

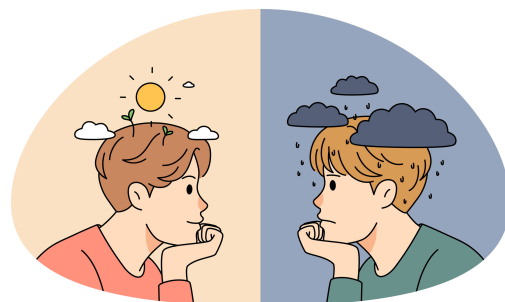


## HOW DO YOU ADAR? A JEWISH GUIDE TO JOY

**The Mishna teaches that from when the month of Av begins, one decreases acts of rejoicing. Rav Yehuda, son of Rav Shmuel bar Sheilat, said in the name of Rav: When Av begins one decreases rejoicing, When the month of Adar begins, one increases rejoicing. (Tractate Ta'anit 29a)**

The months of Av and Adar hold special significance in Jewish history. Av is a month of sadness, marking the yearly anniversary of multiple national tragedies, including the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem. Adar is considered a month of joy, commemorating our salvation from the wicked Haman in the Purim story, and over the course of Adar we are supposed to increase our joy. Yet contrary to what we would otherwise assume, there are no prescribed religious requirements to help achieve that goal beyond Purim festivities that only take up a single day of the month. Instead, we are tasked with nurturing joy on our own. But how?

Throughout its 3,000-year history, Jewish tradition has put a lot of thought into this deeply human question, among others, and has provided a plethora of answers. Our tradition offers paths to joy, including connection with God, finding meaning, contentment, and community. But, ultimately, what makes you happy is you.



### Joy is Connection with God



Connection with God is an understandably meaningful and spiritual pursuit, but it isn't an intuitively "joyous" experience. And yet, some of Jewish tradition's most influential thinkers have said otherwise. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, for example, author of the 18th-century ethical work *The Path of the Just* wrote:



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**Humankind was created for the sole purpose of deriving pleasure from closeness to God and enjoying the splendor of His Presence; for this is the truest delight and the greatest pleasure that can be conceived of... True perfection is only that of being close to God... and only this is true goodness, while everything else people think is goodness is worthlessness and futility... (The Path of the Just)**

In the 21st century, Rabbi Noach Weinberg, the late founder of Aish HaTorah, wrote about the joyous experience of connection with God, emphasizing the way it satisfies the natural human desire for joy more effectively than other pleasure-seeking activities. Rabbi Weinberg suggested several ways to nurture our love and connection with God, including nature, history, Torah study or prayer. Ultimately, he emphasized that connecting with the divine means tapping into the source of all pleasures. If God created the many aspects of our lives that bring us joy, he asserted, how much greater would the joy be in connecting with the Creator Himself?

However, there is a deeper dimension to the joy born out of connecting with God. The pleasure that comes from a connection to the divine differs from those that appeal to our senses. It carries an intellectual satisfaction and a clear sense of purpose and direction. In a way, it is an intellectual experience as much as it is spiritual, a sentiment the Chazon Ish, a 20th-century Jewish legal scholar, made in his monumental work of Jewish philosophy, *Emunah U'Bitachon – Faith and Trust*. Joy, the Chazon Ish said, comes from the truth and understanding that comes with connection.



**Once a person's intellect reaches a clear recognition of the truth of God's existence, they are immediately filled with a boundless, ecstatic joy... (Emunah U'Bitachon/Faith and Trust, 2:9)**



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## Joy is Finding Meaning

Meaning, like connection with God, offers the kind of joy that comes with having direction and purpose.



**Happiness is the ability to say: I lived for certain values and acted on them. I was part of a family, embracing it and being embraced by it. I was part of a community...I asked what I could contribute. (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, To Heal A Fractured World, Chapter 1, p. 7)**

But meaning can come from more places than connection with the Divine. Jewish neurologist and psychologist Victor Frankl emphasized the importance of meaning as a tool for maintaining resilience and ultimately achieving happiness after his experiences in concentration camps during the Holocaust. In his work, he explored the ways the creation of meaning helped him maintain a positive outlook and even helped fellow Jews in the camp survive the experience. Furthermore, he asserted that struggle was an intrinsic part of this path to joy and fulfillment.

**What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for some goal worthy of him. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost, but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him. (Victor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning)**



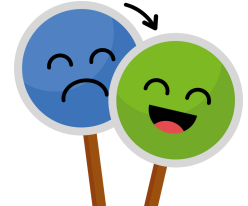


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## Joy is Contentment



It has become abundantly clear that abundance does not yield true, everlasting joy. The rabbinic sage Ben Zoma said almost 2,000 years ago:



**“Who is the wealthy person? The one who is happy with his portion!”  
(Pirkei Avot 4:1)**

As far back as the 12th century, Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi wrote that contentment was actually a commandment:

**There is a specific mitzvah that obligates us to rejoice with what we have, and that is the verse that states, “And you shall rejoice with all of the good that God has given you” (Devarim 26:11). (Sefer HaKuzari 3:11)**

Contentment is, in essence, an expression of gratitude called “hakarot hatov” or “recognizing the good.” Appreciate what you have in your life instead of longing for more.

Gratitude is a deeply Jewish value. Our name, Jew, is actually derived from the name “Yehuda,” the root of which is “hodu,” or thankfulness.

The first prayer a Jew recites in the morning, the Modeh Ani, expresses gratitude for life itself.



The Good

**I give thanks before you, Ruler, living and eternal, for You have returned within me my soul with compassion; abundant is Your faithfulness. (Modeh Ani Prayer)**



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## Joy is Community

Judaism is a religion of community and the joy that comes with togetherness with loved ones.

Jewish prayer services require community, with certain ritual prayers needing 10 people to conduct them. Even the way Jewish liturgy is composed emphasizes community. The Amida, the silent, personal prayer at the climax of every service, is counterintuitively written in the plural and not the singular. We also have a talmudic adage to always pray for the community.

**Abbaye said, “A person should always associate oneself (in prayer) with the community.” (Tractate Berakhot, 29b)**

Connection and community nurture joy in the way members of a community have the sense of comfort knowing they always have someone to lean on when they need support. And at the same time, a certain energy uplifts participants — at synagogue, a wedding, a celebration, etc. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, reflecting on the Hebrew word for joy, explained that “simcha” refers to communal rather than individualized joy.



**Simcha is usually translated as joy, rejoicing, gladness, happiness, pleasure or delight. In fact, simcha has a nuance untranslatable into English. Joy, happiness, pleasure and the like are all states of mind, emotions. They belong to the individual. We can feel them alone. Simcha, by contrast, is not a private emotion. It means happiness shared. It is a social state, a predicate of “we,” not “I.” There is no such thing as feeling simcha alone. (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Collective Joy - Parshat Re'eh, Covenant & Conversation)**



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Laughing with others has also been shown to benefit your health. Heidi Godman, the executive editor of the Harvard Health Letter, wrote about how laughing with friends can help prevent “functional disability—that is, problems performing essential everyday activities (such as bathing or dressing).”

### What is YOUR Joy?



Clearly, Jewish tradition has put a lot of thought into what it means to experience joy, but the plethora of options our tradition offers actually underscores a critical fact about joy—there is no single definition.

Two of the most influential codes of Jewish law, the Mishneh Torah and the Shulchan Aruch, leave out the Talmudic imperative to increase joy in Adar but include the imperative to increase sadness. Reflecting on this anomaly, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapira of Munkács, otherwise known as the Munkácser Rebbe of the 19th century, offered an explanation:

**The reason for the omission of the above rule in the Rambam and Shulchan Aruch is due to the fact that happiness has no concrete guideline and depends on the nature of the individual. In contrast, acts of sadness and mourning, when required by Jewish law in circumstances (like the loss of a loved one), have specific guidelines and delineation. (Nimukei Orach Chaim, Piskei Tshuvos, Chapter 686, fn 17, Paraphrased by Halachipedia)**

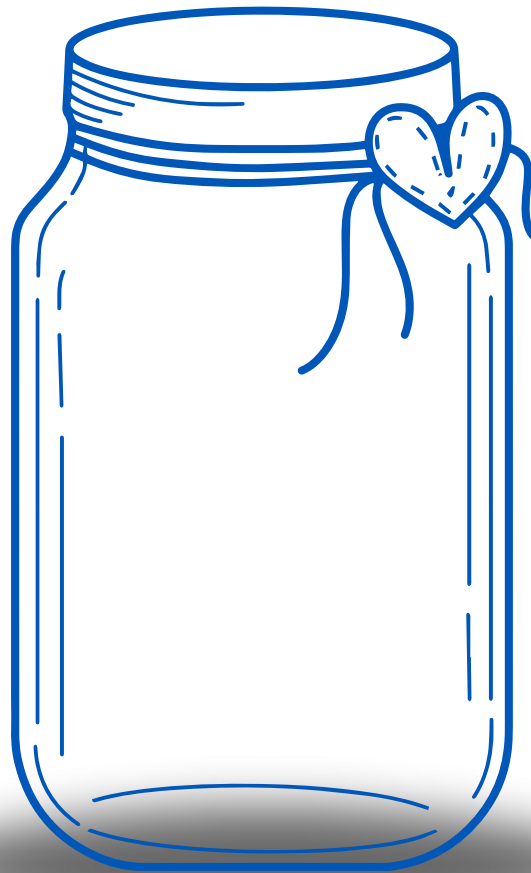
A lot of people offer advice on how to feel joy, especially in moments where we are struggling to, and it is a gift to have people in our lives who care enough to do that. However, what makes you happy is ultimately a choice you make for yourself. Nobody can tell you how to feel happy, so Jewish tradition offers Adar, a blank canvas with no prescriptions or rituals, just space to think about the things that make us happy. But while we don't need to listen to everyone's advice on how to feel happy in the business of life, a reminder to feel joy can be helpful.



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## Activity - Your Joy Jar

Every day in the month of Adar, create a routine—in the morning, evening or whenever you have the opportunity—where you take a moment to reflect on joy. This can be anything from thinking about something that gives you joy to a moment or memory that made you feel happy. Write it down on a piece of paper, and put that paper in a jar by your bedside. By the end of the month, you'll hopefully have dozens of joy moments you can carry into the rest of the year, spreading YOUR joy across your year. Consider using our Adar Joy Cards, with 29 cards in the deck—one for each day in the month of Adar. You can cut them out of this resource and the journal prompts that come with them to help your joy come to life.






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What is a memory that makes you smile?

What is one thing you can do or a food you can eat to lift your spirits?

What are you grateful for?







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