

Dear Chavraya,

While standing in line at JP Lick's before our early morning Torah gathering, I suddenly realized that exactly what I wanted to talk about that morning was unfolding right there in front of me. While waiting for his order, a young man was unselfconsciously dancing to the music that filled the air. His feet were together, his hands along the edge of the counter, as he pivoted on his toes and slid back and forth in the space opened up for him by the others waiting in line. Most of us are too inhibited to express such pure joy in the moment of its rising. I wonder as well, if joy is all too often acknowledged more in the head than felt in the heart.

Joy is a *mitzvah*. It is holy, an expression of gratitude and a way of serving God. A thread runs through this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Ki Tavo*, reminding us that our joy is a gift to God, and also that we are socially responsible to raise up those around us who lack a means of support or who are bowed down by life, that they too might sing out in joy. We are told in the Torah, *v'samachta b'chol hatov...*, *You shall rejoice in all the good that God, your God, has given you and your household; you and the Levite and the stranger who has entered into your midst.* It is not enough to give *tzedakah* only to the degree that others might eat, only to sustain their bodies. We are called to sustain their spirits too. The Levites did not have their own land, and thus no means for their own survival. The stranger too, not to be scorned and told, "go back where you came from," was entitled not only to sustenance, but even to joy. This was one of the themes of the Lawrence mill strike, not so far from here in 1912, "give us bread, but give us roses too." Bread and roses, body and spirit, the fullness of joy that God wants us to know and help others to know.

And God ruefully chides us later in the Torah portion for our failure to find joy, to know *simcha*, in spite of abundance; *you did not serve God, your God, b'simcha u'v'tuv leyvav, with joy and with gladness of heart, by reason of abundance in all things.* Rashi speaks across the ages, offering succinct comment on this sin of joyless abundance, *...even though you had so much good.* The medieval Spanish commentator, Ibn Ezra, gives voice to God's lament, *...when you had all that you desired or needed.* So it is in our time, such abundance and such inequity and such sadness.

Dance to the music of life, along the counter of early morning await the day's serving with joy.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor