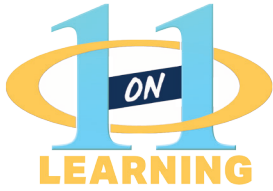


JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES



ROADBLOCKS TO A HAPPY LIFE

SOURCE SHEET AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PROJECT
INSPIRE.
A PROGRAM OF aish HaTorah

MODULE I

Q: If the key to happiness is appreciation, why is it so difficult to achieve?

Consider the following story which may shed a little light on the question:

A grandmother took her grandson to the beach. She sat him down to play at the edge of the water when a freak humongous wave hit the shore and carried him out to sea. The grandmother turns to heaven and cries, "Almighty, he's just a little boy! Have mercy! Think of his parents! Please Bring him back!"

Just then another big wave comes onto the shore and deposits the little boy on the sand -- breathing, unhurt and even smiling! The grandmother turns her face towards heaven and cries out, "He had a hat, he had a hat...where's the hat!?"

Q: Why do you think it's so hard to appreciate what we have, when it far outweighs what we don't have?

As we highlighted in the first 2 classes in the series happiness is all about attitude. And attitude has a lot to do with "focus". If we focus on "what we have" and "want it", we will be happy. If we put our focus on what's missing, we'll never be satisfied, no matter how much we really have. It's never about the amount of "stuff" we have, but rather our "emotional relationship" towards it that matters.

If we could make a choice to focus on what we have we would be happy. Seems simple enough; So, what "takes our focus" away from being able to make this choice?

There are five habits of thought which habitually pull us away from our happiness:

- 1. Everything is coming to me**
- 2. I'll be happy tomorrow when....**
- 3. If I had what he/she has I would be happy**
- 4. I'm used to it. It just doesn't make me happy anymore.**
- 5. If I show proper gratitude (thanks) to others for what I have, I lose some self-respect.**

ILLUSION #1. EVERYTHING IS COMING TO ME.

Q: When we meet kids who give off this attitude how do we view them?

Many of us harbor the same feelings deep inside, but we either don't realize it or don't express them.

Q: Why do you think a sense of entitlement is such a strong block to happiness?

It's actually the kiss of death. If it's owed to me, it doesn't make me happy when I get it. It's really mine. However, not getting it will make me really embittered and unhappy; And since we never get half of the things we really want, a sense of entitlement is a guarantee for an unhappy life!

The Torah teaches us this lesson in a very famous and powerful story:

SOURCE 1: Torah Bereishis (Genesis 29:35) Leah Naming Yehudah

She (Leah) conceived, bore a son and declared, **this time** let me gratefully thank G-d; therefore, she called his name Yehudah.

Yehudah comes from "toda", to thank in Hebrew, and Leah was thanking G-d for her son. It's certainly appropriate to thank G-d for the blessing of a child. However, this begs a question. Yehudah is her fourth son.

Q: Why did she wait so long to thank G-d? What do you think?

Consider the words of Rashi, the famous biblical commentator, when discussing this verse:

SOURCE 2: Rashi on Torah Bereishis (Genesis 29:35) Commenting on the phrase "this time"

"You gave me more than my (rightful) share (of children), now I have to give thanks." (Jacob had four wives and was prophesized to have 12 sons. Since each wife's equal share would be three, when Leah had her fourth son, she was moved to give thanks.)

Most of the commentators understand that although she thanked G-d for each prior child, she was only able to express her "full sense of gratitude" upon the birth of Yehudah.

Q: What held her back?

We can surmise that it was the natural sense of entitlement that held her back from feeling complete gratitude.

The Jewish People (Yehudim) receive our collective name from Yehudah; We are literally the "thanking people". Life is a gift that we didn't earn.

If we constantly live with the reality that everything we get in life is an undeserved gift, we will remove the number 1 block to happiness – It's all coming to me!

Reality #1: Everything is a Gift.

ILLUSION #2: I'LL BE HAPPY TOMORROW WHEN...

I think just about all human beings are wired to feel this way about life, if only I had some thing, experience or accomplishment, I would be happy. However, this is a false concept. Let's revisit a source we learned previously which gets to the root of this mistake.

SOURCE 3: *Pirkei Avos Mishna (Chapter 4:1) Who is the Rich Man?*

The one who is happy with his lot. (with what he has)

At first glance, this source doesn't seem to make much sense. The rich man is someone who has a lot of "something" – money, property, accomplishments, relationships.

Q: How can the Mishna not say that?

Q: Instead, the Mishna points squarely at an attitude as the true source of wealth? What is the distinction between the wealth, and one's attitude about it?

Really, a rich man with 10 million in the bank who isn't happy because of it, is really no better off than a poor man without the 10 million. They are both "emotionally poor". Attitude is decisive.

Therefore, wealth is really more about "wanting what you have than having what you want".

Since happiness is not tied to attaining anything, if a person is waiting on the next thing which will supposedly make them happy, even when they get it their joy will only be short-lived. If, on the other hand, they approach life with an attitude of gratefulness, everything they attain and achieve will just add to their happiness.

There is another more subtle illusion that is fueling this future orientation to happiness.

Consider the following source:

SOURCE 4: *Dueteronomy (Devorim 30:15-19) Free Will in the Torah*

See, I have placed before you "today", life and good, death and evil....choose life, so that you will live and your children will live.

This is the primary section of the Torah that describes the dynamic of free will. The ability to choose is a power we have irrespective of time, whether it be past, present or future.

Q: So why does the Torah stress that this power is being placed before us "today" in the present?

Q: When are we really exercising our free will? Is there really such a thing as the past and the future in actual decision-making?

The past was once the present and is just the memory of a decision made in a by-gone present moment; And the future is just the anticipation of a present moment that hasn't yet occurred.

I know it's a bit mind-blowing but put another way, the present is the ONLY thing that will ever exist.

The past and future are just useful conceptual constructs to help us make better decisions in...you guessed it, the present! Life is just a long series of presents.

Q: So, based upon this insight, what can we conclude about a person that is living for the future, hoping to acquire the things, outcomes and experiences that will make them happy?

It's a futile endeavor because the only thing real is the present. Happiness is a choice to live in, appreciate and find satisfaction in the present. With this attitude, every new present will increase one's happiness. Without it, no new future acquisition will ever keep one happy and satisfied. (Ironically, maybe that is why the word present means both now and gift. Presents come only in the present)

Reality #2: Choose Happiness Today, For Tomorrow Never Comes!

EXERCISES TO DO AT HOME:

Exercise #1

Q: Can G-d give you a greater gift than what He has ever given you in your life to date?

Sounds like a strange question, since G-d can give us anything He wants. However, looking at the question more deeply, how could he really give us anything to compete with what He has already given us. Once given the awe-inspiring gift of life and everything that goes along with it, and being part of the Chosen People with our amazing Torah, what else could possibly compete with that. Whatever we are missing in life, is just "icing on the cake". We've got the cake!

Take 15 minutes to begin to make a list of all the ingredients in the cake that makes up your life. Each day add two more and review this list once a day.

Exercise #2

When you find yourself not "choosing to be happy" during your day, realize that it must be related to not being "present in the moment" and in touch with the beauty of life itself and your life in particular. Stop what you are doing take a deep breath, quiet your mind and get into the moment. Think of 5 things you are appreciative about life in general and your life in particular.