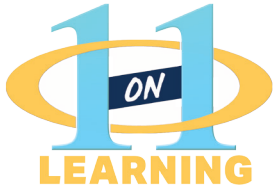


JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES



ROADBLOCKS TO A HAPPY LIFE

SOURCE SHEET AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PROJECT
INSPIRE.
A PROGRAM OF aish HaTorah

MODULE II

Happiness begins and ends with our focus and attitude; if we focus on what we have we're rich and happy. If habits of thought pull us away from focusing upon what we have, no amount of stuff can fill that psychological pit that we have created for ourselves. The 5 roadblocks to happiness are:

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 doesn't make me happy anymore.**
5. **If I show proper gratitude (thanks) to others for what I have, I lose a little self-respect.**

ILLUSION #3: IF I HAD WHAT HE/SHE HAS I WOULD BE HAPPY.

Q: Where do we get our ideas about what would make us happy?

Usually, our ideas regarding what would make us happy are formed by looking around at what others have. In only we had this car, that girl's boyfriend, or went to the other guy's college, then we would be happy. This is not a really pretty picture, but it's an honest take on where most of us are psychologically, and a direction towards which our whole society is pulling; fierce competition, winners and more losers and an endless onslaught of advertising fostering dissatisfaction, jealousy and coveting.

Did you know that the Bible lists coveting as one of the Ten Commandments, which is the basic code of morality in western civilization?

SOURCE 1: *Torah Exodus (Shemos 20:14)*

You shall not covet your fellow's wife, his attendants, his possessions, etc.... And all (everything) that belongs to him.

Q: Why does the Torah warn us with a general statement not to covet "all that belongs to him", when it already went through a laundry list of what we can't covet?

The answer reveals the deeper reason why we want what everyone else has got; can you come up with the reason?

We don't see their "entire situation". We just focus on the piece that we want. If we did, we would understand that G-d made my life custom fit for me, and his for him!

Imagine we all went into a big boardroom and placed our backpacks (symbolically representing our total life circumstances) on the table. Then we all went out of the room; the backpacks were mixed up and then each of us was invited back to choose his/her new backpack (life-situation). Well, you know what? To everyone's surprise each one of us would appraise each available backpack and nevertheless pick up his very own. When we see things with perspective and in context, we realize that our lives were custom made for each one of us by the Master Designer.

With this new healthy attitude, I can be free to WANT what I have, rather than covet what he/she has, held hostage to a false illusion that it really would make me happy.

Reality #3: I would be Happy if I wanted what "I have".

ILLUSION #4: I'M USED TO IT...IT JUST DOESN'T MAKE ME HAPPY ANYMORE

Consider the following Dialogue:

Mom, we have nothing to play with!

What, did someone steal all of our toys?

Q: What accounts for these perspectives?

The mom isn't used to the toys the way her kids arechange to The mom hasn't gotten used to the toys the way the kids have.

SOURCE 2: Torah Exodus (Shemos) and Bamidbar (Numbers) Describing the Manna

G-d said to Moses: "I shall rain down food – Manna- from Heaven; let the people go and collect it each day." (Shemos 16:4)

"Now our life is so boring; there is nothing; we have nothing to anticipate but the Manna."
(Bamidbar11:6)

Imagine getting such an amazing gift? Most of us spend much of our lives trying to earn the money necessary to feed and clothe ourselves and our family. There is a new lottery game which pays \$1,000 a day. Imagine hitting the winning number, and getting 1k in cash Zelled to your checking account each day. Would you get tired of such an amazing gift so easily?

Q: Why do you think our ancestors so quickly were able to not only get used to the Manna, but came to see it as a negative thing, which dried out their lives. (made it boring)?

You might say, the monotony of it challenged them, or maybe not working for it contributed to their upset. However, because of one reason or another they stopped appreciating it.

Rashi, the famous biblical commentator, points out that the Midrash informs us that really, the Manna could taste like anything you wanted it to taste like.

Q: If this is so, how would they ever have grown tired or bored from this amazing food?

The answer is that the person had to bring a new fresh perspective with them each time they ate the Manna; that intention unlocked its incredible hidden array of possibilities.

Let's face it. There is a lot of repetition and mundanity in our lives. The lesson of the Manna is that we must see every day and every routine in our lives like it "fell from the sky today and only today". By approaching life with a fresh, excited and inquisitive perspective, we can unlock the profound from the mundane in our lives. (See the classic film Ground Hog Day with Bill Murray to understand this amazing concept)

The key is not losing sight of the blessing. We must try to view it like the Manna, as if it fell from the sky for the first time; each day as if it was the only day.

Reality #4: See it as if you Got it Today. Then you won't get used to it.

ILLUSION #5: IF I SHOW PROPER APPRECIATION (THANKS) TO YOU, I LOSE A LITTLE SELF-RESPECT.

SOURCE 3: *Torah Exodus (Shemos 20:1) The Ten Commandments*

I am the Lord, your G-d, who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery.
(Shemos 20:1)

This is the first of the ten commandments, "to believe in G-d", and is the basis for our entire religion. We are not told to believe in G-d because he created the world or sustains it, but rather that He took us out of Egypt to become His chosen nation.

Q: Which is a greater miracle, to create the entire world from nothing or to deliver a People from slavery to freedom?

I think we can all agree that it's the former, creating the heavens and the earth from nothing.

Q: So why do you think the Torah introduces G-d to the Jewish People as the One who took them out of Egypt rather than the Almighty who created the world?

The knowledge of G-d as Creator is surely impressive but it's only an idea. What G-d did for us in Egypt and what He continues to do for us is real, personal and emotional. Only a belief born out of this type of experience could ever stand the test of time throughout history.

Belief in G-d is based upon this recognition and our ongoing service is a "thank you" to Him for all His kindnesses, then and now. The Hebrew word for thank you is **toda** related to the word **modeh** which means to admit.

When we thank someone, we are "admitting" that they did something for us. Some of us have a very hard time giving thanks to others whom we are indebted to?

Q: Why do you think this is so and is this same ambivalence at play with respect to G-d as well?

Perhaps it has to do with the fact that admitting that someone did us a favor obligates us to do one in return. We become tied to them and may feel diminished because of it. Something in the human psyche (and particularly the male ego) pushes us to deny or minimize the good that others do for us.

Q: What do you think might be behind this tendency to avoid properly acknowledging what other do for us, specifically G-d?

Maybe its rooted in the desire to be fully independent, sufficient and in control of our lives – like G-d Himself. Since it's based on a pure desire to be like G-d, it's very strong. However, the end game is to use this drive for independence to "connect to G-d" by being like Him. **Unfortunately, our egos trick us into substituting ourselves in His place to retain this sense of independence and control, unfortunately moving us away from reality and from G-d.**

LET'S SUMMARIZE:

There are 5 mistaken attitudes that keep us from focusing on our blessings.:

- 1) Everything is coming to Me.
- 2) Believing that happiness will come in the future when we get what we want.
- 3) Coveting what others have rather than enjoying what we have.
- 4) Getting used to things.
- 5) Not giving proper thanks because we don't want to admit someone did something for us.

They are all mistaken beliefs which take our "focus" away from the reality that our lives are really great, for all the not so great that they may contain. We so minimize what we do have and maximize what we don't that we keep ourselves unfulfilled.

EXERCISES TO DO AT HOME:

- A great tool to fight these tendencies is to keep some type of gratitude journal and write down all the good things that happen to you on a daily basis. Review this once a week. The Shabbos table is also a good place to have all family members share what they are grateful for.
- In your journal its also a good idea to add each day, a blessing or a pleasure that you have. Eating oranges, exercising in the early morning, your eyes; all the many things that we enjoy and things that we don't appreciate anymore, but that we should. After a few weeks of doing this, your "appreciation taste buds" will sharpen and you will able to expand the range of things you are grateful for. And you will be a much happier person. You and all of those around you!