

BSD

The Secret of Happiness

“God’s secret is for those who fear Him” (Psalms 25:14). What is the secret that God reveals to those who fear Him? The phrase, “God’s secret is for those who fear Him” (סוד י-הוה ליראי) equals 353, the numerical value of joy (שמחה). Fear, or awe, of God is the preparatory phase for receiving the secret of happiness in service of God.

What is so secret about happiness? Repentance motivated by fear of God reduces the severity of the sins and transforms intentional sins into unintentional sins. The repentance and remorse testify to the fact that the person truly does not want to sin. By contrast, repentance that is motivated by love and joy transform intentional sins into merits. This is the secret power of happiness, not readily understood by the intellect. How could it be that what was initially a prohibited act can transform into a meritorious one, that is even desired and cherished? In other words, how can a sin turn into a *mitzvah*?

God-fearing people worry about their sins, and God reveals the secret of happiness to them. It is the secret of turning the sins themselves into *mitzvot*, the deepest secret in the Torah.

The Alter Rebbe of Chabad fine-tunes this point. In his book, the Tanya, he explains that repentance motivated by love transforms intentional sins into merits because it is those very sins that motivated the person to fully repent and return to God with great thirst. However, in retrospect that identifies God’s Divine Providence, the additional joy of coming close to God after repenting for sin demonstrates that the (negative) act previously performed was a *mitzvah a priori* – joyous and cherished – whose ultimate purpose was to come closer to God in its wake. This reasoning is far greater than a retrospective justification for something that would preferably not have taken place at all.

Rejoice for no Reason

Besides the common expression, “the joy of (performing) a *mitzvah*” (שמחה של מצוה) directing us to perform every *mitzvah* with great joy, the Lubavitcher Rebbe coined a new phrase: “Joy in its pure state” (שמחה בטוהרתה).

Generally, joy appears engarbed in some garment, meaning that there is a reason for feeling joy. The best reason for joy is performing a *mitzvah*. But a higher level is pure joy, joy that is not contingent on any external reason – not even the fulfillment of a *mitzvah*. Just rejoice. This is the joy that will bring Mashiach, may it be speedily in our days!