

Sat 6 June 2009  
Dr Maurice M. Mizrahi  
Congregation Adat Reyim  
Lunch and Learn  
In honor of Maurice and Joan Mizrahi's 35th wedding anniversary (2 June)

## Happiness

Siddur quotes Tanach:

- Ashrei yoshvei vetecha, od yehallelucha selah (Ps. 84:5)  
Happy are those who dwell in Your house; they will praise you yet again -- selah
- Ashrei ha-am shekacha lo, ashrei ha-am she-HaShem elohav (Ps. 144:15)  
Happy is the people whose lot is such, happy is the people for whom HaShem is God
  - Talmud, Berachot 4b: R. Eleazar b. Abina says: Whoever recites Ashrei three times a day is sure to inherit the World to Come.
- Etz chayyim hi lammachazikim ba, ve-tomcheha me-ushar (Prov. 3:18)  
It is a tree of life to those who hold it fast, and all its supporters are happy

Implication: To be happy, (1) Be close to God and (2) Follow what the Torah says

Yosef Albo, 15<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish philosopher (1380–1444):

- The purpose of Torah is to guide human beings to obtain happiness

Happiness is being satisfied with what you have. (Not romantic :-))

- Talmud, Pirkei Avot 4:1: [Ben Zoma said:] Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot.
- Talmud, Pirkei Avot 6:6: Happy is he who knows his place

But is it possible?

- Midrash, Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:32: R. Judan said in the name of R. Aibu: Nobody departs from the world with half his desire gratified. If he has a hundred he wants to turn them into two hundred, and if he has two hundred he wants to turn them into four hundred.
- Abraham Joshua Heschel (*Man is not Alone*): All that is creative stems from a seed of endless discontent

Implication: You decide if you are happy. It's a state of mind.

Popular song: Happiness is whatever you want it to be.

Searched every book in Tanach for 'happy'. It's all over, especially Psalms and Proverbs.

-However, a search for 'happy' in the Book of Lamentations returned nothing. :-)

What tribe of Israel is "happy"? Asher:

- When Leah had a son through her maid Zilpa, she said 'Be-ashri! -- I am happy!' ... and she called his name Asher. (Gen. 30:13)

To be happy, you have to be married:

- Talmud, Yevamot 62b : R. Tanhum stated in the name of R. Hanilai: Any man who has no wife lives without joy, without blessing, and without goodness.  
-Nothing about a woman who has no husband?

You can be happy by being altruistic:

- Prov. 14:21. ...happy is he who is kind to the humble.
- Ps. 41:2. Happy is the one who considers the poor; the Lord will save [him] in the day of evil.

You can be happy even when you're in the wrong and corrected:

- Job 5:17. Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty

You can be happy even if you are the world's worst sinner:

- Jeremiah 12:1. Righteous are you, O Lord, when I complain to you; yet I will plead these points of justice with you: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are all those who deal treacherously happy?
- Malachi 3:15. And now we call the arrogant happy [me-ashrim]; those who work wickedness prosper; even those who tempt God escape.

You are actually commanded to be happy, to rejoice:

- Deut. 26:11. And you shall rejoice in every good thing which the Lord your God has given to you
- Deut. 16:11: You shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son, and your daughter, and your manservant, and your maidservant, and the Levite, and the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow that are within your gates.
- Deut 12:7: Rejoice in all that you put your hand to, you and your households, because the Lord your God has blessed you.
- Eccl 9:7: Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart
- Eccl: 11:9-10: Rejoice, O young man, in your youth... and remove sorrow from your heart
- Talmud, Eruvin 54a: If you have the means to enjoy life, enjoy it
- Talmud, Shabbat 30b: The Shekinah [Divine Presence] rests on people, not when they are troubled and grieving, but when they are joyful and enthusiastic over the performance of a mitzvah
- Rambam, Hilchot Deot 1:4, 2:7: Be neither frivolous nor sad. Be consistently in a happy mood with a pleasant facial expression.

You are enjoined to enjoy life to the fullest, OR ELSE:

- Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 4:12: Rav said: In the World to Come we will have to account before the judgment seat of God for every pleasure we denied ourselves in this world, if it was permitted and affordable.

-Asceticism is not only discouraged, it is considered sinful.

-Adding restrictions in life to be more "pious" is also discouraged: The Mishna asks rhetorically:

- Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9:1: "Hasn't the Torah forbidden enough already that you want to forbid upon yourself other things?!" [Incorrectly attributed to Rambam]

You can find something worthwhile in everything:

- Talmud, Shabbat 77b: Rab Judah said in Rab's name: All that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world has a purpose.

If you are unhappy, remember past happiness:

- Ecclesiasticus 11:25: In happy days one forgets affliction, and in the day of affliction one forgets past happiness.

Consider that if things were different, they could be worse:

- Chafetz Chayyim: When someone tells me 'it wouldn't hurt if things were a little better', I ask him, 'how do you know it wouldn't?'

Popular wisdom: Be careful what you wish for; you may get it

In the afterlife, the World to Come, there will also be happiness. It's called 'hatzlachah' (beatitude):

- Talmud, Berakhot 17a: "In the World to Come... the righteous will sit with their crowns on their heads and enjoy the splendor of the Divine Presence -- the Shekhinah".

Dispute between intellectuals and anti-intellectuals:

- Levi ben Gershon, 14th century French commentator (Gersonides or the Ralbag): How much bliss one enjoys in the World to Come depends on how much knowledge was acquired while on earth.
- Hasdai Crescas, 14th century Spanish commentator: How much bliss one enjoys in the World to Come depends only on one's love of God and attachment to God.

So what induces happiness?

Hint: What do these quotes have in common (it is the root of happiness)?

- Prov. 8:32. ...Happy are they who keep my ways.
- Ps. 128:1. ...Happy is every one who ... walks in [the] ways [of the Lord].

- Prov. 20:7. The just man walks in his integrity; happy are his children after him.
- Prov. 3:13. Happy is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding.
- Prov. 14:21. ...Happy is he who is kind to the humble.
- Ps. 128:2. [If you] eat the labor of your hands; happy shall you be, and it shall be well with you.

Answer: They all imply that you DO something.

- Just HAVING things is not enough to be happy. Just being in good surroundings is not enough. Just having everything fall into place around you is not enough.
- The joy is in the seeking, not the obtaining.
- That's why you can get bored (and unhappy) in Eden: Everything handed out, nothing to work for, nothing to discover, no challenges.

***How do YOU define happiness? (Discussion)***