

ki savo

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There have always been children who have not followed in their parents' religious footsteps and who have gone "off the *derech*." It is sad and tragic and causes the family no shortage of anguish, sometimes for the right reasons and sometimes for not such right reasons. And though we always tend to try to pinpoint what it was specifically that caused it to happen, the truth is, we're never really sure. It can be for reasons we can't even see, maybe even having to do with previous lifetimes.

However, there is a common denominator. I have never heard of a case of someone leaving yiddishkeit while enjoying it. Human beings tend to gravitate to the things that give them joy, even sacrificing other things to prolong them. And the truth is, the Torah already told us that in this week's parsha.

There are 98 curses in this week's parsha. It sounds as if they are the result of straying from Torah, which they are, but not exactly. In the generation of the Holocaust, so many secular Jews had come from secular families with little or no access to the kind of information necessary to wake up and do teshuvah.

They may not have all halachically been a "tinok v'nishba," like a child who doesn't even know they are Jewish, but they were certainly close to it. When you add abject poverty, terrible anti-

Semitism of the times, and a rapidly changing world of opportunity, it is hard to imagine any of them realizing the importance of returning to their Jewish roots.

The Torah, in this week's parsha, makes a statement that we need to seriously consider. It says that all the curses will befall the Jewish People because:

...you did not serve God, your God, with happiness and with gladness of heart, when [you had an] abundance of everything. (Devarim 28:47)

In other words, the Torah is zeroing in on the real problem, and the real problem began while people were still serving God, still doing the mitzvos, just not with joy. Because, as we all know and history proves, it doesn't take much time before we don't serve God at all.

The Gemara says that "The Shechinah does not reside [upon someone] because of sadness, laziness, laughter, frivolity, idle conversation, idle chatter, but rather because of the joy of a mitzvah" (Shabbos 30b).

So, then, what are we teaching our children? What are we teaching ourselves if we don't know how to derive the utmost pleasure from doing a mitzvah? Just like the mitzvah to love God is a mitzvah to do that which will result in love of God, the mitzvah to serve God in joy is a mitzvah to stop and figure out what it is about performing mitzvos that is supposed to give us joy, real joy?

Because, if we're really honest with ourselves, a lot of the joy people feel from doing mitzvos is after they're done, a feeling of, "Well, I'm glad that's over and I fulfilled my obligation." That's not a false joy, just not the one the parsha is talking about, because it is not one that will keep our children "on the derech," and many adults as well.

Because, we should not forget, God gave us mitzvos for our benefit, not His. Sure, we bring Him joy by being obedient. But, we bring Him even more joy when we show Him that we get it, we understand how they are for our good, and we know how to tap into the heart of the mitzvah to uplift and inspire our own.

If you already love mitzvos and can't wait to do the next one, you're blessed. If the highlight of your day is talking to God and you look for every opportunity to do so, not to solve some problem, not fix some issue, not to make more parnassah, but just to be connected to your Father in Heaven, then you get it, lucky you.

If not, then something is not quite right in your understanding of Torah and your appreciation of the gift of having mitzvos. And that is something each and every one of us has to take to heart and spend the appropriate amount of time resolving. And, if you're a teacher, you have to make it a priority not just to educate, but to inspire and teach children how to find the joy inherent in mitzvos. Not for God's benefit, but for ours, and all the generations that we hope will walk in our footsteps as we try to follow in God's.

I will be giving a two-part series on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur b"H on Monday, August 24 and Monday, August 31, called "Renewal & Rebirth." The classes will be on Zoom at 8:15 pm Israel time, but recorded for registrants to watch on their own time. You can register using this link: <https://www.-matara.pro/nedarimplus/online/?mosad=7014140>, or write to me at pinchasw@shaarnun.org if you prefer an alternative means.

Have a great Shabbos,

Pinchas Winston