

A Manifesto for Simchah

A Jewish Way of Welcoming, Living, and Sharing Joy

We will allow ourselves moments of joy in an unfinished world. We will not wait for certainty about tomorrow or for everything to be well to enjoy. There will be wars, illness, loss, and sorrows we cannot resolve. Yet moments of joy can arise even within mourning, illness, and uncertainty, without becoming a betrayal of those who suffer. Qohelet, who knows disappointment intimately, still invites us to eat our bread with joy and drink our wine with a glad heart (Ecclesiastes 9:7). *Hakarat hatov*, recognizing the good, means appreciating a particular goodness without declaring that everything will be well. Such moments need not make us feel guilty; our responsibility to others continues within them. **The world does not have to be whole for a moment of joy to be real and worthy of welcome.**

We are invited to experience moments of joy without expecting ourselves to always be happy. Rabbi Nachman's call to rejoice *tamid* challenges us to keep returning to joy (Likkutei Moharan II:24). We choose to hear in *tamid* the possibility of constancy through recurrence: a daily practice, an invitation continually renewed (Rashi on Exodus 27:20). Joy can visit a life that remains difficult; it need not describe our entire condition. Qohelet gives both weeping and laughter their time (Ecclesiastes 3:4). We need not force a smile to prove our faith, nor discount a moment of delight because sadness follows it. **A commitment to joy can endure even when the feeling itself comes and goes.**

We will prepare for joy and actively seek what helps it grow. *Mishenichnas Adar marbin besimchah*: when Adar begins, we increase joy (Taanit 29a). The invitation asks us to take an active part in making joy possible. Pain and loss often arrive without being called. Joy sometimes surprises us, too, but often needs preparation, anticipation, and effort. We can reserve the evening, arrange the gathering, make the call, plan something to look forward to. We cannot guarantee what we will feel, but we can create occasions where joy has a chance to flourish. **Joy need not always find us by chance; sometimes it begins with the preparations we make to welcome it.**

We will give joy its proper measure. We seek *shvil hazahav*, the golden mean: the discernment to recognize what a moment can rightly hold. Even joy can become excessive, careless, or harmful when it loses sight of others. During Sukkot, *zman simchateinu*, we can hear Qohelet's skeptical voice as a necessary companion to celebration. Its examination of pleasure and accumulation asks us to weigh what we pursue and what it costs (Ecclesiastes 2:1-11). Sometimes the right measure is wholehearted dancing; sometimes it is quiet gratitude. Joy and awareness can dwell together. **Joy finds its proper measure when it deepens our presence without diminishing our care.**

We will make simplicity, rather than opulence, a source of our joy. Around us, happiness is often advertised through ever greater wealth, luxury, extravagance, and experiences beyond the reach of many. Qohelet directs our attention to bread, wine, and life with the person we love (Ecclesiastes 9:7-9). We can extend that invitation into a book, a walk, a song, a movie watched in someone's arms, a favorite sport played with friends. These pleasures deserve our attention without needing to become more impressive. **A life does not need to grow more expensive to grow richer in joy.**

We will inhabit the joys of the present without asking them to last forever. The sukkah, our *dirat arai*, our temporary dwelling, gives this commitment a physical shape (Sukkah 2a). We eat, welcome guests, and celebrate beneath a roof we know we will dismantle. That knowledge invites us to be present while we are there. Life changes: joy passes, and sorrow, even when it remains with us, can change its shape and intensity. We can endure difficult hours without assuming they contain our entire future, and enjoy good hours without counting how many remain. **The sukkah will come down; the joy of dwelling in it today still deserves our full presence.**

We will give each celebration its own time, place, and attention. *Ein me'arvin simchah be-simchah*: we do not mingle one celebration with another. The tradition keeps weddings separate from the festival's celebration so that the couple's joy and the festival's joy each receive their due (Moed Katan 8b-9a). We hear a broader invitation here: resist the impulse to accumulate experiences until we can scarcely inhabit any of them. Each occasion deserves our *kavanah*, our intention, and our love. Making room for a celebration means becoming available to its people and its meaning. **Each joy deserves enough space to be fully received, and each person enough attention to feel truly celebrated.**

We will cultivate the joy of a Jewish life lived with meaning. The Talmud teaches us to approach prayer without sadness, laziness, laughter, chatter, *kalut rosh*—frivolity—or empty words, but with *simchah shel mitzvah*, the joy of the commandment (Berakhot 31a). We take that invitation into the wider life of mitzvot. *Pikkudei Adonai yesharim, mesamchei lev*: God's precepts are upright, gladdening the heart (Psalms 19:9). Visiting someone ill, chanting a blessing, giving Tzedakah, eating Matzah, observing Shabat or preparing a festival table can make fulfilling an obligation a transformative encounter. Our commitment reaches beyond mere compliance, toward meaning in our mitzvot and joy and pride in being Jewish. **A mitzvah fulfilled with intention can gladden the heart and make our Jewish belonging a lived source of joy.**

We will take another person's happiness seriously, even when it differs from our own. *Lesameach chatan vekallah* asks us to gladden the newly married couple; *vesimach et ishto* calls the newly married husband to bring joy to his wife (Hilkhos Avel 14:1; Deuteronomy 24:5). We will dance for the couple on their long-awaited day. We will choose gifts for our partners and treats for our children according to what they enjoy (Hilkhos Yom Tov 6:17). Love requires the curiosity to discover what delights another person. Sometimes their happiness becomes ours; sometimes we nurture a joy we cannot yet feel. **Another person's joy deserves our care without having to resemble our own.**

We will enjoy, and we will open the door. *Vesamachta bechagecha*, “you shall rejoice in your festival,” includes us alongside our children, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow (Deuteronomy 16:14). Maimonides calls feasting that neglects the poor *simchat kereso*, the joy of the stomach, rather than the joy of a mitzvah (Hilkhos Yom Tov 6:18). Purim likewise joins celebration to *matanot la'evyonim*, gifts to those in need (Esther 9:22). Our own enjoyment has a place within this expanding circle: family, friends, and people whose names we have yet to learn. **The joy of a mitzvah reaches beyond the closed door and the boundaries of those we already love.**

We will make our own joy and the joy of others a way of life. The Talmud presents people who gladden the sorrowful and restore peace as worthy of *olam haba*, the world to come (Ta'anit 22a). Let us welcome joy without losing sight of the world around us. Allow it to come and go. Prepare for it instead of only waiting for it. Celebrate with measure. Choose simplicity over opulence. Savor the passing moment without postponing life until tomorrow. Give each celebration its own space. Fulfill our mitzvot with *kavanah*, finding meaning and delight in what we do. Cherish another person's happiness on its own terms. Open the door and widen the circle. Let *simchah shel mitzvah* become a daily practice of receiving goodness and helping others share in it. **May the joy we cultivate in this world—for ourselves and for one another—become a path toward the world to come.**

Rabbi Uriel Romano