

Self Encouragement & Celebration

Encouragement is the life blood of joy. Encouragement is what keeps each of us going as we serve Hashem in everything that we do. Without encouragement, we become listless. Ultimately immobilization sets in, leaving us wallowing in negativity.

Most of us are used to the idea of encouragement coming from others. Hopefully, we've all received a "yasher koach" or "job well done" after accomplishing something positive. It is of course wonderful to get positive feedback from others.

Encouragement however must come from the inside. There are not always people around us to celebrate our big and little achievements. We must learn how to celebrate every step that we take towards making our lives better and fulfilling the will of Hashem. It is telling to note that even Hashem, as it would seem, encouraged Himself. When Hashem created Light on the first day of creation, the Torah tells us that Hashem "saw that it was good" (Breishis 1:4). Since we are created in the Image of Hashem, we too can learn to acknowledge a job well done.

Depression of course makes self celebration difficult. Our minds are full of self criticism that interferes in our willingness or ability to acknowledge the many real positives in our performance. Therefore, in order to begin learning the skill of self celebration, I direct patients to practice one these techniques:

1. Telling someone about a small accomplishment. Examples might be waking up for davening, returning a borrowed object, paying a bill, or eating a healthy meal. All of these are Mitzva activities and therefore worthy of praise. Let the other person validate your effort. Give the other person the chance to share his or her similar accomplishments. Make sure that you validate those efforts.
2. Write a letter to Hashem about your accomplishments both big and small. Thank Him for the opportunity, ability, and health to do these good things.
3. As you walk or perform tasks, repeat the following over and over again, "thank you". There is no need to say this in the direction of anyone in particular. Over time you actually connect the "thank you" with specific accomplishments.
4. Take specific self celebration "breaks". This can be as simple and quick as indulging in a treat such as a favorite candy bar or pastry. Take time to enjoy. Hashem has created the ability to experience physical pleasure so that we would have a 'taste' of what closeness to Him is like. Food need not be the only way to celebrate your efforts and accomplishments. Going outside to enjoy some fresh air is a wonderful way to reward yourself. Perhaps spending time with a relaxing book or with a fun friend can be a way of validating yourself.