

A Commandment of JOY?!

I sat across from my therapist and shifted uncomfortably on the sofa.

Dr. C is gentle and patient and entirely non-pushy.

And still, she has that unnerving emotional astuteness that I feel flayed open throughout most of the 50 minutes sitting across from each other.

Dr. C held my gaze and repeated her question,

“Do you feel guilty being joyous when your mom is so sick?”

I exhaled. “Nooooo.”

A pause hung thick in the air.

“Well... I mean...” I started stumbling over my words.

“Sometimes it just seems unfeeling to be happy when she’s suffering so much.”

“Do you think it’s possible

that embracing your joy might enable you to be a better daughter?”

And that searing question is why we go to therapy, right?!

When Rabbi Cari first invited me to speak about joy, I was in a really good space.

I like to call this my ponies and rainbows zone.

Dreaming big about life's possibilities--my business, financial abundance,
heart-stoppingly beautiful romance.

And then life got a little more real, as it does.

Health struggles, entrepreneurship struggles,
the experience of being human with all its ups and downs...

I felt like my joy got lost in a bleak neighborhood
searching furtively for the street that would take it safely home.

This is what always happens with spiritual invitations, right? Life gets a little more
real so we can learn what we need to. ☺

This recent sticky period led me to consider holding JOY in a new way.

A path recognizing joy as an active practice.

Joy is a practice.

We are fed the societal message that once we get X...

the job, the relationship, the money, fill in the blank, we'll be happy.

But we also know that the only constant is change
and these external things don't guarantee happiness.

What we can control is where we choose to focus our attention and mindset.

We can claim JOY for ourselves.

The ancient part of our brain is wired for fear.

Claiming joy is a choice to bypass our reptile brain.

Instead, we expose joy from a power within.

The power of pure presence.

I practiced this recently on a trip to Montauk, Long Island.

I was there to officiate at a wedding.

The past few weeks had been challenging.

Joy wasn't coming easily.

Frustrations building my business, disconnected from abundance,
feeling lonely at this wedding.

I popped into an IGA grocery store to pick up a few snacks.

As I was waiting in line,

I chose to leave my phone in my pocket and chat with the couple behind me.

They were in their 60's wearing shorts and flip flops,

their skin that sandy golden hue

that only comes at the end of a summer spent outside.

They emanated a tender, kind energy, and turned out that we both live in Denver!

Also on Montauk for a wedding,

the woman and I discovered we grew up in the same place.

Opening myself to this moment of simple joy in the present moment

shifted my entire day.

I practiced claiming the gentleness of pure connection.

This form of joy is always at hand, it simply requires our true presence—

a smile from a stranger, a comforting cup of cinnamon tea,

seeing a baby in sunglasses, or a dog eating peanut butter (that may be one of my

favorite things ever).

This joy is softer.

It doesn't demand as much from us

and is infinitely more accessible in each moment.

I think about this practice of joy as I release my own misguided guilt

that I don't deserve to be happy if someone else is suffering.

It's a convoluted idea, for instance, that just because one suffers, we all must.

Supporting others and healing our world is much more powerful when it comes

from a place of elevating hope and joy than placing ourselves in shackles.

If I am miserable because someone I love is hurting,

I don't think it helps her whatsoever.

That doesn't mean that I bypass my own feelings of helplessness or heartache.

It means that my vitality, and my ability to feel joyously alive

is ultimately better for those who suffer and the entire planet.

And I realized that of course whether I'm plugged into the most ecstatic ebullience

or simply receiving a soft smile from a stranger,

honoring and celebrating my joy enables me to offer more of my light to others.

It is not childish, as I feared. Far from it.

I find that when I'm able to receive joy and not feel bad about it,

I'm able to love someone for exactly who they are without needing them to be different.

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without needing them to be different.

What a beautiful gift.

The Talmud teaches, "In the future, one will be judged for all the legitimate pleasures which he or she failed to enjoy."¹

¹ Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 4:12.

It's a friggin commandment on Judgement Day!!

I invite each of us to experiment with a new practice—
sharing moments of joy with others.

A picture of something that made us smile, the warmth of sun on our skin.

You may find that it's contagious. ☺

I think my therapist would be proud.

Shana Tovah,

May we be inscribed for a year filled with joy that transforms our lives.