

Dear Friends,

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Sincerely,

Rabbi Yehoshua Werde
Director

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ב"ה



Outline

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Happiness

Is It A Mitzvah To Be happy?

Lekutei Maharan 2:24

מְצַוָּה גְדוֹלָה לְהִיּוֹת בְּשִׂמְחָה תָּמִיד

It is an important mitzvah to be happy constantly.

This very important statement means a lot of things. It serves as the lyrics for several popular Jewish songs and it is the basis of certain philosophies on life, but one thing it does not mean is that being happy is one of the 613 mitzvos.

Yiddishkeit does not see the pursuit of happiness as a goal in and of itself, but it does serve as a crucial means to an end, i.e., in the context of serving Hashem with joy, as the posuk states:

Tehillim 100:2

עֲבָדוּ אֶת-ה' בְּשִׂמְחָה; בָּאוּ לִפְנֵי, בְּרִנָּה.

Serve Hashem with joy, come before Him with praise.

In fact, the posuk speaks in rather harsh terms about one who doesn't serve Hashem with joy:

Devarim 28:47

תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָבַדְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵב מְרַב
כָּל:

*[All of these terrible things will come to pass]
because you did not serve the Hashem your G-d*

joyfully and with gladness of heart, when [you had an] abundance of everything.

The Rambam codifies this as such in Halachah:

Rambam Hilchos Shofar, Sukkah and Lulav 8:15

השמחה שישמח אדם בעשיית המצוה ובאהבת הא-ל שצוה בהן, עבודה גדולה היא. וכל המונע עצמו משמחה זו ראוי להפרע ממנו שנאמר תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב.

The happiness with which a person should rejoice in the fulfillment of the mitzvos and the love of Hashem who commanded them is a great service. Whoever holds himself back from this rejoicing is worthy of retribution, as [Devarim 28:47] states: "...because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with happiness and a glad heart."

Happiness Helps With Your Inner Struggle

Why is joy so important specifically with regards to "the service of Hashem?"

The Alter Rebbe explains in Tanya that you cannot resist your inner temptations and be victorious in your personal struggles when you are depressed.

Tanya Ch. 26

כמו שנצחון לנצח דבר גשמי כגון שני אנשים המתאבקים זה עם זה להפיל זה את זה. הנה אם האחד הוא בעצלות וכבודות ינוצח בקל ויפול גם אם הוא גבור יותר מחבירו ככה ממש

בנצחון היצר אי אפשר לנצחו בעצלות וכבודות הנמשכות מעצבות וטמטום הלב כאבן כ"א בזריזות הנמשכת משמחה ופתיחת הלב וטהרתו מכל נדנוד דאגה ועצב בעולם.

As with victory over a physical obstacle, such as in the case of two individuals who are wrestling with each other, each striving to throw the other. Exactly so is it in the conquest of one's negative tendencies; it is impossible to conquer them with laziness and heaviness, which originate in sadness and in a heart that is dulled like a stone, but rather with alacrity that derives from joy, from a heart that is free and cleansed from any trace of worry and sadness in the world...

“If I Were A Rich Man”

A common mistake many of us make when it comes to happiness is that we believe the more money and physical possessions we have, the happier we will be. The reality is quite to the contrary:

Koheles Rabah 3:10

אמר ר' יודן בש"ר איבו אין אדם יוצא מן העולם וחצי תאותו בידו אלא אם אית ליה מאה בעי דיעבדון תרתי מאה ומאן דאית ליה תרתי מאה בעי דיעבדון ארבעה

Rabbi Yudan said in the name of Rabbi Ibu: A person does not depart from the world with half of his desires in hand. If he has one hundred coins he wants two hundred, and one who has two hundred wants them to become four [hundred].

The pursuit of material possessions is anticlimactic—the more we have, the more we want. In fact, when we have what we previously wanted, we end up wanting exponentially more. When we have 100, we want another 100, but when we have 200, we want an additional 200.

While they say the second million is easier than the first, the worry about how to obtain 200 is significantly greater than the worry about how to obtain 100. Thus, as wealth increases, so does the worry about how to get it.

Scientists coined the term “the hedonic treadmill” to describe this perpetual need to have more.

When we get something we perceive will make us happy—for example a raise in wages—we are happy for a short while, but the happiness doesn't last. Soon enough we begin wanting an even higher raise in salary, and so it goes, on and on. We are never truly happy with what we have, and we always want more, and there is always more to want. It's like running on a treadmill where you run and run and run and after all that running you get nowhere. The pursuit of materialism works in a similar manner; you get what you are after but it doesn't make you happy, so you get more and you're still not happy, and the cycle continues on and on without an end.

This phenomenon has been observed in a study conducted by Los Angeles economist, Richard Easterlin:

Happiness: The Science behind your Smile, p. 77

Participants in an ongoing social survey of a cross-section of the American population were asked to go down a list of major consumer goods that people invest their money in (house, car, television set,

travel abroad, swimming pool, second home, and so on). The first time, they were asked to tick off which of those goods formed part of their ideal of the good life (the life they would like to have). They were then asked to do down the list again and tick off which of the items they actually had already. The survey was repeated sixteen years later. Over the early part of their lives, people go from having few if any of these big-bucket items to having several of them. The trouble is that their ideal of what would be needed for the good life recedes at almost exactly the same rate as they advance. When they are young, a house, car, and TV screen seem enough. Later on, a holiday home comes to seem just essential. Over the 16 years, people went from having 1.7 to having 3.1 items, and meanwhile the good life went from consisting of 4.4 items to consisting of 5.6 items. They were still two items short of where they wanted to be, just as they had been at the beginning.

This is what makes the pursuit of happiness so ironic. We chase material possessions, experiences, and pleasures, in the hope of achieving happiness, yet happiness continues to allude us. And the more we pursue it, the more unhappy we are on account of it. This is what the Mishnah teaches:

Mishnah Avos 2:7

מרבֵּה נכסים מרבֵּה דאגָה

Increasing possessions, increases worry.

The more we have, the more we end up worrying about having.

If material possessions don't bring us happiness, what then is the secret to happiness?

Being Satisfied

According to the Mishnah, happiness is about being satisfied with what you have:

Mishnah Avos 4:1

איזהו עשיר השמח בחלקו

Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot.

A popular anecdote illustrates this point:

There was once a peasant who lived in a tiny village in Poland. Night after night the peasant had a dream in which it was revealed to him that at the base of a certain bridge in Prague, there was a huge treasure buried. Not being able to free himself of his thoughts, he made the grueling trip to Prague.

Alas, there were always guards stationed around the bridge, and he could not dig for the treasure. He came back day after day, hoping for a moment when there would be no guards present.

One of the guards took notice of his odd behavior and asked: "Why do you keep hanging around the bridge?"

A little embarrassed, the peasant related the contents of his dream.

The guard howled with laughter. "Because of this dream you

came all the way here? Why, I have had a repeated dream that under the floor of a peasant's hut in a tiny village in Poland there lies a huge treasure buried. Do you think I am so foolish as to travel there to find it?"

The peasant returned home, lifted up the floorboards, and lo and behold he found a large treasure right under his rooftop.

What can a person do if they aren't naturally satisfied with what they have, how can they become satisfied with their lot?

Hayom Yom, 24 Cheshvan

בענינים הגשמיים צריך להסתכל במי שהוא למטה ממנו, ולהודות להשי"ת [לה' יתברך] כי טוב על חסדו אתו עמו.

In material matters, one should look at someone whose situation is lower than one's own and thank Hashem for His kindness.

The Talmud tells a story about the great sage Rabbi Akiva (50–137 CE) that illustrates this point well:

Talmud, Nedarim 50a

ר' עקיבא איתקדשת ליה ברתיא (דבר) דכלבא שבוע, שמע (בר) כלבא שבוע אדרה הנאה מכל נכסיה, אזלא ואיתנסיבה ליה. בסיתוא הוה גנו בי תיבנא, הוה קא מנקיט ליה תיבנא מן מזייה, אמר לה: אי הואי לי, רמינא ליך ירושלים דדהבא. אתא אליהו אידמי להון כאנשא וקא קרי אבבא, אמר להו: הבו לי פורתא דתיבנא, דילדת אתתי ולית לי מידעם לאגונה. אמר לה ר' עקיבא לאנתתיה: חזי גברא דאפילו תיבנא לא אית ליה.

The daughter of (Bar) Kalba Savua became betrothed to R' Akiva. (Bar) Kalba Savua heard

about it and pronounced a vow prohibiting her from benefiting from any of his possessions. In spite of this, she went and married R' Akiva in the winter. They would sleep in the straw shed and R' Akiva would pluck the straw from her hair. He said to her, "If I had the means, I would place upon you a [tiara featuring] Jerusalem of gold. Eliyahu [Hanavi] appeared to them in the guise of a person, and called at the door saying "[Please] give me a little straw, for my wife has given birth and I have nothing for her to lie on." R' Akiva said to his wife [to comfort her], "See, here is a person who lacks even straw!"

The Ran (Rabeinu Nissim of Gerona 1320–1376) points out that the purpose of Eliyahu's visit was to offer them consolation in their state of poverty by calling attention to someone in an even more impoverished state.

This idea is corroborated by studies of various segments of the population. The studies found that people who live in communities where the average income is lower than what they make tend to be happier than those living in communities where the median income is above their income level, even when they are making significantly more (Daniel Nettle, *Happiness: The Science behind your Smile*, p. 38).

Looking at the possessions of others with envy is one of the things our Sages warn us against:

Mishnah, Avos 4:21

הקנאה, התאוה והכבוד - מוציאין את האדם מן העולם

Envy, lust, and honor-seeking, drive a person from the world.

On a positive note, one should look at a person who is less fortunate and show gratitude to Hashem for one's good fortune. This is a powerful tool to help generate personal happiness.

Humility

The posuk in Yeshayahu offers a rather surprising but resonant approach to achieving happiness:

Yeshayahu 29:19

וַיִּסְפוּ עַנְוִים בַּה' שְׂמֵחָה וְאֶבְיוֹנֵי אָדָם בְּקְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל יִגְלוּ.
Those who are humble shall increase their joy in the Hashem, and the impoverished people shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

The Rebbe explains:

Bringing Heaven Down to Earth p. 120

Depression comes from haughtiness. If you would realize who you really are, you wouldn't be so disappointed with yourself.

Toras Menachem Vol. 4, p. 121

ולכאורה נפלא הדבר, הרי ענוה ושמחה הן ב' תנועות הפכיות, דענוה היא התנועה דכיווץ ושמחה היא התנועה דהתפשטות והתרחבות, ואיך אפשר שע"י הענוה יגיע האדם לשמחה. אך הענין הוא, דענוה אינה השפלות הבאה מצד פחיתות הנפש

שאינו מוצא טוב בנפשו אלא ענין הענוה הוא מצד העדר הרגש עצמו, דהגם שיודע מעלות עצמו אינו מחשב את עצמו למציאות... ויעוד, כאשר מתבונן אשר כל הטוב שלו אינו מצד עצמו אלא בא בירושה לנו מאבותינו...מזה באה הענוה, מאחר שאין זה בכח עצמו.

This seems unusual, as humility and joy are two opposite notions. Humility is a notion of suppression, whereas joy is a notion of expression and expansion. How is it possible that humility will lead to joy?

The idea is that humility does not mean degrading oneself because of ones inferiority—i.e., that one cannot find any good in themselves—rather, humility comes from not being self-conscious; meaning that even when one is aware of their advantages, they do not consider themselves to be of importance....Moreover, when one thinks that all the good that he has is not his own doing but came as a gift from his ancestors...this brings humility, since it is not his own doing.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888) eloquently describes the sensation of humility:

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Mishlei 22:4

Our holy scriptures know of no higher, more ennobling virtue than humility, the mentality residing in the profoundness of the spirit which is totally unconscious of its own importance. Whatever the humble person may be, possess,

desire, or accomplish is never his own making; it is exclusively the product of a higher Being. Himself he considers a creature, created by the one and only Hashem, as His child and servant. The word “I,” emphatically spoken, is completely strange to his trend of thought and mentality.

The reason why humility brings on happiness is because when instead of take things for granted, you see yourself as undeserving, you appreciate and are grateful for what you have been given. This is the difference between a gift and a wage:

Sefer Hamaamarim 5710 p. 239

דשמחת האדם הוא יותר במתנה מכמו בשכר, דמתנה הנה זהו מה שלא הרויח ואינו מגיע לו, על כן הוא שמח בזה. אבל כאשר בא על שכרו הרי אינו שייך שמחה כל כך, מאחר שזהו מה שהרויח בכחו.

ועל כן בהרגשת עצמו, שהוא מוטעה בעצם מהותו וחושב את עצמו במעלה גדולה להיות כי מהותו וכן הטוב והיושר שלו גדול בעיני עצמו ויקר במאד...ועל כן חושב דכל מה שיש לו מגיע לו. אם כן אין בזה שמחה.

The joy that a person gets from receiving a gift is greater than that of receiving a wage; for a gift is something he didn't earn and doesn't deserve—that is why it brings him joy. However, when he is paid a wage, there is little reason for joy, since he earned it thanks to his own efforts.

Therefore, by being self-conscious, he is essentially

mistaken, considering himself to be of high standing as he holds his own goodness and values in high regard...he therefore thinks that everything he has, he deserves. Consequently, he will find no joy in it.

Appreciating What We Have

If you compare the luxuries we have today with the difficulties our parents experienced just a few decades ago, you will find there is much to be grateful for.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, Happiness and the Human Spirit, p. 5

For anyone in the early 1900s, the vision that crippling polio would be eliminated; that the contagious diseases of childhood would be rarity; that the trip from Chicago to Los Angeles would be a trip of four rather than sixty hours; that the Atlantic Ocean could be traversed in seven hours; that, on the hottest days of summer, we could relax in the comfort of air-conditioned homes, watching a football game being played three thousand miles away, or a choice of movies on DVD—that would be paradise on Earth!

If you could tell such a person that, in the twenty-first century, the workweek would be thirty-seven hours; that most of the work would be done by electronically controlled machines; that preparation of meals would be facilitated by the availability of instant foods, microwaves, and fast-food vendors;

that fax machines, cell phones, and e-mail would enable instant communication; that humans would orbit Earth and walk on the moon; that computers would make the most complex calculations in a fraction of a second and predict the weather with great accuracy; that diseased livers and kidneys would be replaced by healthy organs; that the Internet would put all the knowledge in the world at our fingertips—they would see such a future as pure bliss! Surely, with so many of the sources of distress and suffering eliminated, the human race would finally be able to achieve the goal of happiness. The pursuit would be over!

Gratitude

A simple way to achieve humility (and happiness) is by practicing gratitude, and Judaism is filled with ways for us to express gratitude. From when we wake up in the morning until we go to bed in the evening, there is a *brochoh*, blessing of thanks to say for everything we partake of in this world.

Talmud, Berachos 35a

אסור לו לאדם שיהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה
*One should not enjoy anything of this world
without first reciting a brochoh.*

There are *brochos* to show our thanks for everything we can do or enjoy; when we eat, we thank Hashem for our food; when we relieve ourselves, we thank Hashem for our health; in the morning, we thank Hashem for the ability to see, and

to move, and to stand upright, and for giving us strength; for clothing us; and for providing us with our every need.

Reciting brochos with kavanah is a powerful way to express our gratitude for what we have, and serves as a constant reminder to be mindful of the blessings in our lives.

Seeing the Good In Everything

Another key to happiness is to look for the good fortune in everything, particularly in the events that appear negative.

The Talmud tells us of Rabbi Nachum Ish Gam Zu who was able to see the good in every situation:

Talmud, Taanis 21a

ואמאי קרו ליה נחום איש גם זו? דכל מילתא דהוה סלקא ליה אמר 'גם זו לטובה'.
זימנא חדא בעו לשדורי ישראל דורון לבי קיסר אמרו מאן ייזיל ייזיל נחום איש גם זו דמלומד בניסין הוא שדרו בידיה מלא סיפטא דאבנים טובות ומרגליות אזל בת בההוא דירה בליליא קמו הנך דיוראי ושקלינהו לסיפטיה ומלונהו עפרא (למחר כי חזנהו אמר גם זו לטובה) כי מטא התם [שרינהו לסיפטא חזנהו דמלו עפרא] בעא מלכא למקטלינהו לכולהו אמר קא מחייכו בי יהודאי [אמר גם זו לטובה] אתא אליהו אדמי ליה כחד מינייהו א"ל דלמא הא עפרא מעפרא דאברהם אבוהון הוא דכי הוה שדי עפרא הוו סיפיה גילי הוו גירי דכתיב (ישעיהו מא, ב) יתן כעפר חרבו כקש נדף קשתו הויא חדא מדינתא דלא מצו למיכבשה בדקו מיניה וכבשוה עיילו לבי גנזיה ומלוהו לסיפטיה אבנים טובות ומרגליות ושדרוהו ביקרא רבה כי אתו ביתו בההוא דיורא אמרו ליה מאי אייתית בהדך דעבדי לך יקרא כולי האי אמר להו מאי דשקלי מהכא אמטי להתם סתרו

לדירייהו ואמטינהו לבי מלכא אמרו ליה האי עפרא דאייתי
: הכא מדידן הוא בדקוה ולא אשכחוה וקטלינהו להנך דיוראי:
Why was he called Nachum Ish Gam Zu? Because whatever happened to him, he would say: "This, too, is for the good." Once the Jews wanted to send a gift to the [Roman] Emperor. "Who will go?" they asked. "Let Nachum go, for he is well acquainted with miracles." They sent along with him a chest full of precious stones and pearls. On the way, he stayed at an inn. During the night, the innkeepers took the contents of the chest and filled it with earth. In the morning, when Nachum saw [what happened], he said: "This, too, is for good."

When he arrived there, he gave the chest to the king. When the king saw that it was filled with earth, he wanted to kill all [the Jews] and said: "The Jews are mocking me!" Said Nachum: "This, too, is for good."

Eliyahu Hanavi appeared disguised as one of the king's ministers and said: "Perhaps this is the dust of their father Abraham, who would throw dust that turned into spears and straw that turned into arrows?" There was a country which [the Roman armies] could not conquer; they tried [the earth brought by Nachum] and succeeded in conquering it. So they took Nachum into the Emperor's treasury, filled his chest with precious stones and

pearls, and sent him off with great honor.

When he returned to the inn on his way home, they [the innkeepers] asked him: “What did you do that you deserved such honor?” He replied to them: “What I took from here, I brought there.” So they demolished their inn and brought [the earth] to the emperor’s palace, saying: “The earth that was brought here is from our land.” They tested it, and did not find it [effective], so they executed the innkeepers.

Obviously, Nachum’s statement “This, too, is for the good” was not just a statement, he saw it as good and believed that it would turn out for the best.

Happiness is a Choice

The English word “happiness” comes from the root “hap” which means luck or chance, as in the word “happenstance.” It gives the impression that happiness is something you are either blessed with, or you are not.

If luck gives you a comfortable situation then you will be happy, if not, you may be destined for a life of misery.

In contrast, the Hebrew word for happiness, simchah, comes from a very different root:

Tikunei Zohar 22

ואתון בשמח“ה איהי מחשב“ה

The letters of the word “besimchah” (happily) are the same letters as “machshavah” (thought).

Happiness is a way of thinking. If you choose to think happy thoughts, to see the good in everything, to be grateful for what you have, to think about your good fortune by looking at those that have less than you, then you can be in control of your own happiness and you are not at the mercy of chance.

Chassidus teaches that the mind is in control of the heart. The emotions we feel are products of the thoughts and beliefs we entertain. By thinking positive thoughts, we can effect positive feelings.

The Spiritual Power of Joy

There is a spiritual side to happiness as well. According to the Zohar, when a person is happy in this world, there is a mirror effect in the heavenly realms that results in an abundance of blessing being reflected back down below.

Zohar 2:179b

תא חזי עלמא תתאה קיימא לקבלא תדיר... ועלמא עלאה לא יהיב ליה אלא כגוונא דאיהו קיימא, אי איהו קיימא בנהירו דאנפין מתתא, כדין הכי נהרין ליה מעילא, ואי איהו קיימא בעציבו, יהבין ליה דינא בקבליה. כגוונא דא (תהלים ק ב) עבדו את ה' בשמחה, חדוה דבר נש משיך לגביה חדוה אחרא עלאה
Come and observe! Our world is always ready to receive [the spiritual flow that emanates from above]... The upper world provides in accordance with the state below. If the state below is joyous, then, correspondingly, abundance flows from above; but if the state below is one of sadness, then, correspondingly, the flow of blessing is constricted.

Therefore, “Serve Hashem with joy” (Tehillim 100:2), because human joy draws a corresponding supernal joy.

Joy Breaks Barriers

So powerful is the effect of joy above that it breaks spiritual barriers:

Samach Tesamach 5657 p. 49

שמחה פורץ גדר

Joy breaks barriers

In fact, joy is even more effective than tears in this regard:

Likutei Ramal (Rabbi Moshe Leib Sosover)

השמחה...מדריגה יותר מבכיה, כי לבכיה פתוח השער, כמו שאמרו חכמינו ז"ל “שערי דמעות לא ננעלו”. אך השמחה משבר המחיצה והגודא.

Happiness...is greater than crying, for the gates [of heaven] are open to crying, as our sages OBM said: “The gates of tears have not been locked.” However, joy breaks down the walls and barriers.

What are these so called “barriers?”

Chassidut explains that since Hashem is infinite, any limitation that exists only exists because Hashem’s presence is concealed. This concealment of Hashem’s presence is really an illusion created in order to make space for this limited universe to exist. In Hashem’s realm, there is no limitation.

Through joy, it is possible to break free of the illusion of limitations and constrictions.

This is in fact what joy is. Joy comes from looking beyond the limitations that make a person depressed, to the things that free the person from his confined thinking.

For example, if a person feels threatened by what others have because they fear there is not enough to go around, by adopting an abundance mentality—a perspective in which there are no such limitations—one is able to become more content and even generous.

In a spiritual sense as well, the Zohar explains that since there is no limitation above, there is always reason to be happy. All it requires is for us to choose to be happy below and that will elicit cause for happiness from above that will manifest itself below in the form of an abundance of blessing and success.

Ma'amarei Admur Ha'emtza'i D'rushei Chasunah, p. 417

עיקר בחי' השמחה הוא רק ענין ובחי' רוממות עצמות הנפש
למעלה מעלה מגדר כלי הגבלתה

The primary element of joy is simply in the soul's transcendence higher and higher, beyond the entrapment of its limiting encasing.

If you think about it, the feeling of depression, the opposite of happiness, is one of feeling trapped. You feel the limitations and barriers and they confound you to the extent that you do not feel capable of overcoming them and resort to despair.

Joy, on the other hand, is a lack of limitation. When you are happy, it feels like the options are limitless. This is because joy is an authentic expression of the soul's limitlessness. And

all it takes is a decision to be happy and a little discipline to do the things that you know will make you happy and almost magically you will be happy. This is because you have happiness within you, it is your natural state of being, and all you need to do is to remove the obstacles that are in the way.

The Joy of Wholeness and Completion

The Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Yehudah Loew 1520–1609), in explaining why a marriage is such a joyous occasion, explains the essence of what makes us happy:

Chidushei Agados Maharal vol. 1 Yevamos 62b

כל שמחה הוא מפני השלימות כי כאשר אחד בשלימות אז בא
השמחה

All joy is from completion, for when a person is complete, then happiness comes.

The Maharal explains that we were not created to be alone. When we are alone, we feel lonely, as if we are missing something, and the feeling of lacking causes us to be unhappy. On the other hand, one of the greatest joys in life is in marriage, when one finds their counterpart and rejoins with the missing half of their soul to once again become complete as their souls were on high before descending into this world.

Spiritual Completion

If we feel we are missing something, we will not be happy. While this explains why someone who is satisfied with what he has is happy, this is not always the case:

רוחניות וגשמיות זיינען הפכים בעצם מהותם. דאס וואס עס איז א מעלה אין גשמיות, איז א חסרון אין רוחניות. אין גשמיות איז א שמח בחלקו דער גרעסטער בעל מעלה. און דורך עבודה וועט אזא איינער צוקומען צו די העכסטע מדריגות. אין רוחניות אבער איז א שמח בחלקו דער גרעסטער חסרון, און ער ווערט, ר"ל [רחמנא ליצלן], א יורד ונופל.

Spiritual and physical are antithetical in their very essence. A superior quality in the physical is a deficiency in the spiritual.

In material matters, one who is "satisfied with his lot" is an individual of the highest quality. A person possessing this trait will, by working at it, attain the highest levels. In spiritual matters, however, to be satisfied with one's lot is the worst deficiency, and leads, G-d forbid, to a fall and descent.

Having enough is very different to being complacent. When it comes to having things, the sensation of completion is not in having more, but in being content with what you already have. However, when it comes to fulfilling your life mission and achieving your potential, feeling content with what you have already achieved will only get in the way of your ability to feel complete and happy.

Our Sages teach that:

הבטלה מביאה לידי שיעמום
Idleness leads to mental illness.

Why is that?

Rabbi Twerski, Happiness and the Human Spirit, p. 151

Every living creature comes into the world in a state of potentiality. Except for human beings, nature has endowed every creature with the instincts that can lead to its actualization. We humans are the exception. In order to become the best we can be, we need to focus our efforts in that direction, to intentionally exercise and implement the traits of the human spirit to the best of our abilities. This process—whether we call it actualization, self-improvement, personal growth, or self-fulfillment—is spirituality. Failure to embrace spirituality leaves us in a state of incompleteness and discontent.

Our happiness depends on being complete people. We are not born violinists, engineers, doctors, or scientists. Though we may excel in any of these occupations, perfecting ourselves as human beings lies not in a skill, but in maximizing ourselves in every way possible.

Never Satisfied With Achievement

Just as it is a good idea to look to people of lesser economic status in order to be satisfied with your lot, it helps to look at people who have achieved more than you spiritually and be inspired to rise higher and achieve more:

בענינים הרוחניים צריך להסתכל במי שהוא למעלה ממנו ולהתחנן לה' שיתן לו דיעה טובה להתלמד ממנו וכח ועוז שיוכל לעלות בעילוי.

In spiritual matters, one should look at someone who is above his own level, and plead with Hashem to give him the proper understanding in order to learn from that person, and the power and strength to rise higher.

To refer back to the Maharal's explanation that completion is what makes us happy, completion means something very different for the body and soul. Since the body is limited, its completion is in having enough. However, the soul's appetite cannot be quenched by having enough for it is infinite and it knows no bounds. This is why our quest for spirituality brings fulfillment and completion, instead of bringing emptiness and unhappiness (from what we don't have).

The Greatest Joy is in Serving Hashem

Divrei Hayomim I, 16:11

ישמח לב מבקשי ה'.

Those who seek out Hashem will be glad of heart.

In Tanya, the Alter Rebbe describes the joy of the soul's return to Hashem from its bodily entrapment. The neshamah finds its completion (and thus its happiness) when it prays, studies Torah, and performs mitzvos to connect with its source in Elokus:

זאת תהיה עבודתו כל ימיו בשמחה רבה היא שמחת הנפש בצאתה מהגוף המתועב ושבה אל בית אביה כנעוריה בשעת התורה והעבודה... ואין לך שמחה גדולה כצאת מהגלות והשביה כמשל בן מלך שהיה בשביה וטוחן בבית האסורים ומנוול באשפה ויצא לחפשי אל בית אביו המלך ואף שהגוף עומד בשיקוצו ותיעובו... כי מהותה ועצמותה של הנפש הבהמית לא נהפך לטוב... מכל מקום תיקר נפשו בעיניו לשמוח בשמחתה יותר מהגוף הנבזה שלא לערבב ולבלבל שמחת הנפש בעצבון הגוף.

This, then, should be one's lifelong [aim]—the joy of the soul upon leaving the body during one's study of the Torah and prayer [so that the soul may] return to “her father's house as in her youth”... [Surely,] there is no joy as great as that of being released from exile and captivity. It is comparable to the joy of a prince who was taken captive, turning the millstone in prison and becoming covered with filth, who then goes free to the house of his father, the king. True, the body remains [a source of limitation]...since the essential character of the animal soul has not been transformed to good. But His G-dly soul will become more precious to him than his body, so that he rejoices in the soul's joy without letting the sadness on account of his body interfere with or disturb the joy of the soul.

Generosity

Often people find that when they are charitable and give of

what they have, instead of feeling unhappy for losing what was once theirs, they feel a sense of joy and purpose in the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others by living up to their higher values that represent what they are truly about in their heart of hearts, and what makes their soul feel complete.

In Summation

Chassidic Aphorism

Depression is not a sin; but what depression does, no sin can do. Happiness is not a mitzvah, but it can bring one closer to Hashem more than any mitzvah can.

Take-aways

- » While Happiness isn't a mitzvah per say, it is an essential part of our service of Hashem—an important means to an end, because if we are not happy we will not have the strength to overcome temptation and the personal challenges that we face.
- » The more we have, the more we want, and the more we are missing, the less happy we are. A solution is therefore to be satisfied with what we have, and it helps to look at people who have less than we do.
- » Humility and gratitude are important ingredients for achieving happiness, because they divert attention from the unhappiness that comes from feeling that we deserve, and gets us to focus on appreciating what we have been blessed with. Mentioning our thanks to Hashem by reciting blessings (brachot) is a great way to incorporate gratitude into our daily routine.
- » Happiness is a choice. When we choose to see the good in everything, we end up feeling happy, and the outcome actually turns out better.
- » Happiness is a state of completion. That is why we find happiness in achieving our potential. Marriage is a joyous occasion because our soul finds completion in uniting with its other half. The completion of the body is in having enough, whereas the completion of the soul is in reconnecting to its source in G-dliness which it does by performing a mitzvah or through prayer and Torah study.