here we see belief turned into action. This cannot occur without trust. Rav Sha'ul confirms this relationship between belief and hope, in Romans 15, when he writes, *May God, the source of hope, fill you completely with joy and shalom as you continue trusting.* (Romans 15:13) As Yahovah is the source of hope, then we have no need to fear the truth of His Word. It's that simple.

Let's focus for a moment on the relationship each of us has with Adonai Elohim Tzivaot, Lord God Almighty. As we know, this relationship is created when (a) we confess our sins to Him and ask for forgiveness, (b) express our desire to turn around – t'shuva – and walk on His narrow path, rather than on the world's broad path, (c) invite Him into our hearts to create change – to transform our hearts to become more like His and (d) commit to following His life instructions, the Torah of Adonai Yeshua, the Creator. If we stop there, then we will have a relationship with the Ruler of the Universe, but it might not be long lasting. There is a fifth step we need to complete in order to ensure our relationship will be solidified – that is walking out in trust – our tying the scarlet cord to the window of our hearts. Through displaying our obedience to His Word, we signal to Him our desire for a deep relationship with the Lover of our souls. And then we have gained another vital element of joy – closeness to Yahovah.

The closer we are to the source of our joy and I mean our real Joy, the greater will be the fulfillment of joy in our lives. From this closeness comes shalom. Remember, Shalom is not merely peace; it is Yahovah's fullness within us and His completeness overtaking us. I know many of us within this room this morning

have experienced this incredible joy which overtakes us, when we know His presence and enter into His presence. And this closeness to Yahovah can overcome the effects of even the most oppressive of circumstances. Rav Sha'ul understood this; just listen to his expression of joy, while being imprisoned, as found in Philippians 4: *I have learned to be content regardless of circumstances.* (Philippians 4:11) And here we have another element of joy – contentment.

The Apostle Matthew, in his 6th Chapter, writes - *Therefore, I tell you, don't worry about your life — what you will eat or drink; or about your body — what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing?* (Matthew 6:25) In this verse, Matthew is sharing with us the conditions of contentment – accepting our life without worry, care or fear, knowing Yahovah, our Great and Mighty God has us protected and secure through His love. With this understanding we will be content. What is the requirement? *Only that we seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness.* (Matthew 6:33) Then we will receive what we need to live and to complete the tasks He has for us. Once we let fear and worry enter our hearts, we stop seeking his Kingdom and His Righteousness and focus instead on the things of the world. We move from under His protective wings into the world of sin.

Once more Rav Sha'ul, in Hebrews 13, clarifies this issue of contentment, with *Therefore, we say with confidence, "ADONAI is my helper; I will not be afraid -- what can a human being do to me."* (Hebrews 13:6) Why is it, then, even some believers seek after more of the things of this world, rather than relying on the One who wants us to have all we need? I know unbelievers, through their human natures, crave what the world has to offer them. Within the world of sin the

bumper sticker, “He, with the most toys, wins”. Here are some statistics which might help us put the issue of want verses contentment into proper perspective:

93% of the world’s population do not have a stable roof over their heads nor a minimum of three meals a day;

80% of the world’s population live on less than \$10 per day.

75% of the world’s population do not own a pair of shoes.

22,000 children each day die of poverty-related diseases.

Almost 30% of all children in developing countries are malnourished and dehydrated.

Does this help us put our problems in perspective? Do we need convincing to be content with our lives or do we wish to continue complaining and whining about our situations, as if that will help us dig ourselves out of the messes we have created for ourselves. But I promised this wouldn’t be a hard message, so I’d better stop here.

How do we express the joy Yahovah gives us? I would imagine each one of us expresses joy in our own unique ways; however, there are some common ways in which we celebrate and share the joy we have within our hearts. Each time praise and worship occurs within Kehilah, I hear joy; I hear joy in the words which come from our hearts through our lips and I see joy in the dancing that takes place at our tables. Rejoicing – what a word this is – there are two words in Hebrew which mean rejoice; the first is biblical definition for rejoicing is לָגַל, gheel, meaning to spin around with gladness; the second is שָׂמַח, samach, meaning showing gladness. When we have a holy day, we often say to each other Chag Sameach, which means joyful festival. So, to be joyful literally means to spin around or

dance with gladness, as we read of David, in 2 Samuel 6:14, spinning around or dancing with gladness, as he brought the Arc of the Covenant home to Jerusalem, after he defeated the Philistines in battle. This gives us permission to dance before Yahovah with abandon, within pure joy. There is a caution here, though; known as the Toronto Phenomenon, named after observances within the Vine-land Church - Toronto Airport, many are caught up in the act of uncontrollable laughter and making noises like animals, when rejoicing before Adonai Elohim. Such behaviour verges on idolatry, for as Isaiah says in his 8th Chapter, *And when the people [instead of putting their trust in God] shall say to you, Consult for direction mediums and wizards who chirp and mutter, should not a people seek and consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? [Direct such people] to the teaching and to the testimony! If their teachings are not in accord with this word, it is surely because there is no dawn and no morning for them.* (Isaiah 8:19,20) Thankfully we have not witnessed that behaviour in Kehilah and I pray we never will. So, to bring His message to its conclusion, let's review what joy means in our lives, today:

1. Joy comes when we have confidence in Yahovah's promises.
2. Faith and action, emunah, are integral elements of joy – the essence, the fuel for our joy.
3. The closeness of our relationship with Yahovah.
4. Contentment.

Beloved, we are in a position to receive the joy He wants for us. We must want it, though. I'm reminded of the story of the man who hated his job – his pay was much lower than his qualifications might indicate he receive; his duties were

menial and he did not have good relations with his colleagues. When asked why he didn't seek other employment, his response was, "Better the devil I know than the devil I don't know". If we are in this situation, then we lack the joy Adonai Elohim Tzivaot has for us.

Dear ones, are you looking for more of His joy? Do you wish you were filled with His presence? These desires are ours, if only we ask and step forward in trust of Him.

Pray for our desire to reach out to Yahovah, our endless and unique source of pure joy – our unquenchable joy - is greater than our need to cling to things of the world.

We have a few minutes for discussion. Please use the microphones set up for you.