

22nd Annual Jewish Men's Retreat (JMR) October 25-27, 2013

Laugh, Nosh, Love, Work, Kvell Restoring Balance To Our Lives

THEME AND FLOW DOCUMENT

Section I

We spend much of our lives *laughing, noshing, loving, working and kvelling (LNLWK)*. Yet, many of us go through our lives jumping from task to task with no clear sense of why we are doing what we are doing. Our cycle of living often seems disconnected and out of balance. Life often pulls us along - this way and that - with little rhyme or reason. We may even ask ourselves to what end and purpose do we spend our lives immersed in these endeavors?

JMR 22 will explore the points of connection in our lives as we *laugh, nosh, love, work, and kvell*. We will consider the ways we can find balance and rhythm by exploring the four magical worlds we all inhabit - *physical, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional*. How do these "worlds" become out of balance and how do we restore balance, wholeness and vitality to our lives?

Men's lives are often lived predominantly in one of these worlds and not finding ways to bring in the other worlds can create oppression and despair. A man may choose a particular profession that works financially but doesn't serve his creative side. His relationship with an intimate partner may be unfulfilling or incomplete because of too many compromises he may have made for the sake peace at home (*Shalom Bayet*). His ability to find time to pursue interests he is passionate about may be curtailed due to family obligations or work commitments that seem to always take precedence. His spiritual growth may be dampened by a partner who doesn't value the "spiritual experience" or by his own ambivalence about what it means to have a profound relationship with G'd.

JMR 22 will offer men time to explore the imbalance between these worlds that can impact how a man engages the people and the world around him. Unbalance in our lives challenges us in ways that lead to disconnection with self and others, with frustration and anger. Men can

feel trapped with no way of escape. We cannot truly be “in the world of wholeness” if one of these worlds is sacrificed to the exclusion of another. We can think about these four worlds as a stool with four legs. Each leg represents one of the worlds. To have a stable stool, the legs need to be equal in length and also be able to equally support the weight (if one leg is very thin and another is very thick, one of the legs will break). If one leg is even slightly shorter than another, the stool is uncomfortable and probably unusable.

So it is with our life if our worlds are out of balance. Eventually, this imbalance plays itself out in unhealthy ways. We start to obsess about work issues to the exclusion of other essential issues and relationships. We lose the core of what it means to be a caring individual. We retreat from our intimate relationships, hold grudges, seek revenge, feel victimized and neglected, despair about our lack of accomplishment. We start to seek quick fixes to our sense of disconnection through sex, unhealthy relationships, drugs, alcohol. We stop reaching out for support by cutting our ties to those dearest to us who can offer us the best chance to restore balance. Our days are full of anger and rage at everything so our health suffers. We stop picking up those little “messages” that tell us something is wrong until it is too late. We are unwilling (and probably unable) to listen to others, be open and reflective. The drift toward this type of unbalance/disconnection is often imperceptibly slow—we hardly notice it on a day to day basis. Eventually, it starts to take its toll on us and those in our life.

If we truly want to LNLWK and embrace the richness each of these experiences has to offer, we need to open ourselves to appreciating that life can actually offer us richness and vitality. We need to fully appreciate how this unbalance/disconnection can de-stabilize us in so many ways and understand why we have allowed this situation to exist and why we allow it to persist.

Section II

There is a concept in the sciences and music called **Entrainment**. *The definition of entrainment in the bio-musicological sense refers to the synchronization of organisms to an external rhythm, usually produced by other organisms with whom they interact socially. Examples include firefly flashing, mosquito wing clapping as well as human music and dance such as foot tapping.* This concept is relevant for several reasons. First, to fully seek balance/connection in LNLWK, each of us in our own unique world of SELF needs to be entrained. We need to vibrate internally in such a way that each of our four worlds operates more or less at the optimal “frequency” and in the proper balance to each other. Remember, each of us has our unique sense of “Balance in the Four Worlds” so there is not a specific standard that we can say is the “ideal balance” for all of us. Finding that sense of “personal entrainment” can be a long and arduous process, but it is a journey we are compelled to fully experience LNLWK.

Second, we achieve entrainment with others in our lives. In certain situations, we actually “vibrate” at the same frequency. When two people have an “entrained relationship,” it means they are able to vibrate at the same frequency for a sustained period of time. Part of finding balance is both the internal process we seek for ourselves and then the way we extend that balance to those outside ourselves.

Let’s consider some examples where this entrainment is possible. A music ensemble (jazz quartet, orchestra, choir) depends on each individual knowing what to play/sing with the proper skill to pull it off. Skill isn’t only about technique. Skill means a full integration of heart/hand/head/soul to play/sing “with feeling.” This isn’t about being an accomplished professional. This is really about being balanced in the four worlds as an individual. Personal entrainment is at work here. We can then extend this to a person in an ensemble/orchestra / choir who now brings his/her individual balance into a larger context. *All those in the group work together to become entrained through a collective effort of attuning to each other’s unique “personal vibration.”* This often means damping down one’s own unique sound/skill to the benefit the whole.

This also is at work during Shabbat and perhaps at its most obvious during Yom Kippur. Shabbat and Yom Kippur are experiences that allow us to restore balance or at the least to bring our attention to the disconnection in our four worlds so we’ll do something about it. These are events in the Jewish calendar that allow us to reset before unbalance/disconnection become a serious problem (assuming we take advantage of this opportunity!). This process happens on the individual and communal level. We seek through prayer, meditation, day dreaming and breathing to restore our sense of entrainment. *This is done in the context of a community whose collective work heightens the power and effectiveness of this process.* Thus, our participation in the tribal aspect of Judaism pulls us along to a place where we can entrain with others which ultimately enhances our own spiritual uplift.

JMR 22 can seize on these opportunities during individual and communal activities to enhance this entrainment effect. We can help men to more fully explore their own worlds and the unbalance that robs them of their vitality, energy and spirit. We can also demonstrate how the community through “communal entrainment” can provide the support needed to restore and sustain our balance in the four worlds.