

“THE SWITCH”

Turning Mourning into Joy

By Hannah Neshet

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Before Israel leaps into her joyous celebration of Yom Ha'atzma'ut (Israeli Independence Day), a solemn tribute is first given to those who paid the ultimate price to see this nation of Israel survive. On Yom Hazikaron (Remembrance Day), Israel, as well as the Jewish people in the nations, pause to reflect upon and honor the sacrifice of the heroic soldiers and the terrorist victims who lost their lives so that Israel could continue to live. The mood of the nation is somber, as the people of Israel recount their losses – mothers mourn their sons and wives grieve for the husbands they will never again embrace. ...



A few minutes after sundown, however, a radical ‘switch’ takes place. The Israeli flag, which has been hanging all day at half-mast, is proudly raised to the top of the pole at a beautiful ceremony on Mount Hertzl in Jerusalem. This is followed by a lively parade by the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) and a speech by the Israeli Prime Minister. Suddenly, the sky explodes with thousands of fireworks in a display that illuminates the heavens and dispels the darkness. The celebration of Israel’s independence has begun!



Elie Ruben, publisher of AACI’s *Isratimes*¹ writes, “*The strength to switch from deep sadness to great happiness is very particular to the Jewish people....*”

One minute we are remembering the sad days of our past – our loved ones who died fighting for our country in bloody battles with hostile enemies. We look with horror and perhaps even fear at the photos posted of innocent men, women and children who died in terrorist attacks, wondering perhaps who might be next? Will we ever live in safety and security in this Land, against all odds?

And then, within a matter of minutes, we are celebrating the incredible reality that ‘**Am Yisrael Chai!**’ – the nation of Israel lives! And then we proclaim – **Od Avinu Chai!** - our

¹ AACI Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel, The Voice, *IsraTimes*, May-June 2011

Father still lives! Yes, it is He, our Heavenly Father, who keeps Israel who neither slumbers nor sleeps. Therefore we can look forward to our future with hope in faith in Him.

Jewish people are known for remembering both the sadness and the joy, the darkness and the light, the bitter and the sweet together. For this is life. Which is why at the Passover Seder we eat a 'matzah sandwich' made up of bitter herbs and a sweet apple & nut mixture together – to remind us that life is a mixture of the bitter and the sweet.

Until we reach Heaven, there will always be a trace of sadness, even in all of our joyful celebrations (called a 'simcha' in Hebrew). Even at the pinnacles of 'simchas', a wedding, when the ceremony is completed, the groom smashes a glass, symbolic of the destruction of the Holy Temple. This reminds us that our joy can never be perfect while living in this world – for this is not our true home.

One can never totally abandon oneself to joy while knowing that another yet suffers. When we celebrate our freedom at Passover, we dip our finger in the second cup of wine, symbolizing the Ten Plagues, and remove ten drops of red wine, letting each one drop onto our plates like crimson drops of blood. For the cup, which represents joy, cannot be completely full knowing that our deliverance came at the cost of the Egyptians' suffering.

The ability to both mourn and celebrate must become part of our walk of faith with the Lord. Yeshua told us that in this world we will have trouble, but that we can still be 'of good cheer' (I think that means to be happy) because He has overcome the world.

Job (understandably) stated that man is born for trouble as sparks fly upwards. Or, as my Mom would tell me in a Yiddish expression, "Everyone has their own tsuris"²

We might look at someone else's life and think, "*I wish I had a life like theirs, a family like theirs, a marriage like hers (or his) – they don't seem to have the trouble I have suffered.*" But we are not seeing what goes on behind closed doors. That 'perfect family' living in a 'dream home' and driving a new car may be struggling with serious marriage issues, or trying to find answers to dealing with a difficult child that makes their family life a living nightmare.

That 'model marriage' we see from the outside could actually involve a drug addicted, alcoholic, or violently abusive spouse. We need to trust that the 'tsuris' (trouble/sorrow) God gives us is not more than we are able to bear; and that He will either deliver us or give us the grace to walk through it. We won't have grace to bear someone else's trouble and sorrows, but only our own.

² Tsuris – Yiddish expression for trouble. Tsurot in Hebrew.

The question is, can we be happy, even while we still have serious problems and issues in our lives that cause us pain and trouble? I believe that by the grace of God, we can learn to have a 'merry heart' and celebrate life, despite the bitter that is mixed with the sweet.

One day, I had such a hard time with my children that I came close to the point of despair. We all know it can be a challenge to raise children even in the best of circumstances, but being a single Mom adds additional hardships. It was by the end of such a trying day, wondering how I could even keep going, when I noticed the children quietly working on some kind of craft. It was late and my patience was nil by this point so I ordered them into bed!

They meekly complied without saying a word, which I thought unusual; but it was only after they were asleep that I noticed what they were working on. Avi had drawn a picture of the two of us together with several doors that opened to say, "*I love you Mom*" over and over again. And Liat had tried to embroider the message "I love you Mom" onto a paper napkin. The sweetness of their love washed away the bitter taste in my mouth.

Sometimes life hurts and we need to cry. But, as my landlady, Etti, remarked the other day, we need to be more like little children. Be honest and say it hurts, cry as long as we need to, receive the comfort of those who love us, and then forget about it, wipe away our tears and run off to play.

If it could only be that easy, eh? But to enter God's Kingdom we must become like little children. God promises that "**Weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning.**" (Psalm 30:5)

We need to keep believing that this joyful morning will truly come and that our mourning will be turned to dancing. "**You have turned for me my mourning into dancing.**"

Just like at those moments after sunset, when Israel's mourning will be turned into dancing, so too will our sorrows be turned to joy. How? Because of God's amazing love and mercy. He promises to work all things out for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

The word used for 'turn' in this verse is from the word 'hafuch', which means to change to the opposite, or literally to 'turn upside down.'

When I have a chance to go to a café in Israel, I always order a 'café hafuch' – which means an 'upside down coffee' where the milk and the coffee have been switched! This is what God will do in our lives with our troubles and sorrows – He will 'hafuch' them

(not proper Hebrew ☺). He will hafuch our weeping into joy and hafuch our mourning into dancing. Halleluyah!

I want to prove this to you with an amazing revelation from the Hebrew (thanks to Elisheva, Liat's teacher). Yeshua went into a synagogue on Shabbat (the Sabbath) and read from Isaiah 61, boldly proclaiming Himself the fulfillment of these Scriptures.³

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;....

This prophecy goes on to make some beautiful promises, “...**To comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, a the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; ...the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified.”**

Note that all this ‘exchange’ is to be done in order that the Lord may be glorified.

The Hebrew itself, however, hides a secret treasure within this verse.

The word for ‘beauty’ is ‘pa’er’ פאר

and the word for ashes is ‘afer’ אפר

You can’t see this in the English but I wanted to show you these two words in Hebrew so that you could see the ‘switch’! They are the exact same letters but the order has been switched!

God is going to take the very circumstances that cause us to weep into our ashes and turn the situation into something of great beauty. How? I don’t know how, but God does! It was out of the ashes of the Holocaust that the nation of Israel came into being. God took the ashes of the Jewish people from out of the Nazi crematoriums and turned them into the living, breathing, vibrant modern State of Israel! ⁴ The ultimate hafuch!

Now if God can do this with Israel, can He not also turn (hafuch) our difficult circumstances? God can take any situation, any challenge, any injustice and totally turn it around, backwards and even upside down so that it all works for our good – so that we will be even better off than we were before! We need only believe and trust Him.

³ Luke 4:18

⁴ Ezekiel 37

Psalm 84 says “**Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Bacca (weeping), they make it a spring. ..they go from strength to strength...** (v 5-7)

Notice that this man is blessed because his heart is set on pilgrimage. That means he is set on going somewhere, not settling in to where he is now. This man is walking through a valley of tears, yes, but he knows he is ‘just passing through’.

David said, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil” David also knew he was just passing through that dark valley; he had his heart set on pilgrimage.

When we find ourselves in a Valley of Bacca (crying), a place where we are brought low through tears and sorrow, we need to post a gigantic sign on our wall that says, “**Just passing through!**” I used to have a sign like this posted on my fridge: “This too shall pass.” Maybe I need to put that sign back up again. ☺

We absolutely cannot sit down and set up a permanent camp in our valley of Bacca. We must not make grieving and mourning the place where we settle! God promises to walk us through the valleys of life and to bring us through, if we will just hold on in faith and trust Him.

Our tears are not wasted nor in vain; they do not go unnoticed. God keeps each one in a bottle.⁵ The Valley of Bacca (weeping) will be turned into a ‘**maayan**’ (spring). If we will put our sorrows in God’s hands, and receive His comfort, He will turn these tears into a wellspring of life for others in need of similar comfort. Our mess can become our message to those desperate for hope.

When God brings us out of the Valley of Bacca, and makes our tears into a life-giving spring of living water, we will then go from strength to strength until we each appear before God in Zion. (v. 7)

The Hebrew word for ‘strength’ here, however, is not the same as in verse 5, “*Blessed is the man whose strength is in You.*” Here, strength is the Hebrew word, **oz**, which means simply ‘strength’.

But when we go from ‘strength to strength’, the word used is **chayil**, **חיל** which can mean vigor, but also wealth. God will bring us out of these valleys prospering and in vigorous health, even as our soul prospers.

⁵ Psalm 56:8

Chayil is also a military term. A chayal **חַיִל** is a soldier. It is walking through the valley of Bacca in faith and courage, that qualifies us to be strong and courageous soldiers in the army of the Lord, able to minister living waters to others who are thirsty.

Tears are the only things I can find in the Bible that we don't reap what we sow.

“Those who sow in tears will reap with joy.” (Psalm 126:5)

If we will sow our tears into the Kingdom of God as seeds, He will, in a miraculous way, bring them forth as a harvest of joy.

The English translation of Isa. 61:3 usually says that God will give us beauty 'for' ashes, but the Hebrew word, **'tachat'**, means **'under'**. Somewhere under the ashes lies beauty, if we will just trust God to do a 'hafuch' – to make 'the switch'.

There is a time for grieving our losses, for mourning over a painful past; but then we must make the switch from mourning to dancing & from heaviness to praise. Instead of looking backwards in sorrow, we can look forward to the good plan God still has for our life – to give us a hope and future. We can get a hug, dry our tears, and go out to play.

What are your 'tsuris' ? Everyone carries their own private burdens. The other morning, as I walked my dog, Pepper, around the moshav, I felt joyful for no particular reason – just rejoicing in the warm sunshine & enjoying the many birds' songs, and appreciating the beautiful flowers that appear on the earth (SOS 2:3). I felt like singing, despite the fact that my problems had not magically disappeared; they patiently waited for me to return home and deal with them.

A friend rode up on his motorcycle and we greeted one another with 'chag same'ach' in anticipation of Yom Ha'atzma'ut (Israel's Independence Day). He noticed the heavy bag of groceries I was carrying from the makolet (little general store) and remarked (in Hebrew), *“We each carry a 'sack', but we can still celebrate, right?”* *“Right!”*, I answered with a smile.

Because I tend to grumble while washing dishes, I keep a painted rock sitting by my kitchen sink to remind me with these words,

Let your heart's song be happy

This is my hope and prayer for each of us – that we would invite Yeshua into all our 'tsuris' – to help us discover the beauty that lies underneath the ashes; that our sorrow would be turned to joy and our mourning into dancing. Amen v'amen.

Love, peace and much joy!

Hannah

About the Author:

Hannah Neshet grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching Christians about the Jewish roots of their faith.



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