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Parashat Kiddushim: Making Distinction between Happiness and Joy

I have to believe that we share the exhaustion and heartache that comes from yet another killing of a child, this time a high school senior, in class, just a few days from his graduation. I do not know what to say about this anymore. I know that gun access is out of control and that mental illness is out of control. I know that anxiety has hit an all time high and I am not at all sure what it means that in Denver, there has been a vote to decriminalize possession of psychedelic mushrooms.

What I *can* say, is that it seems to me that our national compass needs help and that we have sorely misplaced our focus. Anger boils on the pot without anything of value inside the pot. And while we have been advocates for showing up for good causes, for productive dialogue, supportive gatherings, this week's child sacrifice in a suburban Denver charter school has us scrambling just to stand up, just to find light.

That was where I was last evening when I unexpectedly met with a 3<sup>rd</sup> cousin, Michael Levine, founder and trombone player of the Dallas Brass, a brass quintet started by Michael Levine in 1983.

Michael's current passion is in mobilizing young people, band students throughout our country and Finland, to reach for something beyond themselves. As he spoke about this project, I felt my spirits begin to rise, just a little and I wanted to share it with you.

The project is called Harmony Bridge and students from elementary through high school bands throughout the US sign onto the program. In their band rooms, they prepare for performance as well as prepare for conversation with the residents.

Here is their Mission Statement.

The Mission Statement of Harmony Bridge says

“the elementary, middle school and high school students are to take their musical skills into the community, to bring joy into the elderly population in senior care homes and others places of need. Through musical performances, conversation and interaction, the students will experience the power of caring and sharing while developing an understanding of their ability to make their community and world a more loving place.”

This program intends to raise the bar, from “what is happy for me, myself and I” to what creates joy.

One of the great thinkers of what gives life meaning beyond what life gives us was Victor Frankl.

Victor Frankl, Holocaust survivor, wrote how essential it is to have a greater purpose than me, myself and I. His famous book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, tells the story of how he survived the Holocaust by finding personal meaning in the experience, which gave him the will to live through it. He went on to later establish a new school of existential therapy called logotherapy, based in the premise that our underlying motivator in life is a "will to meaning," even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Frankl pointed to research indicating a strong relationship between "meaninglessness" and criminal behaviors, addictions and depression.

Without meaning, people fill the void with hedonistic pleasures, power, materialism, hatred, boredom, or neurotic obsessions and compulsions. Frankl wrote about the sustaining joy that comes from worthy goals.

He said, "What a person actually needs is not a tensionless state, but rather the need to strive and struggle for some worthy goal. What we need is not the discharge of tension at any cost, but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by us."

This week's parasha Kiddushim is usually translated as "holiness." The laws within it are called "the Holiness Code." However, the word Kadosh, which we think of as holy, literally translates as "separate" or "distinct." To make something Kadosh, is to set it apart from other things, even things that seem similar.

When someone is Kadosh to us, or grammatically correct "m'kudeshet" or "m'kudash" there is a modification, separating that person from all others.

Coincidentally, David Brooks, commentator in the Times, wrote this week about the distinction of two concepts that many thinks of as the same. He wrote about the distinction between the two concepts, happiness and joy.

David Brooks was speaking to graduating students at Arizona State University, some 35,000 in the football stadium. His goal was not the typical professional goals talk but rather about the meaning of life.

He spoke about the two kinds of emotion present at any graduation ceremony.

Happiness defines most graduates who have achieved something.

Families and friends feel happiness for the student graduating of course, but in addition they feel inner joy. They feel joy in seeing their child's glow, the blooming of the whole person, in seeing how the normal and unexpected adversities of growing up in the 21<sup>st</sup> century do manifest into something wonderful. Joy is the bigger picture. Joy is inside. Joy lasts. Joy is in seeing what the years have produced.

Brooks says that happiness usually involves a victory for the self. Happiness comes from accomplishments. Happiness is what we feel when something good happens to us.

Joy, on the other hand, involves the transcendence of self. Joy comes when your heart is in another. Joy is what happens when we are generous to others, when we give away our gifts.

The core point is that happiness is good, but joy is better. It's smart to enjoy happiness, but its smarter still to put ourselves in situations where we might experience joy, the kind that comes from giving, from helping, from being genuine with one another. In the Sheva Brachot, the wedding blessings, the words joy, sason, and happiness, simcha, exist side by side, however, the word Sason, joy is always first.

According to David Brooks and according to cousin, Michael Levine, when we bring self to others; that produces joy. That is the reason Michael created Harmony Bridge, to help young people experience giving to others finding meaning in that and hence, joy. Joy happens in relationships and giving. When we experience joy, from the inside, there is magic in the world, living at that deep affectional level. It is a blaze of joy.

May this Shabbat Kiddushin, the Shabbat with Kadosh, with its' the message of "distinction" help us reach toward that higher purpose, the purpose of service for others, and experiencing joy.