

In the true spirit of the High Holy Days, I confess: I am going to tell you, a sanctuary filled primarily with adults, about an animated Disney movie. Wait! Please listen. It has a captivating message for adults, too. Trust me.

The film is *Inside Out*. In the movie, a young girl named Riley moves from Minnesota to San Francisco. As the film unfolds, we see how she adjusts to this move. The brilliance of the film is that we see inside Riley's mind as her emotions, personified as a series of characters, maintain a running banter. Joy – with a capital J – runs the show. She's bouncy, energetic and always on. Joy manages the emotions and memories, giving directions to sadness, anger and the others, and directing which of Riley's core memories – depicted as glowing marbles – should be rolled out, released to trigger particular emotions.

As Riley experiences her transition, difficult for any young child, we see joy trying ever so hard to keep sadness away from our character and her core memories. But sadness keeps reaching out to touch these memories, forever changing them. Joy fights back, pushing sadness out of the way again and again, until she realizes that sadness in fact needs to be at the forefront...at least some of the time, for positive change to happen for this little girl. The film's "central insight"ⁱ? "Embrace sadness, let it unfold..."ⁱⁱ Why? Because to truly feel joy, you must understand its antithesis. Embrace the sadness if joy is ever to be real.

Embrace sadness. This central insight of *Inside Out* is lauded by scientistsⁱⁱⁱ as necessary and important in *our* lives. At the same time, it is a countercultural notion. All around us we see messaging that says: Be happy! Even in this movie, again and again Riley's concerned parents ask: "Where's my happy girl?" Societally, we are bombarded by the message: Be happy!

And if you're not, there are plenty of books to show you how! You can read *The Mindful Way to Happiness*, *The How of Happiness*, *The Happiness Advantage*, and countless others. Magazines publish articles on happiness and publish lists of books saying "These Books Will Make you Happier."^{iv} There is even a whole academic movement of called positive psychology that focuses on happiness. The most popular undergraduate course at Harvard is...*How to Find Happiness*. And consider this: Eighty percent of students polled in a study on empathy said their parents were more

worried with whether they were happy than whether they were kind.”^v
The messaging could not be clearer! “Be happy” is the priority – even outranking “Be kind.”

Repeatedly, we get the message that we are *entitled* to happiness – unadulterated, uninterrupted positive feelings that are all about us, and only about us. Advocates abound who say clear the deck of negative messages; forge ahead to happiness. Yet, we have to wonder, how can we really close out the discomfort – the sadness or anger or worry or difficult memories in pursuit of happiness?

The truth is that we all live with a range of emotions, just like those personified in the movie – among them fear, anger disgust, sadness and joy. We live in a world in which there is more anxiety and worry than we can name. There are the global concerns, the headlines that make us want to avert our eyes. And on the personal front, there is no shortage of things that consume us. Anxiety about parents or children, or finances, or the illness of someone we love. Divorce, struggles with family or friends, or concern about work. Death, loss, ongoing stress from the pace of our lives. How easy it is for us to get stuck in that worry, to be preoccupied by concerns or stress. How difficult it is to find happiness when our minds are full of anxiety and sadness.

Here is where our Jewish tradition has great insight. First a definition, articulated by a leading voice in the Jewish ethical *Musar* movement explaining: “There’s a distinction between happiness and joy. Happiness is getting what you want. It is connected to identity—your desires, your expectations—but it’s [ego-based and it doesn’t last]...Joy is what Jewish tradition is about. Jewish teaching is more about getting beyond yourself than satisfying your personal desires. It’s about connecting, joining and feeling that much deeper sense of fulfillment and completeness that isn’t possible for the solitary individual.”^{vi}

Now, wait. Are we supposed to say no to happiness? No! To the contrary. Happiness is a good thing. But joy is more profound. The distinction here is that Judaism is not about individual happiness for its own sake. Judaism, *is* all about joy. “*Simcha* — joy – is at the center of Jewish life.”^{vii} You may know that native Alaskans have a great number of words for snow. We

Jews have a great number of words for elated feelings.^{viii} Among them is “*simcha* – considered the broadest word for joy...”^{ix}

We know *simcha* best perhaps as a word describing a joyous occasion – a wedding or bar/bat mitzvah. It’s a *simcha*! Torah has countless references to joy. Repeatedly,^x we find the instruction to rejoice – *v’samachta* – a word related to *simcha* – in the context of giving thanks and celebrating holidays. Take for example, an instruction about Sukkot. Our biblical ancestors were told to rejoice– *v’samachta* – in a communal place, and, as they did, they were to remember that their ancestors were slaves in Egypt. They were to share their food not just with their own family members and slaves, but with the Levites, the strangers, widows and orphans – that is, those who wouldn’t otherwise have sustenance.

A brilliant piece of commentary from *Rashi*, the biblical commentator explains this text, personifying God as if God were to say: We’re in a partnership here. I’ll take care of your guests, if you take care of mine. God’s guests...those who cannot provide for themselves. Ours...the members of our extended family.

That commentary gives us insight into Jewish joy. Joy is about celebrating in community with a connectedness to our past, to our memories, both the happy and the sad. And joy is about sharing it with others. When we do, it boomerangs right back to us.

Seems do-able, yes? Here’s the challenge, though – the world in which we live. Why? That same great *Musar* teacher explains: “Most people don’t have that many opportunities for really deep connection. We live in a society that stresses individual satisfaction. [Happiness, if you will.] That’s a hurdle, because guiding people to transcend the individual and to get beyond believing that momentary satisfaction is *the* goal contradicts the dominant messaging that runs through [our] culture. Joy comes to an open heart that connects to other people. And if you have that, you are also going to feel their sorrow and their pain.”^{xi}

What’s he saying? There’s more to life than momentary or individual happiness. Something even deeper, even richer: JOY. Return, if you would, with me to the movie *Inside Out*. Despite the character Joy’s tireless efforts to keep sadness and difficult memories out of young Riley’s daily life,

“Sadness, it turns out, is not Joy’s rival but her partner.”^{xii} Sadness, depicted as a slouching blueberry-colored girl who finds doom and gloom everywhere, turns out to be crucial to Riley’s happiness.^{xiii} By acknowledging and even honoring sadness in her heart, rather than trying to run from it, Riley is once again able to feel joy.

So too in our Jewish tradition. Sadness is joy’s counterpart. Joy cannot be understood without sadness. Think about a Jewish wedding. We hear the *sheva brachot*, the 7 wedding blessings which proclaim the ultimate joy of the wedding day – using multiple expressions of joy to announce that. And then, what do we do at the end of the wedding ritual? We break the glass. Now whatever meaning you’d like to ascribe to that broken glass, it is one of fragility amidst the ultimate joy of the wedding day. Some ask why we bring in the sadness of our history to those moments of joy. The message is that joy and sadness travel together, hand in hand.

Our lives, too, are a veritable mix of emotions. Sadness, and the complexity of our emotions and memories, is real in our daily lives and stands right next to joy. We go from a concerned phone call with an aging parent to a celebration of a friend’s birthday. Or from a child or grandchild’s performance to a worried doctor’s visit. From a party to a stressful work day. From a funeral to a vacation. This does not mean that we ignore or can’t experience joy. It means that joy is, an emotion that travels right alongside sadness and other, less comfortable but oh-so-human emotions.

So do me a favor, please. Go on a joy ride this year. No, we are not going to run out into the parking lot and speed off in a stolen vehicle with the top down. It’s a different kind of ride. Ride into the new year, with joy sitting next to you in the front seat. Take on the new year in pursuit of joy, meaningful, depthful joy, marked in community with others. And, in the back seat? Sadness. Or worry or concern or anger. The negative emotions continue to travel with you, but they don’t have to sit up front. You don’t have to give them the seat.

How do we take this joy ride? Start this *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, reflecting back on the year past. Look in your metaphorical rearview mirror on the events and emotions of 5775. Ask yourself: Where have I been? Where am I now? Am I consumed with sadness or worry – and not allowing myself to

experience joy? Am I seeking joy – sharing experiences with others, informed by my memories and values?

Continue that review, looking in the rearview mirror over the coming days. Ask yourself: who's traveled with me this past year? What people? What emotions? Have I sought happiness for myself, or have I created joy with others?

And then look ahead – for on any drive, we need to look at the road before us. We don't know what the road will look like in the new year, straight or winding, with sharp turns or big inclines, though most likely it will contain surprises for us all. But we can think about how we want to drive into this new year. When we travel with other people, bringing our emotions with us, we are all the stronger. And our ride into this new year, 5776, wherever it takes us, can indeed be a joyful one.

As we begin that proverbial ride at the start of this new year, let the call of the shofar this Rosh Hashanah call us to the joy of celebration and inspire us with courage and honesty to do the work of *teshuvah*, the pursuit of change. And may we remember that none of us travels alone. We move forward on our joy ride supported by our community and our rich history of sharing our tradition. Now, buckle up, roll down the windows, feel the wind on your face, and hit the road! *Shanah tovah!*

ⁱ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/05/opinion/sunday/the-science-of-inside-out.html>.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} *American Way Magazine*, August 2015.

^v <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2014/08/11/think-youre-raising-kind-kids-think-again/>.

^{vi} Alan Morinis in *Moment Magazine* symposium: <http://www.momentmag.com/makes-us-happy-symposium/>.

^{vii} *Jewish Spiritual Parenting*, Paul Kipnes & Michelle November.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x Numerous Deuteronomy references & specifically, Deuteronomy 16.11 and Rashi on 16.11 in *Commentators' Bible*, Deuteronomy.

^{xi} Alan Morinis in *Moment Magazine* symposium: <http://www.momentmag.com/makes-us-happy-symposium/>.

^{xii} <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/19/movies/review-pixars-inside-out-finds-the-joy-in-sadness-and-vice-versa.html>.

^{xiii} Ibid.