

On Believers Having Fun

by
Michael Rudolph

It happened that this edition of the Rabbi's Corner fell due just a day after I returned from a week's vacation in Southern Maryland with my granddaughters, so I decided to write on what was freshest on my mind – having fun.

Before I became a believer, having fun was uppermost on my list of priorities, and I pursued it via a plethora of hobbies and interests that often crossed over into my professional life. By that, I mean that I never pursued a professional endeavor that I did not consider fun. Put more indelicately, I avoided working at anything or studying anything that I didn't enjoy, and surely would have come to a sad end were it not for God having provided for me through parents who gave me a care-free and financially secure early life. It is only fair to my father that I tell you, in the matter of industry and duty, I did not emulate him. My father worked very hard at earning a living for his family whether or not he enjoyed what he was doing at the moment; in fact, in my youthful ignorance, I even disdained his pursuit of "work for profit" as being beneath the "higher pursuits" of art and science which I fancied myself as having personally. Indeed, I considered myself a "renaissance man" (with some credit begrudgingly given to my peer Leonardo).

From early youth, my life consisted of playing cowboy, playing naturalist, playing folk singer, playing doctor, playing scientist, playing explorer, and playing biker (complete with a Harley hog, black leather jacket, and saddle-stitched, electric-blue pegged pants); the Fonz had nothing on me! There was Radio, photography, Scouting, manufacturing (and often exploding) rockets, fencing, judo, the study of science, medicine, psychology, philosophy and law, reading and writing poetry, collecting stamps, target shooting, guitar-accompanied folk singing, clarinet (pretty awful), ballroom dancing (pretty graceful), attending ballet and opera, motor boating, sailing, hunting, fishing, hiking, bicycling, motor cycling, collecting reptiles, wine tasting, pipe-smoking, and, of course, befitting my station in life – *haut cuisine*. It's ironic that ministry was the one thing I never thought to dabble in.

Then, in 1976, I met God, became a believer in Yeshua, and having fun seemed to suddenly contradict my new direction in life. There were others to consider now besides myself, and the responsibility of it loomed large. And of my old ways, I now realize that my pre-Yeshua life was so similar to Ecclesiastes 2:3-11 that it could have been written with me in mind:

"I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me

in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.”

Yes, my old life was enjoyable, but my new life with God had an excitement about it that I had not previously known or even considered – the excitement of knowing truth, and of making a real difference in the world by serving others. And so I stopped spending time on my hobbies, and turned my enthusiasm and energy toward this new direction, determining to lay pleasure aside.

However, it did not take long before God biblically repackaged many of my former activities and interests and returned them to me. Law continued to be my income-producing mainstay, but I began to utilize my legal training to study and interpret God’s Law in the Scriptures. My folk singing and guitar playing became used in worship, my study of medicine and psychology turned into biblical counseling and pastoral ministry, philosophy became theology, my U.S. stamp collection gave way to Israel stamps, and my love of opera influenced my interest in cantorial music. On the secular side, my interest in science turned toward astronomy, Ham Radio morphed into radio astronomy, boating, camping, shooting, fishing, and motorcycling remained intact, pipes and wine tastings disappeared, but the reptiles stayed until Marie declared “It’s either them or me.” Bottom line: I am still utilizing almost all of my former skills and interests, and having just as much fun, but with lasting value.

But why I am telling you all this? It is because I have noticed that many believers consider biblical life to be so serious that they have forgotten how to have fun. It’s as though God could not possibly be the author of anything light-hearted and enjoyable. If you are thinking that way, you might consider these Scriptures:

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 “I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor -- it is the gift of God.”

Ecclesiastes 5:18 “Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.”

Isaiah 65:22b “And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.”

1 Timothy 6:17 “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.”

Deuteronomy 24:5 “When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.”

Psalm 128:2 “When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.

There is, of course, a way to misuse pleasure – to prefer it over God as described in 2 Timothy 3:1-4:

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ...”

If you are a fun-loving believer or a Grinch who has read this and wants to repent of his ways, consider coming to Ohev’s “Hoot n’ Show” from 7:00-9:00 PM, Saturday, July 19. The “Hoot” part comes from “Hootenanny,” and the “Show” part comes from “Arts & Crafts Show.”

The “Hootenanny” part of the event will be held in the sanctuary under a variety of lights. We will be encouraged to dress 50s and 60s and bring pillows and beach chairs that will be circled around the *bima* platform; people will sit on these and also on the front of the platform. When everyone is circled up, someone will begin to sing and, if anyone else knows it he, she, or everyone will chime in. Words to a song can be passed out (but not projected) to help this. There is no central plan of any kind, but some people come prepared to sing and/or play and/or lead a particular song they have in mind. Although the hootenannies I was part of in the 60s were of the folk song variety, we will not restrict the style of music played at our “hoot.” That means it can be folk, gospel, jazz, rock, Latin, Israeli, etc. Performance is not the issue – group fun is the issue. The “Show” part of the event will be for art works. We will provide exhibit tables and walls for hangings; selling will be allowed but is not the main purpose of the event.

Do blondes have more fun? I doubt it, but please come and prove that Ohev believers do!!

July 2008