

# Rabbi Fox's Message for Temple Beth Shalom's Adar/Nisan 5767 (March 2007) Newsletter

## Increasing Joy

So you made it through the Winter! In our community, the world changes as the weather warms. People come and go, but mostly come to our fair land over the bridge. And what is it that begins our excitement? Is it just the weather? No, it is the Jewish month of Adar!

Jewish tradition teaches us that we are to be happy; the month of Adar has arrived. So, what does it mean to be happy when we are required to be so? How can we feel an emotion that we may not feel? How can a religious tradition force us to feel an emotion – perhaps you think that this is too autocratic, “legislating” a feeling. On some level, it certainly feels somewhat unachievable, doesn't it?

Judaism doesn't shy away from making statements about how we ought to live our lives. It is one of the reasons that most people have strong reactions to Jewish law (halakha) and tradition or custom (masoret or minhag). In a county where there is so much freedom and where there is so much autonomy (read: living without judgment), many of us take offense at what we feel is overly strident religious direction. “How dare Judaism!” we think about this requirement or that prohibition. And that's where we fall short.

Why do I make such a judgment? Our Jewish heritage teaches us that each generation must interpret the laws and traditions to build on our past and to make a new future. Judaism, as some might have you think, is not a stationary and stale vision of the world. Quite to the contrary: We are encouraged to find new solutions for old challenges all the time. It is ingrained in the process of Jewish law and in the normal functioning of Jewish communities.

So where does this leave us with commandments to be happy as Adar arrives? We must understand such direction in its history and with regard to its intent. We are to be happy for had the Jews not survived the story of Purim, perhaps we would not be alive today. Our heritage is chock full of wisdom – we are truly blessed in this way – and we should understand wisdom as it is intended, both universally and in its particular application to our life and times. It's true: We should be happy for all that we have in our life that is built on the past of our people. Purim is a joyous holiday and a wonderful reminder that, sometimes, we are required to fight for our future as a people. But most of all, Purim is “the great exhale” after the near-tragedy that makes us feel lucky to have what we have in life.

So, let's *try* to be happy. God knows many of us need a reason from time to time to feel joyous . . . and after an odd and dreary Winter perhaps we can use a little joy, as well! Besides coming to our Purim celebration, try to do something fun you don't normally do in your life. And if someone asks why you did something a little different you haven't done in a long time or where all your new-found joy is coming from, just tell them that your Rabbi told you to find a little more joy this month!

May we all find lasting joy in the month of Purim and beyond.

Happy Adar and Purim!  
Rabbi Fox

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