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### **SERIES TITLES:**

- In Pursuit of Happiness
- 5 Roadblocks to Happiness
- The Love Game
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- Born Free-- The Creation of the Jewish People



# In Pursuit of Happiness





#### **Topic:**

#### In Pursuit of Happiness

#### Main Themes Covered in this Topic

- 1. Interesting Observation about Happiness
- 2. The Popular Misconception
- 3. Torah's Effective Solution
- 4. Applications and Exercises

#### **Featured Video**



http://www.aish.com/v/sp/50 574247.html

Questions to Discuss:

Is happiness a byproduct of achieving or getting the things that you want in life – or can you get it another way?

The following questions are included for further contemplation and discussion, and **although each one** is not answered directly, one should be able to answer them after going through the learning module.

Can we be happy while those around us aren't?

Can we be happy when things go really bad for us?

Interesting observation about what people want out of life.

Ask yourself the following question:

Question:

Which would you rather be rich or happy? (If you could only choose one).

Almost everyone chooses to be happy.

Observation:

Yet, most if not all of us invest great amounts of time, energy and even money trying to become rich, yet very few work at being happy!?

At least two fascinating popularly held beliefs emerge from this interesting observation:

- 1. Even though people pursue wealth, what they really are looking for is happiness.
- 2. People assume that happiness can't be attained directly; it is a byproduct of acquiring all the things they want and/or achieving all of their goals.

Happiness Is Complex In reality the subject of happiness is indeed complicated and there are a number of factors which all together create an outlook, which will enable a person to find happiness in life. These include some other good Jewish values like:

- Having a sense of meaning and purpose.
- Understanding that everything in life is a gift.
- Being humble.
- Being a giver.
- Trusting in G-d, or put another way believing that things are moving in a
  positive direction even if we can't always see it.

Yet there is one central idea that if applied consistently will bring us to happiness in life:

#### First The Misconception:

Discuss:

Our happiness and unhappiness are produced by the circumstances in which we find ourselves-from the external circumstances of our lives. If we get a compliment, win the game, get a raise, buy a new car, we are happy. If our boss criticizes us, we break a leg or get a parking ticket we're unhappy.

Question:

Isn't this how most of emotionally experience life?

This view makes us feel insecure, out of control......

Victims of Life:

When our happiness is based upon life circumstances, we become victims to life's vagaries, and seek in varying degrees to manipulate our external circumstances, expecting happiness to follow. Yet, since not even the best "control freak among us" cannot manipulate life circumstances perfectly, happiness is fleeting if attained at all, and pursuing it creates greater stress and anxiety often outweighing the gain.

A Solution:

Oral Law Source for Happiness

The Rabbi's in the Mishna (Torah's Oral Law) give us the key to finding happiness with the following question and answer:

Source: Who is the rich person? (Pirkei Avos 4:1)

Question: Who do you think is the rich person? Isn't this a simple self-evident question?

The Mishna gives a very interesting answer:

Source: Who is the rich person? The one who is happy with what he has.

(Pirkei Avos 4:1)

Explanation: You see, many people seek happiness from the outside in; If we get the raise, the

new relationship, the great job (all outside circumstances) we will be happy.

The Mishna is sharing with us a profound secret; we've got the order wrong. We think the rich man is the one who has "a lot of things". Really he is poor, if the things that he has don't make him happy. It's like having his wealth in a safe deposit box that he

doesn't know about. He's really rich, but he's emotionally poor.

Attitude change:

Controlling happiness seems to have more to do with wanting what we have (which is an attitude) than having what we want. If we cultivate this attitude regarding what we really do have in life, every additional thing we get will make us indeed richer.

**The Dali Lama says**: Happiness is determined more by the state of one's mind than by one's external conditions, circumstances, or events, at least once basic survival needs are met?

The Torah and the Dali Lama seem to be pointing to the same line of thought. How does this approach to happiness resonate with you?

**Two Examples of Attitude Controlling Happiness:** 

Question: A . Rich Man, Poor Man.

Do you recognize the following scenario?

Children can have a basement filled with wall to wall toys and can actually have the audacity to suggest to their parents that they are bored! On the other hand, if a new friend comes to the house to play and he enters that basement and sees the toys, all of a sudden, he is rich! Amazing. Yet, the kid who owns the toys is poor because they don't make him happy any more (he's used to them). It seems it's not the toys that make the difference, but the attitude of their owner.

Consider the Following Illustration:

#### B. Feeling like a Queen.

Queen Victoria of England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the richest person in the world, yet in real terms was poorer than any low income person in America today.

Question:

Yet, whom do you think "feels richer," the Queen or the low income person?

Conclusion:

Wealth is all about attitude. "Wanting what you have" promotes happiness, now and in the future, no matter how much or how little one actually has, while needing to "have what you want" is a recipe for frustration and disappointment.

#### **Getting Off the Treadmill**

New Paradigm elaborated

If controlling happiness is about attitude, no longer do we have to be victims of life circumstances beyond our control. We can stop trying to endlessly manipulate life hoping to find happiness, while always falling short of the mark. We can take control of our lives, because we are free to develop an attitude that will produce happiness.

Don't be Complacent:

This doesn't mean that we should become passive or complacent with what we have; we **can** always strive for more in many areas of our life. Judaism encourages striving and growing in all areas of life – both in material and spiritual terms.

Actually if you cultivate the **proper attitude**, **every acquisition and achievement will make you happier and richer**, because you feel it emotionally through appreciation.

You Might Be Wondering:

But what about the Bad Stuff Happening in my Life....How can I be happy in the face of that?

Story Which Provides Perspective:

Rabbi Noach Weinberg (founder of Aish Hatorah) tells a story of a man who is blind. He is at the top of the Empire State Building about to jump off. Imagine you were that man. You have lost all your wealth, your family has left you, you feel broken. Suddenly: You have eyesight. You can see. You've never seen before! Would you still jump?

Of course not! You would be excited to see all the things you've never seen before.

- Your parents
- Your family and friends.
- The beautiful world around you.
- Yourself

You would be enthralled looking at and taking in all the things you've never seen before!

Eventually though you might be right back up there about to jump!

Question:

Why would you jump after you got your eyesight back?

Answer:

You stopped **appreciating** your eyes! As long as we appreciate what we have we are excited about it. We see it as a gift. **Once we get used to it, expect it, we no longer appreciate it; and <u>then all we see and focus upon is the pain.</u>** 

#### Let's Get Practical

How do we start appreciating? It takes <u>habituating ourselves to focus upon all the things we really have</u>, which for many of us, is a brand new direction. You see, we've built up a default mechanism to see our happiness as linked to what's to come in the future rather than the here and now, and to believe that we have no control over it. We need to rewire ourselves in a way that is conducive to happiness.

Action we

The First Step:

can take:

The way to break a bad habit is to attack it in a way that will generate the least resistance. To that end, consider the following exercise.

- 1. Make a list of 30 pleasures that you have in life. Each day take 5 minutes to write in a journal all about the pleasure. Examples: morning coffee, oranges, hot showers...
- 2. Once a week, review the journal entries for that week. A good time for reviewing this is Shabbat.

The goal: The exercise is aimed at awakening the "gratitude taste buds" to all the great things in your life. Gradually, you will become more aware of other pleasures in your life, appreciating life more and becoming happier. This will become your default outlook on life and that is the goal! We have been habituated to take things for granted. This exercise will help to re-habituate ourselves to appreciate, all the pleasures in life – those which are obvious, those less obvious and even the pain or struggles we sometimes go through.

Action for our kids:

3. You can do this with young children to help their positive thinking by discussing "gratitudes" with them at night at bedtime. Ask them to share with you three things that they are grateful for each night. If they have trouble responding, help them; I am grateful for having the best mommy in the entire world!

Featured Video



http://www.aish.com/v/sp/100\_Blessings.html

## 5 Roadblocks to Happiness





#### **Topic:**

#### **5 Roadblocks to Happiness**

#### **Main Themes Covered in this Topic**

- 1. A Story
- 2. Happiness Revisited
- 3. 5 Roadblocks to Happiness
- 4. Exercise

Featured Video



http://www.aish.com/v/sp/49 082446.html

Question:

If the key to happiness is appreciation, why is it so difficult in practice to achieve?

Consider the following story which may shed some light on this question:

Cute Story:

A grandmother once took her little grandson to the beach.

She sat him down to play at the edge of the water when a freak humungous wave hit the shore and carried him out to sea.

The grandmother turns to heaven and cries, "Almighty, he's just a little boy! He did nothing wrong in his life! 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!

His grandmother turns her face towards heaven and cries out,

"He had a hat, he had a hat! .... Where's his hat?"

The Road to Happiness Revisited:

It's all about attitude, if we appreciate what we have and want it, then it will make us happy. If we don't appreciate it, or want something else we can't be happy, no matter how much more we get. It's not the amount of stuff that counts, but rather our emotional relationship to it that matters.

The

Challenge:

If we could make a choice to focus upon all that we have in life we would be happy. We often get pulled away from and habituated into focusing upon what we don't have instead.

The 5 Roadblocks:

The Five Illusory Ideas that challenge us and pull us away from 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. If I thank someone else for what I have I lose some self-respect
- 5. I'm used to it. It just doesn't make me happy anymore

#### Illusion #1. Everything is coming to me.

When we meet kids who feel this way we think of them as spoiled brats. Let's be Honest:

Do you see that many of us harbor the same feelings inside, but we just don't realize

it?

A sense of entitlement is actually the kiss of death for being happy. If it's owed to me, it can't possibly make me happy when I get it. After all, it was coming to me. However, it can make me really embittered and unhappy if I don't get it. And since we never get half the things we want, this attitude is a recipe for misery.

The Torah actually teaches us this lesson when Leah gave her son Yehuda his name:

She conceived and bore a son and declared, this time let me gratefully thank G-d; therefore she called his name Yehuda. (Bereishes 29:35)

Question:

Kiss of Death:

Source:

Hebrew Tidbit:

O.....

Yehudah means "to thank" and Leah was thanking G-d for him: that was very praiseworthy of her, yet why did she wait till she had her fourth son to thank G-d in this way? The famous commentator Rashi points out that only when she had more than her fair share of Yaacov's children (which should have been three) was she able to express her full sense of gratitude. Before that time a natural sense of entitlement held her back from feeling complete gratitude. The Jewish People (Yehudim) receive our collective name from Yehudah; we are literally the thanking people and our calling is to constantly live with the understanding, that life and everything in it is truly a gift. Feeling this will remove the number one block to happiness — It's coming to me!

Reality #1: Everything is a Gift

#### Illusion #2: I'll be Happy Tomorrow When.....

Question.	or achieved, then I would be happy?
Source:	See I have placed before you "today" life and good, death and evilchoose life (Devarim 30:15-19)
	Today is the only thing that really Exists!
A Little Deep Philosophy:	<b>First, realize that there is no such thing as tomorrow.</b> When you get there, it turns into today. All we really have is this moment, right now, and after that is gone, all we will have is the next "this moment". Choice is in place only now, only today. If we live for the future, we'll never be happy, because the future is just something we carry around in our heads to help us use the "present" more fully!
Perspective:	Second, happiness is not dependent upon something we get or achieve. Rather it is all about developing a healthy attitude about our lives. Once we have the

When was the last time you said or thought, if Lonly I had

Happiness is a choice we can make at any time; it's never dependent upon outside circumstances or future events.

attitude, we're happy. If we don't, no amount of success or attainment will give

Reality # 2 -- We can Choose to be Happy Now!

us the lasting happiness that we truly seek.

Illusion #3 -- If I had What He/She has I Would be Happy.....

Question:

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

Coveting is Not

Cool:

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

Did You

The Bible actually lists coveting as the last of the Ten Commandments (the basic code of morality in our Western Society):

Know?

You shall not covet your fellow's wife, his attendants, his possessions, etc....And all (everything) that belongs to him. (Shemos 20:14)

Source:

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

Question:

The answer reveals the deeper reason why we want what everyone else has got; because we don't see "all that belongs to him".

We only see the house we want. If we saw the dysfunctional relationships inside the house we would run the other way. The reason we covet what others have is that we don't see their entire situation. If we did, we would understand that G-d made my life custom fit for me.

Want what you have:

With this attitude I can be free to WANT what I have, rather than covet what he/she has, under an illusion that it really would make me happy.

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

Illusion #4 -- If I Thank you, I Lose Self-Respect.

Question:

Why is it so hard for many of us to say "thank you"?

Source:

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

Consider the following:

This is the first of the 10 commandments, the commandment of believing in G-d and is the basis for our entire service of G-d. We are not told to believe in G-d because He

created the world, or because He sustains everything in existence, but rather because He did so much for us by taking us out of Egypt and making us his Chosen Nation.

Our bond is born from gratitude for what He's done in the past and what He continues to do in the present for us as individuals and for the Jewish people as a nation.

Hebrew Tidbit: The Hebrew word "to thank" is Hoda'ah. It also happens to share the common root modeh, "to admit". When you thank someone you are admitting that they did something for you.

Many shy away from admitting that others have helped them because it automatically obliges us to return the favor. We become tied to them and feel diminished because of this. Something in the human psyche (particularly the male psyche/ego) pushes us to deny or at the very least diminish the good that others do for us, perhaps it chips away at the facade that we are totally independent and in control of our lives. When we do this we can't enjoy others as much and this diminishes our happiness.

Hebrew Tidbit #2: The phrase for ingratitude in Hebrew is **cafui tov**, literally translated as **covering up the good**. In other words, when someone does a favor for us and we want to avoid acknowledging it, we have to cover up the good, literally turning a blind eye to reality.

Conclusion:

Thanking allows me to live in reality and to give back to people, building a true foundation for self-respect.

Reality # 4 – If I thank you, and give back to you, I gain true self-respect.

Illusion # 5 -- I'm used to it...It Just Doesn't Make Me Happy Anymore

Question: Mom, we have nothing to play with!?

Response: What, did someone steal all our toys!?

Source: G-d said to Moses: "I shall rain down food- Manna- from Heaven; let the people go

out 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)

The Challenge of Wealth:

Even our ancestors made mistakes. They got too used to what they had and started to take it for granted. We all confront this challenge.

Canyou imagine the following scenario:

Money raining down from heaven each morning and evening, allowing you to buy all the food you want, the house and designer kitchen in which to make food, the limousine and driver that would take you to the store to buy the food, wine, music, flowers, art, and the latest decorations to create the ambience which will enhance your enjoyment of the food, a chef to prepare it, the latest designer clothes to be dressed in while you eat it, and the personal trainer to keep you slim even after you ate it. And on top of all of this, you would finally have the time, leisure, and peace of mind to pursue real, meaningful personal interests. Think of it as early retirement with a fat lifetime pension.

Question:

How soon do you think you would tire of such an amazing gift?

Well, our ancestors tired of it after only a little while because they lost perspective. It just shows you that you can get used to ANYTHING, even the greatest gifts in life.

## Reality #5 -- If you could really "See It/Appreciate It" you wouldn't get used to it!

#### **Summary:**

We would all be happy if we could just eliminate the negative attitudes that undercut our appreciation for life and all the blessings that we have. We need to:

- 1. See life as a gift.
- 2. Look for happiness in the present.
- 3. Want what we have.
- 4. Thank others freely for what they do for us.
- 5. Always look for the beauty in every scene and in every face, no matter how many times that we have seen it before.

Taking these 5 pieces of advice to heart will keep us out of the cauldron of dissatisfaction, envy or boredom and allow us the room in our hearts to see life as the beautiful unfolding journey that it **really** is!

Question: Can G-d give you a greater gift than what He has already given you in your life?

Answer: Realize that anything you may want or feel that you are missing, is just like "icing on the

cake". You've got the cake: life, opportunity, family, love, relationships, eyes and ears to see and hear all of the beautiful things in life, intelligence to understand life, a great

country to live in, and so much more.

Whatever you are missing pales in comparison to what you have!

Exercise #1 Take 15 minutes to make a list of all the ingredients that make up the wonderful cake

of your life.

Exercise #2 Each day for the next 2 weeks add another item. Then ponder "what's missing"?

You make find that you now relate to "what's missing" as just the "icing on the

cake"!

Reminders From Previous Section:

-Keep an appreciation Journal

-Review appreciation with kids

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http://portal.sliderocket.com/ BJVFG/ldgabtt-NEW

## The Love Game





#### Topic:

#### The Love Game:

#### **Featured Video**

#### **Main Themes Covered in this Topic**

- 1. The Puzzle, Questions and the Dilemma.
- 2. The Definition
- 3. Illustrations
- 4. What We Learn from Children
- 5. Let's Get Practical



http://www.aish.com/h o/video/Worlds\_**Greate** st\_Love\_Story.html

#### Love is a Puzzle:

Consider the Following:

"Most of us have experienced being in love; the starry-eyed feeling where time stands still when we look into each other's eyes, feeling emotionally bound as one. We know when we are in love, but have little idea how we got there and less regarding how to get back. The common perception is that finding love is a very random occurrence. Even the expression, "falling in love" suggests that love is a kind of cosmic accident one falls victim to; sort of being in the way of Cupid's capricious arrow when both of you least expect it. Usually accidental shootings hurt, but in the case of love, its mercurial nature just adds to its mystery and power."

Frustration:

We know what love feels like, but few of us know how to find it? If we had a definition

it might make it a lot easier.

Question:

What is the definition of love?

#### **Consider the Following Attempts to Define Love:**

"The feeling of being cared for knowing that to someone you mattered" – **Oprah** 

"Love is a space of time measured by the heart." – Marcel Proust

Love is life. And if you miss love you miss life" - Leo Buscaglia

Love is the feeling that you get when you meet the right person – **Anonymous** 

#### The Dilemma:

### Discuss the Dilemma:

We all recognize the feelings highlighted by these quotes, but they seem to fall short in providing us with a clarity on just what love is and more importantly regarding how to get more of it in our lives.

Love appears to be a vague, ephemeral feeling that is:

- 1. Random and accidental
- 2. Happens to us with little or no effort
- 3. Very beyond our control

#### The Problem:

Discuss the Problem:

From a Jewish perspective this lack of clarity is even more troubling because the Torah doesn't merely suggest that we love other people, it actually commands us to love others:

Source:

V'Ahavta L'Re'echa Chimocha – Love your friend as yourself (Vayikra 19:18)

Question:

How can the Torah expect us to love others?

- a. We don't have a clear definition, and furthermore,
- b. Is it really possible to expect people to generate feelings on demand? It seems like you either have them or you don't.
- c. Also aren't there people who each one of us just can't love?

Question:

So what is the definition of love? This is really the key to unraveling this puzzle.

#### The Torah's Definition:

Our Torah provides us with a definition of love which we can derive from the writings of Maimonides, one of the greatest Rabbis in Jewish History.

Source:

One does not love G-d except with the knowledge one has of Him. The love is commensurate with the knowledge. If there is little of it, there is little love, if there is a lot; there is a lot of love. (Mishna Torah, Laws of Teshuva 10:6)

Explanation:

Since G-d is "all virtue", all we have to do is know Him to love Him—love is automatically generated by recognizing His virtues.

We can apply this definition to loving all other people; who, unlike G-d are a mixed bag of good qualities and not so good qualities:

Torah's
Definition
of Love:

Love is the emotional pleasure we feel when we see virtue in another person and identify them with that virtue.

Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer, the "Great One of Vilna," one of the leading Rabbis of the past 500 years echoes the approach of Maimonides regarding love..

Source:

We love because we recognize noble qualities in others. (Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer as quoted in the River, the Kettle and the Bird p.143)

#### **Practical Illustrations:**

Exercise:

The power of the definition comes alive when you see it in action for yourself. Do the following exercise:

#### The Love Dynamic:

Think about someone that you love.

Question:

Why do you love this person? Make a list.

Usually, people write a list of the person's virtues: They are loyal, considerate, sensitive to their feelings, loving, giving etc.

If you remark, they sound like an angel, do they have any negative qualities? You answer, of course they do.

The main point:

However, you associate them with the positive qualities and therefore you love them. Seeing virtue and even more importantly, <u>associating them with that virtue</u> generates love!

#### The Flipside:

Take someone you dislike.

Question:

Why do you dislike them? Make a list.

Usually, people write a list of the person's negative qualities; they are arrogant, insensitive, self-centered, rude etc. Yet, somebody must love them, a mother, a wife, a friend. How is that possible? Well, they must see some good in them too. Begrudgingly, they admit I guess that must be true; but his mother, no....she is just stuck with him!

To Love or Not To Love:

#### **Startling Conclusion: Love is a Choice!**

What is now brought into sharp focus is that while all people are a mixed bag of good and bad characteristics, we feel love for those whom we primarily associate with virtue. The negative qualities can be compared to some shmutz on their clothing that is not really damaging their essence. Those we dislike we view primarily through the prism of their negative qualities.

Don't Miss This: Love is not a stroke of fate, a passing mood you accidently fall in and out of. It is a choice that we all can make to focus on the virtues of others. Since it is in our hands, it can be expected of us.

Set Your Focus The key to proactively generating love for all people is to focus on the "Virtue not the Vice".

#### **Money Back Guarantee:**

Guaranteed this formula will keep you in love with those you have chosen to love (i.e., spouses, relatives, and children) and help you see another side to those you really can't stand!

**Food for Thought**: In the process it might even help promote fixing up some of those negative qualities that prevented you from loving them in the first place...... In fact, as the rabbis say:

Source:

K'maim Hapanim l'panim kayn lev haadam l'haadam (proverbs 27:19).

Just like a person's face is reflected back to him when he looks at water, so too is a person's behavior- reflected back at him by another.

Deep Insight:

If you see virtue in others, and feel warmth towards them, they often reflect that same feeling back at you.....or at least the cold war begins to thaw!

#### What we learn from Children:

Lessons from Children:

G-d is an amazing teacher. He wanted to teach us how to love all people, so he gave us children so we would learn how. You see all parents are created with an inborn commitment to seeing virtue in their children.

Question:

If you ask an expectant mother if she will love her new born, what does she answer?

Answer:

She looks at you as if you fell on your head. Of course I will love them!

Questions:

Well, how can you be so sure?

If love is seeing virtue in others, how do you know that they will be so virtuous?

What if he/she turns out like the Greenberg kid, down the block...

Don't you think it would be more prudent to wait a while, get to know them a bit before you rush into such a permanent commitment?

The

Takeaway:

The answer of course is that by children G-d gives us a freebie; an inborn commitment that helps us to see the virtue in our children, and love them because of those virtues, even though they may have a heck of a lot of negative qualities as well.

Is Love Blind?

And to explode another popular misconception about love, it is not blind! True love comes with a magnifying glass. Who knows more about our negative qualities than our parents, but they stubbornly cling to identifying us with our virtues. So we learn a critical lesson about love from children.

Commitment to seeing virtue is the key. When it pertains to children we come by it naturally. When it comes to all others, even spouses, we have to commit to it!

Question:

So how can we love our kids when they are being obnoxious, or other people in our lives who are difficult?

Loving Difficult People:

Even when our kids are being obnoxious we can love them if we focus on the good in them. This is not advocating that parents go into heavy denial, and ignore the negative behavior. It just suggests that we can love them for their virtues and their essence while at the same time discipline them for their bad behavior; it is not a zero sum game. So too, we can even learn to love obnoxious people who don't happen to be our children!

#### **Commitment is a Game Changer.**

When it is all said and done, the takeaway is that **we can love anyone** if we **remain committed** to seeing the good in them. The Torah can demand this of us, because **we** all can choose to make this commitment to others.

Action we can take:

#### Let's Get Practical:

- 1. For 5 minutes each day focus on all of your children's virtues.
- 2. Make a list of your husband's/wife's virtues and review them before he/she comes home from work at the end of the day.
- 3. Once a week, think about a person you have difficulty liking and for 5 minutes focus on their virtues.

**Featured Video** 



http://www.aish.com/j/jt/ Jtube New\_Girl.html

# Israel: There's No Place Like Home





#### **Topic:**

Israel: There's No Place Like Home.

#### Main Themes Covered in this Topic

- 1. Opening Conversation : Elie Weisel
- 2. Jerusalem: Stairway to Heaven
- 3. Jacob Reveals the Secret Called "Home"
- 4. The Power of "The House of Jacob"

#### **Featured Video**



http://media.aish.com/images/VWe
veGotToLiveTogether140x1.jp

#### Listen to the Words of Nobel Laureate Elie Weisel:

"I remember when I went to Jerusalem for the first time; I felt as if it was not the first time. Yet each time I revisit the city, it is always for the first time. What I feel and experience there, I feel nowhere else. I return to the house of my ancestors; King David and Jeremiah await me there"

His words are very profound and they resonate with us.

#### **Opening Conversation:**

1.	How would you describe your feelings after visiting in Israel?	
2.	What adjectives would you use to describe what Israel and Jerusalem mean to you?	
	Israel is a place of (List 3-5)	

## Spending Time in Israel May Evoke Some of the Following Feelings and Experiences:

- We feel a connection to each other to our fellow Jews.
- We feel a greater sense of spirituality and a deep connection to the land.
- We may gain greater clarity regarding who we are and what's important in life.
- We feel oddly secure and protected, even though the country always seems to be on the brink of confrontation.

Question:

What makes us feel these very deep and profound feelings about Israel? Particularly since most of us didn't grow up there, and many were/are visiting for the very first time!

#### Remember When You Were in College:

At the end of a term, when you were finishing up your last finals, do you remember that growing excitement and anticipation of going home, seeing your family and your friends, your house and those familiar and favorite places of your youth?

Elie Weisel is describing a place dear to all of us, one which never grows old, always beckons us to return and longs for our presence: a place called home.

## Home is More than a Physical Location, it's a Psychological/Spiritual Reality that We Long for; it's a Place Where We Can:

- Always return
- Be ourselves
- Feel that we belong and are loved.
- Feel safe and secure

In short, we are home and feel the security and connectedness that concept conveys.

Let's try to understand why:

#### **Stairway to Heaven - A Very Mystical Encounter:**

Source:

Our patriarch Jacob camps out one night in a very special place, dreams of a ladder connecting heaven and earth with angels going up and down and has an experience of G-d. (based upon Bereishes 28:10-16)

Questions:

What do you suppose the ladder represents and why were angels going up and down upon it?

Answers:

- Jacob's ladder symbolizes connection the spiritual and physical, and rootedness the Jewish soul is anchored to this spot. You might say that this is the place where the world received its soul.
- Our actions, represented by the ascending and descending angels, points to the idea that we literally have the power to bring heaven and earth together.

#### You All have been to "The Place"

Kev Background

The spot where Jacob slept is known as "The Place". Our mystical tradition describes this as the very spot from which the world was created, where Adam and Eve were born and received Information: their G-dly souls, and upon which the Holy Temples would stand, for almost a thousand years.

> Now you have an inkling of why it's called "The Place". This is our spiritual birthplace, and that is why it feels like we've returned home each time we visit. And you have been there. This place is just above the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

#### The Mystique of the Kotel—the Western Wall:

Check out an amazing 2000 year old prophecy from the Songs of Songs:

Source:

Behold, - He stands behind our wall, observing through the window...

(Song of Songs 2: 8-9)

Rebbe Acha, in the midrash 2000 years ago explains that the verse alludes to a promise from Gd, that He will never let the western wall be destroyed and will always be there watching.

(Midrash Rabba Exodus 2:4)

That is why when a person stands at the Western Wall they often feel something stir within, connecting them to their ancestors, their People, their destiny and most poignantly to their inner soul.

Question:

What was your experience like visiting the Kotel?

Source:

Though G-d is everywhere in the world, He makes His presence felt more in Israel, and most by the Western Wall. Though intimate connection is available to Him everywhere, it's just that everywhere outside of Israel, it's like going up a down escalator. In Israel, and particularly Jerusalem, the escalator is always going up; all you have to do is get on.

--Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf

**Israel: A Land of Contradictions** 

#### Consider a recent article about Israelis:

#### Why are the Israelis so Darn Happy?

by <u>Tiffanie Wen</u> Apr 14, 2013 4:45 AM EDT

A new study shows them to be among the most contented in the Western world. What gives? By Tiffanie Wen



By now everyone in Israel has read the results of the study <u>published</u> earlier this month that showed Israelis ranked among the happiest people among the Western nations, despite an extensive laundry list of problems in their country.

#### See more at:

http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/04/1 4/why-are-the-israelis-so-damn-happy.html

Man at beach cafe reading newspaper, Jerusalem beach on January 18, 2012 in Tel Aviv, Israel. (Eitan Simanor/Gamma-Rapho via Getty )

So much to worry about in the precarious Middle East yet Israelis experience a sense of contentment and security amongst the highest in the world.

Question: How can we explain this phenomenon?

To be sure, there are a variety of ingredients which contribute to this experience; however, the Torah itself alludes to one very significant factor:

Source:

(Israel is) A Land that Hashem your G-d seeks out; the eyes of Hashem your G-d are always upon it....

(Devarim 11:12)

In short, G-d looks out for us; we see this level of "Divine Attention" to the land in so many ways, including the founding of the State, its continued survival and its extraordinary achievements. Perhaps it was best said by the first Prime Minister:

"In Israel, in order to be a realist, you have to believe in miracles. David Ben-Gurion

The philosopher Descartes was once asked by the agnostic monarch, Louis XIV, give me one self-evident proof for the existence of G-d? He answered without hesitating, The <u>Jews, Your Majesty, the Jews</u>. Nowhere is this divine involvement more apparent than in the modern state of Israel.

#### One Last Piece to the Puzzle—

The Torah continues the account of Jacob's dream with the following description:

Source:

And Jacob suddenly awoke from his sleep, and he said, this place is truly wondrous; this must be nothing less than G-d's House and the gateway to the heavens.'

(Bereishis 28:16)

#### Jacob describes this place as a home.

A home is a place that unites, brings together, nourishes and seeks to make whole all who live there. A home starts with individuals but ends with a family, imbued with shared ideals, dreams and aspirations.

Later in Jewish history, this site would become the place of the Beit Hamikdash, the House of G-d – the Holy Temple of Jerusalem, around which the whole Jewish People would Unite.

#### At the Foot of the Mountain.....

As the Israelites encamped at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, G-d instructed Moses to address the People in the following way:

Source: So shall you say to the <u>House of Jacob</u> and relate to the Children of Israel.....

(Exodus 19:3)

The Rabbis tell us that G-d had Moses address the women first -- the *House of Jacob*.....

Question: Why do you suppose the Torah uses the phrase the "House of Jacob" when referring to the women?

The Torah is hinting at a profound truth; that the power of creating that "House of Jacob", a place of Connection where Earth and Heaven meet, lies in the extraordinary capable hands of women.

She can take this power which is sourced in **Jerusalem and Israel**, and create that **space called home wherever she may be.** 

It's a place where her family can feel loved protected, secure and growing into people that she and G-d can be very proud of.

#### A Heartfelt Prayer:

May you take all the ideals and values that Zion and Jerusalem represent and create a home of peace, light and love which nourishes and illuminates the hearts of all who enter within her walls.

Featured Video



http://media.aish.com/images/Israel-Defying-the-Odds140x100.jpg

## Great Relationships – The Key Ingredient





#### **Topic:**

**Great Relationships: The Key Ingredient** 

#### **Main Themes Covered in this Topic:**

- 1. Love as the Foundation
- 2. Parents Don't Divorce their Kids! What We Need to Learn about Spouses
- 3. Commanding an Emotion
- 4. The Love/Giving Dynamic
- 5. Exercises
- Extra Credit: The Mystical Dimension of Relationships

#### **Featured Video**



http://www.aish.com/j/jt/Jtube\_Coca\_ Cola Portugal Rivalry Wallet.html

#### **Love Revisited:**

Looking at Love:

Everyone is looking for love, but often "in all the wrong places". Love is an amazing pleasure and is available to everyone if we would just accustom ourselves to adopt the following guaranteed formula:

#### Look for the good in others and associate them with that good.

You will immediately feel warmth towards them and connection. Most of us instead, are habituated to see the negative and that blocks us from loving others.

Lesson:

<u>Let's take a lesson from how we view our kids</u>. Most of us are hardwired to see the good in them, even though we are intimately familiar with the not so good. This G-d given commitment to seeing their good, is supposed to teach us how to love everybody else, by looking for their good!

#### Parents Don't Divorce Their Kids! - What We Need to Learn about Spouses:

Question: Isn't it funny that most normal people don't divorce their kids, no matter how much

aggravation their kids might cause them?

Yet, they often divorce their spouses. This is hard to believe, because their spouses they

chose freely, while their children were sort of chosen for them by G-d.

Question: Why do you think this is so?

Let's Discuss It: Husbands and wives need to know that just because they chose to see the virtues in one another at one point in their marriage, doesn't mean this commitment will last forever.

The commitment to seeing the virtue in our spouses must be constantly renewed. If we are steadfast in that commitment, our love should actually grow over time, as our knowledge of who they really are expands through shared life experiences.

This is one of the key ingredients to staying in love with our spouses. Focus on the virtue, nurture the virtue.

(Then you ladies can work on scrubbing off the shmutz from your husbands' that you so desperately want to get rid of! Or maybe you'll actually find them endearing as your love for them grows<sup>(2)</sup>)

#### **Expanding your Great Relationships:**

**Questions:** 

Even if we take love for spouses and children off the table, how does one generate "love on demand" for relatives, co-workers, friends and humanity?

And what about those relationships that are somewhat negative, yet can't be avoided because they are a constant in your life?

Applying the Principle:

The first step is to apply the same principle of **looking for the good in others** as we naturally do with our children and should do with our spouses. The difference with others outside of the family unit is that we are **less motivated** in seeing their good side.

Let's take a look at the Torah source for loving others and maybe we'll gain some insight about how to get motivated.

Source:

Love your friend like yourself. (Vayikra 19:18)

Question:

The directive is to love your friend. What does "like yourself" come to teach?

There are many answers to this question. Lets take a look at two of them:

View Others as you want Them to View You. The popular statement "Don't do to others as you wouldn't want done to you", is derived from the verse, "Love your friend like yourself". Realize that since you would want other people to view you in a favorable light, so too you should make an effort to see them in the same way. Get into his/her shoes by realizing that you walk in basically the same pair.

The Need to See Ourselves as Good. Many of us are habituated to see the negative in others which blocks us from developing warmth and connection with them. One reason for this is an unwitting negative psychological projection of how we are feeling about ourselves. If we see the negative in ourselves, we more naturally see the same things in others. However, if we are in touch with our souls (the good in us) we become more open to connecting to the souls (good in them) of others.

Question:

Who do I want to be?

Popular Author:

Hear what <u>Stephen R. Covey</u>, author of the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, has to say about our choice: "Our behavior is a function of our decisions not our conditions. Highly proactive people's behavior is a product of conscious choice, based on values rather than a product of conditions based on feelings......If we let things control us we are reactive. <u>Proactive people can carry their own weather with them....."</u>

The choice is ours: We can act from habituated "self-interest", ego, and the insecurity of the body and carry storm clouds of hate around with us. Or we can be proactive, touch our souls and thereby connect to the souls of others, "carrying love around with us". The Love-Giving Dynamic:

Up to this point we have been focusing upon shaping an attitude of recognizing virtue to foster our relationships.

What about actions? Question:

> Let's take a look at a contemporary perspective on the role of action from a great Jewish philosopher and ethicist from the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

If one were only to reflect upon the idea that a person comes to love the one to whom he gives, he would realize that the only reason the other person seems a stranger to him is because he has not yet given to him; he has not taken the trouble to show him friendly concern. If I give to someone, I feel close to him; I have a share in his being. It follows that if I were to start bestowing good upon everyone I come into contact with, I would soon feel that they are all my relatives, all my loved ones. I now have a share in all of

them.... (Strive for Truth – Essay on Kindness.)

Rabbi Dessler offers a penetrating insight into the dynamics of relationships: Giving generates love.

But is Rabbi Dessler right?

I would have thought the one who receives, not the one who gives is the one who loves more?

Though counterintuitive, we see proof from the parent child relationship:

Though the child receives much more from the parent than the parent can ever get back, the parent clearly loves the child more than the child loves the parent. The more giving, the more love!

Did you know that the Hebrew language itself testifies to Rabbi Dessler's conclusion?

The Hebrew word for Love is "Ahava" – the root of this word is Hav which means to give.

Source:

Question:

Evidence:

Hebrew Tidbit: We can give in so many ways to people, with our time, money, energy and commitment. Even just listening and offering support to people is an enormous act of giving.

### A New Approach to Love

Rabbi Dessler is suggesting a strategy for promoting love that is based upon the sound premise of giving to others; the more you give to people, the more you will love them.

Question:

How does this fit in with our definition that "love is the pleasure derived from seeing the good in others"?

Rabbi Noach Weinberg suggests a novel approach in bringing the two definitions together.

You see, we would indeed love if we were able to focus on people's virtues. However we are often blinded by a natural tendency to see the negative in others.

Source:

"Man's egotism makes recognizing noble qualities in others hard to come by. We spend too much of our lives fantasizing about how beautiful, intelligent and important we are while convincing ourselves how ugly, unintelligent and unimportant others are. Our jealousy makes it difficult for us to acknowledge that another person possesses a superior quality that we lack. (Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer, The River, the Kettle and the Bird, p. 143)

**Giving to someone allows us to look beyond** the negative view we are predisposed to adopt, because **we are now vested** in his future. It is the same reason why giving to a charity makes a person more likely to advocate for the charity, or why buying a Rolex causes a person to champion that product. Now it's an extension of **himself**, which we are generally biased to see as good.

This understanding is actually alluded to by the beautiful words of R. Dessler himself:

Source:

"If I give to him; I have a share in his being. (self-interest in seeing his virtue) You shall love your neighbor as yourself...By giving to him of yourself, you will find in your soul that you and he are indeed one; you will feel in the clearest possible way that he really is you, "as yourself". (Strive for Truth - Essay on Kindness)

### Conclusion:

### Wrapping It Up:

Great relationships are the product of:

- Making the commitment to see the good in people.
- Giving to them.

In the end, both avenues complement one another and allow us to relate to ourselves and to others as souls. This is what we all share in common.

Ultimately this is the recipe for loving all of humanity; a recognition that we are all ONE by virtue of the fact they we were all hewn from the same "Rock" Who placed within us our essence -- our souls. On that basis alone – connecting to our own souls and those of others- are love and unity and ultimately peace possible.

### **Exercise:**

- 1. Make a list of your virtues. Review it at the end of the day and note how you used your virtues that day.
- 2. Chessed (kindness) and love starts with those closest to us. Do one act of kindness a day for everyone in your family and have in mind a virtue of theirs while you do it.
- 3. Do one act of kindness a week for someone you would like to love/like a little more. (Co-worker, relative, etc.)

### Extra Credit:

### **Understanding the Dynamics of Love on a Deeper Mystical Level**

Source:

Rabbi Leib Chasman, famous ethicist and spiritual supervisor of Chevron Yeshiva, once saw a student eating fish with great relish. "Tell me, young man, do you love fish?"

The student answered "absolutely."

If you love fish, replied Rabbi Chasman, you shouldn't eat it! You should, take care of it, feed it and try to make it happy. Actually, you don't really love fish, you love yourself!

Discussion on Love:

### Who Loves Ya?

Let's face it. When we were dating, and went out with a "great catch", we did it because we loved ourselves, not them. We just saw qualities in them that would make us happy. Or to put it another way, we were pursuing our own <u>self interest</u>.

**Then one night it all changed**: Yet as we got to know them better and actually grew to love them, we started giving to them, not so we could get something from them, but actually without wanting anything in return at all.

Deeper Selfinterest: If you look into this magical transformation a little more deeply, it's not as if we morphed into good Samaritans all of a sudden, and lost our sense of self-interest. Actually, we just came into contact with a **deeper self-interest that is actualized through selflessly giving rather than taking.** We actually derive more pleasure from this type of giving because in so doing, we are acting like G-d; As we give we connect to the Source of all giving in the deepest possible way.

Tied Down?!

One of the reasons that people - especially men - run away from marriage is that they think that they will get less pleasure being tied down in a relationship than being single; they will have to compromise on the expression of self because of the perceived commitment to other. However, what many discover is that they can actually experience their "true selves" on a deeper level only through marriage. This is because it is the quintessential vehicle capable of transforming them from takers into givers. In actuality, it allows them to truly bring out the G-dliness latent within them.

Givers are Happiest:

Though we take while we are young, as we grow older we all realize that the happiest people are those who give of themselves the most. This really is the expression of a deep human psychic need going back to the very beginning of human history.

Closing Thought:

The creation of this world by G-d was really the first love story in human history. G-d created a beautiful world to give his children ultimate pleasure and connection. When we act like G-d we participate in that unfolding story and help bring it to its final magnificent conclusion, speedily in our days!

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## The Me in the Mirror





### **Topic:**

### The Me in the Mirror

### **Main Themes Covered in this Topic:**

- 1. Where Does Self Esteem Come From?
- 2. The Torah View of Self-Worth
- 3. Jewish Identity
- 4. Walking Tall
- 5. Self respect in Torah

### **Featured Video**



http://www.aish.com/j/jt/10106185 9.html

### **Exercise:**

Question: Where do we get our self-esteem from?

Discussion: The Confusion:

Not such an easy issue to decipher:

Question: Does our self-esteem come from our accomplishments, achievements or from others

outside of us?

**Problem:** If it does come from the outside, it can be a moving target, hard to acquire and pretty

frustrating; so much is really out of our control.

Question:

Or, does our self-esteem come from some internal, intrinsic capability, identity or natural talent?

And if so, why are we so compelled to look outside for external validation, and are forever striving to change ourselves?

If we were really so great, wouldn't we all feel naturally good about ourselves?

### **An Important Clarification:**

Self-Worth / Self-Respect

There is a difference between self-worth and self-respect.

One measure of worth is the intrinsic or inherent value of something. Another measure is based upon improvements that you make to it. Assets like gold, real estate, oil all have an inherent value; that's why they are called "real assets". Though their market prices fluctuate based upon current buyer preferences, they pivot around some real mark of their true value. On the other hand, something like clay is valuable only in so far as how you can improve it or what you can turn it into.

**Conclusion:** 

People, like assets also have an inherent value called self-worth and an improvement value called self-respect. **The confluence of self-worth and self-respect creates our self-esteem.** 

Interesting Factoid:

### The Torah View of Self-Worth:

Believe it or not the value of the human body is worth roughly \$4.50, and a list of its constituent elements reminds one of a fertilizer mix.

You may never have looked at it quite this way.

Question:

Yet most of us intuitively appreciate a human being to be worth so much more than that. Why?

The believer in us all would offer that the inherent value of a human being is based upon the possession of a priceless asset missing in that organic mix; the human soul. That ineffable yet powerful part of ourselves is our core, allowing us to think, to dream, to love to create and to transform. This is the part, according to Jewish tradition, that is pristine, pure and from which we draw into this world our enormous potential to become great.

True self-worth is based upon knowing that you are a soul, you are good and you are connected to G-d.

As we say in our morning prayers:

Source

G-d the soul that You placed within me is pure. You created it, you formed it, you blew it into me and you guard it for me.... (morning prayer service)

The soul is holy and good and as Jews we believe that this is our essence and foundation without blemish from any type of "original sin" or irreparable deficiency.

In our Torah we learn that what makes us human is that G-d breathed into us the soul of life:

Source:

And G-d formed the man of the dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life... (Bereishes 2:6)

### Why do you think the Torah uses breath as a metaphor for giving life?

Breath comes from the very depth of an individual, and has the ability to give life to that into which it is blown. And yet, that new life has a measure of independence from its source.

Symbolically, it was as if G-d took a very deep, essential and personal piece of Himself and gave it to us, making us like Him. As the Torah continues:

Source:

So G-d created man in His image..... (Bereishes 1:27)

This is how a Jew looks at the greatness of a human being and that is why we are so positive and optimistic about who we are, and what's more who we all can become; all human beings – <u>Jew and Gentile alike</u>.

### **Jewish Identity:**

Yet there is an added dimension to our self-worth which derives from our being Jewish, and that is our Jewish Pride.

Are you proud to be a Jew? Why?

The Jew has always stood for social justice, peace as an ideal, fairness and the protection of all those who were disadvantaged or unprotected. The dignity which we proffered to each individual expressed itself in a system of charity and social welfare unmatched to this day in its scope, sensitivity and compassion.

Jewish Literacy: Unfortunately many Jews today are not in touch with our brilliant legacy, and this is exacerbated by our lack of Jewish literacy regarding what our People has truly stood for over the years. This undercuts our Jewish pride and identity.

Great Quotes about Jews:

Consider these famous non-Jewish thinkers and what they had to say about the Jewish People:

Source:

Mark Twain - "Concerning The Jews," Harper's Magazine, 1899

"If statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of stardust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly, the Jew ought hardly to be heard of, but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages; and had done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it.

The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed; and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, and no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"

Source:

### John Adams, Second President of the United States

"I will insist the Hebrews have [contributed] more to civilize men than any other nation. If I was an atheist and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations...

They are the most glorious nation that ever inhabited this Earth. The Romans and their empire were but a bauble in comparison to the Jews. They have given religion to three-quarters of the globe and have influenced the affairs of mankind more and more happily than any other nation, ancient or modern."

The Chosen

People:

Sounds like Mark Twain and John Adams are both describing the Jews as the Chosen People; unique from all other Peoples in our accomplishments and in our treatment

through history.

Question:

What do you think being Chosen means?

The Torah's

The essence of being "Chosen" is taking responsibility for bringing goodness and peace into the world as expressed in the famous directive from the prophet Isaiah:

Source:

Take:

You shall be a light unto the nations (Isaiah 49:6)

And in numerous other places in the Torah we are described with a mission of bringing holiness into the world:

Source:

You shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all the peoples....a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Shemos 19:5-6)

### **Walking Tall:**

Elite Special Forces: Walking around with this identity is like being part of an elite special forces unit of the Marines; no matter what difficult, challenging situation presents itself you walk with your head held high, knowing you're part of something special, meaningful and vitally important.

The Ideal

This composite identity of an **exalted soul** combined with a **powerful national mission**, forms the basis of a healthy Jewish pride and sense of self-worth, independent of our accomplishments and attainments.

### **Self-Respect in Torah:**

Interesting Survey:

Dennis Prager, Syndicated talk radio host, surveyed teenagers and asked them "what do your parents want most for you in order of priority":

- 1. To be good.
- 2. To be successful
- 3. To be smart/do well in school.

Overwhelmingly the majority of kids felt that their parents wanted them to become successful, then smart and lastly, good. And Prager surmised from the attitude of the kids,

that had there been a few more choices, being good would have slipped even further down the list.

Parent's Reaction:

Parents were shocked to find out that their kids thought being good meant so little to them, and dismayed to realize they hadn't transmitted that value to them.

Successful / Great:

For sure there is nothing wrong with being successful or making a lot of money, however it's very easy to confuse being a successful person with being a good or great person.

### **Self Respect in Torah**

### Why are Jews so driven to be successful?

People pursue financial success not only for the money, but because they are really looking for self-respect. They want to wake up in the morning and be able to say "I am somebody!" While they may not feel genuine self-respect they are given respect by **others.** 

Hebrew Tidbit: In Hebrew the word respect is **kavod**, and it comes from the root **kavade**, which means heavy, substantive. A person who is "heavy" and has genuine self-respect never has to advertise or publicize his accomplishments: they speak for themselves.

In Ethics of Our Fathers the rabbis make the following comment about respect and honor:

Source:

Who is the honored person?..... (Pirke Avos 4:1)

You would think the answer is fairly obvious; Those that people give honor to, or in our terms, the one who is famous.

Yet the Mishna continues:

Source:

Who is the honored person? <u>The one who honors others.</u> (Pirke Avos 4:1)

True Self-Respect You would think it's the one whom others respect? Though counterintuitive, the Mishna's statement encapsulates the view that if your focus is upon others and what you can do for them, you will gain genuine self-respect. **Simply put, the goal is really being good, not looking good!** If you are good, you will look good. It's a guarantee. If you are a good, wife, mother, friend, child, colleague, you will have self-respect.

The Wrong Approach:

However if one runs after honor, which a lot of people do, guess what? As the Talmud says:

Source:

"Honor runs away from those who pursue it, and runs after those who run away from it. (Talmud Eruvin, 130b)

### **Looking Good vs. Being Good:**

It's not cool in our society to be good; looking good maybe, but being good? Good seems nerdy, boring and certainly flies under the radar, while being successful and looking good has an immediate allure. Success doesn't necessarily translate into self-respect though, because it's not always based upon achievements that have any enduring value.

It's Right
In Front of
You:

In other words, if you focus on doing things because they are right, good and true and build up others, you will become a respected person. It's a pity that people spend so much time chasing, external measures of success longing for self-respect while often compromising the very areas of their lives which will generate the most real self-respect.

### A Diamond In the Rough:

Putting it All Together:

Each of us is a diamond in the rough. We have a lot of intrinsic self worth and real value. We have infinite spiritual potential and power within and we are card carrying members of a People that has literally transformed the world in which we live. And we should get out of bed in the morning feeling great about this.

Yet though we are worth so much, we are all still diamonds in the rough; the more we polish the diamond, improve the diamond the more valuable it becomes. The more we care about others and do good, the more the natural beauty of the diamond is able to shine out. We need to walk around feeling we are individually worthy, and part of a special group with a very meaningful calling. And from this healthy place of self worth, we can begin to build lives that generate true self-respect by focusing on becoming great people – based upon a lifetime of good acts!

## Points to Ponder:

### **Exercise:**

- 1. If we review the different areas of our lives, how much of our emphasis is on looking good and how much on being good?
- 2. How much are we focused upon ourselves and how much upon others?

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## She Said What...!?





### **Topic:**

### She Said What...!?

### **Main Themes Covered in this Topic:**

- 1. Source in Talmud: Gossip Kills Three
- 2. The Gossip Triangle
- 3. Why are We Drawn to Gossip?
- 4. The Pep Talk
- 5. 10 Commandments of Positive Speech

### **Featured Video**



Source:

Gossip kills three people, the speaker, the listener and the person being discussed. (Babylonian Talmud Arachin 15b)

Question:

Though we all recognize that gossip is not very nice, isn't the Talmud's position comparing it to murder a bit extreme?

Let's examine the Talmud's strong claim that gossip kills the three people involved with it: the speaker, listener and the one spoken about.

First a Story: The One Spoken About:

Jewish folklore tells the story of a man who slandered the town's rabbi. Later he begged the rabbi for forgiveness, wishing to make amends. The rabbi told him to cut open a pillow and scatter the feathers in the wind. "Now am I forgiven?" asked the man. "Yes", answered the rabbi, "as soon as you go and gather all the feathers".

"But that's impossible! Exactly. When we speak badly about someone, the damage spreads far and wide. It's impossible to fully repair it".

Gossip appears on page 1 of the newspaper, but the retraction or apology is buried near the want ads. You can't ever fully repair a reputation.

### A Good Name:

A person's reputation - their good name - is certainly a major part of his or her joy of existence. Money can always be earned back, but a reputation for honesty, integrity, and kindness, for being a loving husband, a good parent, a charitable and righteous person, while developed over years, can be wiped away instantly and in a flash of evil. Depending upon the circumstances, it may be nearly impossible to restore to its original level.

Saving Face:

The Japanese have a term that describes very well what happens when a person's reputation is damaged: The person is said to have "lost face", as <u>if a piece of them has died and no longer exists</u>. Those who have "fallen on their swords", rather than face the shame of a ruined reputation bear out the notion that losing one's good name is a form of death

### But it's True!

We all can understand that spreading lies about a person (slander) or even unsubstantiated gossip can cause irreparable damage to innocent people. But most of us don't think twice about sharing gossip we believe to be TRUE, even if it may cast the person in a negative light.

Yet the Torah actually prohibits us from saying anything negative about another person, EVEN if it is true. And it compares one who violates this to a murderer!

Question:

What could be the Torah's rationale for this?

Take-away:

When someone speaks negatively about another person, the listener forms a view of that person **unfairly weighted by this negative "snapshot"**. It's out of context, like holding up a picture of a pimple and creating the impression that this is what the entire person looks like.

True but False:

Being true doesn't exonerate the gossiper, because since it is only a partial truth, it contributes to creating an overall impression that is almost always false. And in the process, reputations get ruined and people get hurt.

### The One who Speaks:

Well, if gossip is likened to murder I guess the gossiper can be called a murderer.

Question:

But how does the killer himself die through his act? What do you think?

Sources:

G-d <u>Said</u> let there be light, and there was light. (Bereishes 1:3)

G-d formed man from the ground, and blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a <u>living being</u>. (Bereishes 2:7)

"Living Being" Means a <u>being that speaks.</u> (Translation of Onkelos on Torah.)

The Power to Create or Destroy:

Just as G-d creates the world through speech, the essential power of man to build worlds and destroy them is also the power of speech. Our power of speech is the essence of our souls' and of our humanity.

One who debases the gift of speech, debases his/her humanity, snuffs out a little of the vitality of his life force. The gossiper experiences a type of death. This is why there is such a tremendous emphasis on speech in Judaism. The quality of our speech and the ideas and thoughts which give rise to it, inexorably dictates the path and worth of our lives.

Popular Saying:

It's said that small people talk about others, average people talk about things, while great people talk about ideas.

No 4 Letter Words! We intuitively realize this and teach it to our kids when it comes to cursing. We understand that it is coarse and suggests that a person lacks refinement. Have you noticed that the greatest people you know probably curse little if at all; it's beneath

them. If you want a great meaningful life which people will remember, think and speak great thoughts. Usually this is the path to great actions!

### The Listener

The Talmud says of the three people, **the listener is the worst**. That's hard to imagine; it seems like he/she is merely an innocent bystander.

Question:

Why do you think this is so?

### **Creating the Market**

Hebrew Tidbit: The answer is that without the listener there is no "market" for the gossip. Gossip is called rachilas in Hebrew and comes from the root word for "peddler". A peddler of tales has nothing to sell if there are no customers. So the listener is actually the only one that can stop the "character assassination" from happening. In fact, it is his/her responsibility.

### What We Get Out of Gossip

Question

If it's this bad why are we so drawn to gossip?

Speech is Power:

First of all, if we realized just how powerful our speech was and the damage that we can do with it, we would probably be a whole lot more careful with what we say.

We Want to Be Great:

Secondly, there is a deep psychological reason for gossip. No-one wants to be mediocre in life. Deep down we all long to be great – to be important.

### There are Two Ways to Become Great:

Two Paths:

- 1. We can put in the hard work, long hours and overcome the myriad challenges of life to become great, thereby elevating ourselves through our actions.
- 2. Or, we can take a shortcut and knock others down, thereby **temporarily** propping ourselves up.

Of course this is a counterfeit, because although there is a temporary high and feeling of importance from being the center of attention as the gossip king or queen, the feeling is shortlived and our true self esteem actually takes quite a hit.

We All Know The Truth: Even as the gossip flies, we know deep down that we are not one iota better; we have just dragged others down to our level.

Fear Not!

A lot of us are just afraid to be great and we prefer a tacit conspiracy where we all settle on being mediocre rather than opening ourselves up to the risk of failing.

### The Pep Talk:

Question:

How about you? Can you say negative things about yourself?

Did You Know?: Realize that the Torah laws on gossip apply not only to talking about people, but also to organizations, whole groups of people and an individual you probably never expected – YOU!

No Way!

Yes, you are not allowed to speak badly about yourself. If you put yourself down, you are transgressing these laws. By doing so, in essence you are saying that G-d blew it. He doesn't blow it. He made you in his image and He doesn't make junk! So forget the self-deprecating dialogue. You are unique, special. You have the potential for a particular greatness that no one else has. Now use that potential for the good. And just remember, you are "too good to gossip".

### **Great Advice: The 10 Commandments of positive speech**

- 1. **Speak No Evil.** Say only positive statements. Let words of kindness be on your tongue.
- 2. **Hear No Evil.** Refuse to listen to gossip, slander and other negative forms of speech.
- 3. **Don't Rationalize Destructive Speech.** Excuses like "But its true" or "I'm only joking" or "I can tell my spouse anything" just don't cut it.
- 4. **See No Evil.** Judge people favorably, the way you would want them to judge you.
- 5. **Beware of Speaking Evil Without Saying an Evil Word.** Body language and even positive speech can bring tremendous destruction.
- 6. **Be Humble; Avoid Arrogance.** These will be your greatest weapons against destructive speech.
- 7. **Beware of repeating Information.** Loose lips sink ships. Even positive information needs permission before being repeated.

- 8. **Honesty Really Is the Best Policy -- Most of the Time.** Be careful to always tell the truth, unless it will hurt others, break your own privacy or publicize your accomplishments.
- 9. **Learn to Say "I'm Sorry."** Everyone makes mistakes. If you've spoken badly about someone, clear it up immediately.
- 10. **Forgive.** If you have been wronged, let it go.

  Excerpted from "Gossip -- Ten Pathways to Eliminate It From Your Life and Transform Your Soul," by Lori Palatnik and Bob Burg Simcha Press). Available at Amazon.com.

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http://www.aish.com/j/jt/Jtu be\_How\_Do\_You\_Know.html

# The Key to Greatness





### **Topic:**

### The Key to Greatness

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### Main Themes Covered in the Topic:

- Manufacturer's Description for a "Human Being"
- 2. Thinker, Speaker, Chooser
- 3. Free Will Defined
- 4. Pain, Pleasure and Comfort
- 5. Exercises



http://media.aish.com/images/VJTAdju stmentBureau140x100-.jpg

### Who are We?

### **Manufacturer's Description**

Every manufacturer labels its products with a product description: washing machine, frying pan, flat- screen TV. It might seem obvious to us, but if you had never seen the product before it would help you identify what to do with it. Imagine using an ipad as a doorstop. That would be a pretty expensive doorstop and it probably wouldn't work so well. And the worst part of all is the opportunity cost; what you could have done with it instead.

Question for Discussion:

If you had to pick a label for a human being to describe what it is and does, what would it be?

Consider the following options. Which is the best?

- a. Thinker
- b. Eater

- c. Chooser
- d. Speaker
- e. Feeler

We certainly do all of these things a lot during our lives, and in some way they all (plus others) define us, to a certain extent.

Questions:

But which one(s) are most fundamental to our essence, the bottom line of who we and what we were created for?

### Is Man a Thinker?

Everyone is familiar with the famous saying:

### I think, therefore I am.

You may be less aware that this was the answer to the following philosophical query posed by Descartes:

How do you know that you exist?

Clearly thinking is an integral aspect of our humanity. Yet, does it capture our essence as human beings?

### The Torah's View of Man – The Power of Speech

Let's take a look at creation's story:

Source:

And G-d formed the man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a **living being.** (Bereishes 2:7)

The famous Sage Onkelos translate "living being" as a "speaking spirit".

### Man is a Speaker.....

The power of speech is the very power of creation itself. Remember G-d created the world through speech, so speech is literally **G-d's power to create**.

So we have it, man is a speaker. Certainly speech is central to who we are as human beings and we can literally create or destroy worlds through the power of intelligent communication.

Yet maybe we can take it a step further:

Speech certainly separates us from all other creations and all of the great human achievements have come in part through its use.

### We are Created in His Image

But there is a power that we all have that is even deeper than speech.

Question: What do you think that is?

Question:

Source:

Conclusion:

The Torah directs us towards an answer with one of the most famous and important statements in our tradition:

Source: So G-d created man in His image.....(Breishis 1:27)

This verse more than any other in the Torah reflects our noble nature and awesome potential. Being created in G-d's image implores us to be good and lifts us into being holy, like G-d Himself.

What do you think it means to be created "In His Image"?

Among all living creatures, man alone is endowed with free will. (Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk)

The greatest power of man is our free will; our ability to make real, meaningful choices.

So man is really a chooser; that is what we do 24/7 and therein lies the key to our greatness. It's all about the quality of our free willed choices. If we become expert at using our free will to make great choices, we will become great people.

### Free Will Tour

We need a definition!

First a few Questions:

Questions: Are all choices free willed?

Or put another way, are all choices equal?

Is choosing a scoop of vanilla ice cream over chocolate on the same level as helping an old lady across the street, or turning down an offer to do drugs?

Important Qualification:

When we talk about the power of free will, we are talking about that power which distinguishes us from animals; they have preferences just like we do, but we would not define ourselves by our preferences.

### Proposed Definition of Free Will:

When pushed most people say that free will is the choice between right and wrong, good and evil.

Those kinds of choices are certainly meaningful, but how many moments like that can you string together in a normal day?

Let's play G-d for a minute......

If you were G-d, surely you would want man's most critical power to be operating constantly, not just several times during the course of a day?

### The Torah Defines Free Will:

Source:

I have placed before you life and death, blessing and curse, and you shall choose life, so that you will live...... (Devarim 30:19)

Questions:

The Torah understands free will as the choice between life and death!

Now that's really something!

How many of us are actually choosing death?

Actually very few people choose death, thank G-d. So how are we to understand this?

Let's take a look at the last part of the verse.

Source: .....you shall choose life, so that you will live. (Devarim 30:19)

Question: What does choosing life have to do with living, isn't it more about not choosing death?

**Let's get deep here**: Actually the Torah is pointing to something awfully important. If you don't choose life, real life, full of growth you are actually choosing death.

And while it's certainly true that very few of us actually take our own lives, we actually commit suicide on the installment plan all the time.

Question: Have you ever heard the expressions:

Killing time, dead drunk, zoned out, comatose etc?

These are perfectly acceptable ways of killing life. Life is time; each moment that is in front of us now can be used to grow, be great, be productive, be fully alive....or can be used to escape, to sleep, to seek total comfort.

Just picture yourself on a beach in a hammock, with a pina colada in your hand, just about .....asleep!

Sounds good, doesn't it? Well yeah, maybe for a short while.

This might be a great way to relax from time to time, but a life spent pursuing this type of scene would actually keep a person from achieving true greatness.

Perhaps **Shakespeare** said it best in the words of his tragic hero Hamlet:

To be, or not to be: that is the question:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?.... To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream.

The struggle of life and of free will is the struggle between life and death - to be or not to be - and it is in front of us every waking moment. Wow!

### Let's get practical:

Source:

Free will is practically defined as the choice between doing what you want to do versus doing what you feel like doing.

Rabbi Noach Weinberg, based on verse in Devarim cited above 3:1

### Let's See How this Plays Out in Real Life

- a. What you really want out of your life, lines up with choosing life.
- b. What you **feel like doing** in the short run, lines up with seeking the **temporary comfort** associated with death. (the big sleep)

### More than just Semantics

### Some Examples:

- I want to get in shape and eat healthy. But I feel like eating the entire chocolate cake that my wife just bought for our son's birthday party.
- I want to be patient with my mother, but I feel like snapping at her.
- I want to study for the test, but I feel like going to the great party on Saturday night.
- I want to spend quality time with my kids, but I feel like putting on a long video for them so I can take care of my personal needs.
- I want my husband to get healthy and lose weight, but I don't feel like helping him by buying and cooking the right foods for him.

### Defining the Differences between what We Want and what We Feel Like

- What we "really want" is associated with our aspirations and beliefs, its rewards are usually gained in the long run, and we know it's good for us.
- What we "feel like doing" is usually associated with our desires, its rewards are gained in the short run and it is often not in our long term best interests.
- What we truly want usually requires effort and tends to build us up as human beings.
- What we feel like doing requires little effort on our part is almost always very comfortable and usually doesn't help us grow as people.

### All of us have different free will struggles.

- Some of us have struggles around food or alcohol.
- Others have struggles around anger, or patience.
- Some of us have trouble getting out of ourselves to give to others.
- Others struggle with letting too many people into their lives or letting them in too deeply.

The key to personal greatness is "to do what you want to do more often than what you feel <u>like doing"</u>; to get up off of the deck when you fall and instead of opting for the momentary comfort of quitting, recommit yourself to living into your dreams.

Greatness isn't obtained in the epiphanies of life but rather in the moment to moment battle to be fully alive and to fight against the natural spiritual lethargy of comfort and complacency.

Know what you want and live for what you want. Don't feel bad if you sometimes opt for comfort, we all do. Just don't make it your life's pursuit.

### Exercises:

- 1. In a clear, thoughful moment, what would you say you really want out of your life?
- 2. Identify those free will struggles that come up for you again and again, and get in the way of you achieving these aspirations.

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# Bringing Venus and Mars a Little Closer Together:





### **Topic:**

### **Bringing Venus and Mars a Little Closer Together:**

### **Main Themes Covered in the Topic:**

- 1. The Opposite Sex.
- 2. The Popular Marriage Myth.
- 3. One Plus One Doesn't Equal Two.
- 4. Who We Are. What We Need.

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In a continuing adult education French class, the teacher was discussing feminine and masculine nouns. In French every noun has a gender. Le Crayon, pencil is masculine, La Maison, house is feminine. One student asked what gender was a computer, la computer or le computer.

The teacher split the class by gender to decide.

Women unanimously voted for le computer, which is masculine, giving four reasons for their choice:

- 1. You have to turn it on to get its attention.
- 2. Holds lots of data, but is clueless.
- 3. Supposed to help solve problems, but most of the time it is the problem.
- 4. Could have gotten a better model if you waited just a little bit longer!

Men also voted unanimously, but for la computer, which is feminine. They gave the following four reasons for their choice:

- 1. No one but its creator understands its internal logic.
- 2. Native language is incomprehensible to everyone else.
- 3. As soon as you commit to one, you need ½ of your paycheck to pay for accessories.
- 4. The smallest mistakes are retained in long term memory for later retrieval.

This cute joke highlights some of the frustration men and women experience with each other, seemingly born out of our many differences. And men and women seem to universally express these differences; that is why the joke resonates with us.

It's almost as if men and women as a species express the same unuttered prayer; If only they could be "a little more like us"!

The title of the best-selling book that first made these differences famous, <u>Men are From Mars and Women are from Venus</u>, depict men and women as strangers from two different planets, each with its own language, methods of dress and customs.

Did you know that the Talmud asserts this very same notion 2000 yrs. ago?

Source: Women are a Nation unto themselves... (Shabbat 62a)

One thing is clear, you never hear anyone describe the other gender as close by, and it's always the opposite sex.

Question:

Yet for all our opposing tendencies man and woman are inexorably attracted to each other like two magnets with opposite charges. Why? Is the only reason so the human race will continue?

Besides providing an ongoing disconnect in our ability to communicate with one another, and at times some much-needed comic relief, the obvious differences between men and women may point to a different approach in understanding the goal of marriage. And this new approach is actually a very old approach outlined in the Torah in the creation story of Adam and Eve (Chava).

### One Plus One Doesn't Equal Two

At the end of Creation, after G-d created the world and all the animals, He creates human beings. We are all familiar with the story:

G-d created Adam and seeing that it wasn't good for him to be alone creates his mate Eve out of his tzelem--rib or side.

Yet if you take a close look at the introduction to this story a fascinating idea emerges:

Source:

So G-d created Man in His image, in the image of G-d He created **him**: male and female he created **them.** (Bereishis 1:26-27)

**Ouestion:** 

So wait a minute, did G-d create Adam first (him) as the beginning of the verse implies, or did he create Adam and Eve at the same time (them), like the end of the verse?

Answer:

Our mystical tradition explains that the **first human was actually one being** -- half male and half female. Only then did G-d split them up and complete their creation as man and woman.

Question:

The obvious question is if G-d's plan was to eventually split them up, why did He initially create them together as one?

Question:

What do you think?

Answer:

The answer reveals a foundational premise about human beings and marriage which could literally revolutionize the state of marriage in our society. So listen up!

G-d created man and woman together so they will always yearn from the depths of their souls to be reunited together as one. This is their natural state, they need each other to find completion, and without the other they are existentially alone. On the surface, they may appear as if from two different planets, yet they have the potential to perfectly complement and complete one another.

### As the Torah tells us:

Source:

A man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and they shall become **one flesh**. (Bereishis 2:24)

### One Plus One Equals Two

The typical view of marriage in our society starts from quite a different premise: That both men and women are whole and fully independent entities and could be successful each on their own. They are like companies out in the marketplace, considering a merger. Each company could continue to prosper on its own, but a merger may confer added value upon each unavailable to them on their own. So they merge.

The problem comes along when one or the other company begins to see that the other one is not adding value as originally envisioned, not living up to its side of the deal. Since that was the sole reason for the merger, they break up.

Question: [

Does this sound a lot like modern day marriages?

This would appear to be at least one very good reason why divorce is so prevalent in our society. And though men and women both suffer from this view, it appears that men are more likely to make the break when their view of their spouse changes.

Yet, take a look at how the Talmud describes a man who is not married:

Source:

Any man who does not have a wife lives without happiness, without blessing, without goodness.....without peace....he is not a whole man. (Yevamos 62b-63a)

### The Jewish Way

Imagine, instead of two companies who saw themselves as adding incremental value to each other, one company specialized in sales and the other in manufacturing. Their merger would be based upon truly needing the other company to realize their common goals. Each would understand that they need the other to be successful and to be a whole and successful entity.

Judaism emphasizes again and again that we are not complete, healthy and perfect without our G-d designed soul mate. No matter how much money, friends and temporary relationships we might have, we will always be existentially alone and incomplete, without our "other half", even if they are from Mars or Venus.

Questions:

How could adopting this uniquely Jewish perspective change a person's view of marriage?

What benefits may accrue to marriages as a result?

### You Might Be Wondering......

What about divorce? First off, it would seem that a person with this "enhanced" worldview would be a lot less likely to get divorced from their spouse than someone without it, right? However, in some instances it's necessary and even mandated for a man and wife to divorce.

However, it should be looked upon as a last resort as distasteful as amputating a gangrenous limb from one's body; a person might have to do it in order to save their life, but they are losing a piece of themselves in the process! The Torah provides an escape hatch from marriage, not so much so people will actually use it, but moreso that by knowing that they can, they will do everything they can to avoid it.

### Men and Women: A Deeper Look.

Though the Torah hints at the creation of man and women together as one, the storyline goes on to describe first the creation of Adam and then Eve as follows:

Sources:

And G-d created Man from the "dust of the ground', and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being. (Bereishis 2:7)

G-d said, It is not good for Man to be alone; I will make him a helpmate corresponding to him. (Bereishis 2:18)

He took one of his sides... then G-d fashioned the **side** that He had taken from the man into woman. Man said, this time it is **bone of my bones** and **flesh of my flesh**. (Breishis 2:23)

### Question:

### What are You Made Out of?

There is so much explicit and esoteric that we can learn from the creation of Adam and Eve, but one fundamental lesson emerges from the story.

**Man was created from dirt and woman from bone**. These two materials reflect their essence on a spiritual and emotional basis.

### Question:

What about "dirt" expresses the essence of men?

Dirt is plentiful and in most instances worthless. It's only valuable if you do something with it, plant on it or build on it. But left fallow it's worthless. Man's psyche is shaped from this duality; he constantly feels worthless, the equivalent of psychic dust incessantly trying to build and conquer to prove to everyone — and especially himself --that he is worth something. Therefore man's ego is enormous -- it can never get enough stroking -- yet at the same time is extremely fragile and easily broken.

Question:

What about "bone" expresses the essence of women?

Woman, on the other hand were not created from dirt. She is created from bone - something strong, useful and valuable. She, from the depths of her soul, needs to be recognized as worthy and valuable. Unlike the man, she doesn't have an ego problem- because she knows deep down she is valuable – yet she desires to be cherished for "who she is".

### One Medicine, Two Cures:

First, recognize that men are women are different, bring different things to the table and were meant to complement each other through the goal of completing each other as one.

There are a variety of things that both men and women need to support their emotional and spiritual health; some are exclusive to one or the other and some are required by both. However there is one thing that men and women can give to one another which will enhance their individual health and support their growing together as one.

Question:

What do you think that is and why?

Men and women both crave and need appreciation; the same remedy but for two very different reasons.

Question:

Why do you think men need appreciation?

Men fear deep down that they are failures and that they are not fulfilling their potential, and no matter how accomplished or successful they may be feel that they are not worthy. They vacillate consistently between feeling like princes and the next moment paupers.

Men need their wives to appreciate them to make them feel respected. When a woman really appreciates her husband and strokes his ego over the top, he feels like a hero, a knight in shining armor rescuing the damsel in distress. Really showing appreciation to a man for all that he is and does makes him feel valued, needed and purposeful.

Question:

Why do you think women need appreciation? And it's not for the same reason as men.

Women know they are valuable. They need their husbands to cherish and love them in recognition of that incredibly valuable gift that G-d has shared with them. If you go back to the creation story, didn't Adam get an amazing gift from G-d at the dawn of history, called woman (yes, it's true he has been paying for it ever since....but that's another story<sup>(1)</sup>) If you received a precious gem, you would guard, cherish and pamper it, in view of its inestimable worth. Men

need to show appreciation to their wives for how important, valuable and precious they really are to them and to their families.

### The Bottom Line Takeaways:

- 1. Know that we are really one, need each other to be whole and complete and will be forever diminished standing alone.
- 2. Men and women are better together than we would ever be apart.
- 3. Our differences are good and we complement each other perfectly.
- 4. Shower each other with appreciation for what each of you needs, to help each other grow into the best person you can be and to always nurture the WE over the ME

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http://www.aish.com/j/jt/9594

# Born Free-- The Creation of the Jewish People





### **Topic:**

## **Born Free-- The Creation of the Jewish People**

### **Main Themes Covered in the Topic:**

- 1. Is Freedom the Right Place to Start?
- 2. Freedom Unplugged
- 3. The Bakery Window Called Life
- 4. Matzah is the Antidote
- 5. A GPS for True Value

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http://www.aish.com/h/pes/mm/P assover-Youre-Never-Alone.html

Question:

Do you know which Jewish Holiday is celebrated in the first month of the Jewish Year?

Yeah, I know you thought it was Rosh Hashanah. It's a long story for another time, but take my word for it, it's really Passover. Passover also happens to be the first holiday celebrated and instituted in Jewish History.

You would think that the main take-away of the first Jewish Holiday in history would be something really religious, like serving G-d.

Actually, Passover which commemorates the creation of our People and our religion, is all about Freedom --both national and personal. Born free, as free as the wind blows....; that's very progressive for an ancient religious cult, don't you think? ©

Questions:

Isn't it odd that the idea of freedom, which seems to put man and his rights center stage, would be the first lesson that G-d would teach the Jewish People as a Nation in Egypt?

How does that advance His agenda in the world?

### **Freedom Unplugged:**

Freedom is one of those things that is easy to define but really hard to attain?

Question:

What does it mean to be free? Discuss.

The answer to this question seems pretty universal. Tap the common man on the shoulder and ask him this question and he will say a derivative of the following:

Freedom is the ability to do what you want to do.....without any external or internal forces getting in your way.

Seems pretty basic but there are a couple of questions that need to be posed and answered to actually have a shot at attaining freedom:

Questions:

Who are you?

### What do you want?

Sounds like two simple questions, but are they really?

If we are in anyway confused about who we are, we wouldn't necessarily be in touch with what we really wanted.

Important Claim to Consider:

There is a basic universal confusion over who we are as human beings that holds many if not all of us back from being Truly Free.

Consider the following true story:

I once had a friend who graduated Dartmouth College, was a very bright guy and very good looking. While my friends and I were cutting our teeth in the trenches of Wall Street, somehow he got into modeling. He made triple the amount of money that we were making but he didn't last a year in the business. Not because he wasn't good at it, but because he couldn't handle people relating to him as just a body - a pretty face- when he knew that he was so much more.

You see, my friend was in a job which put "extreme" value on the body. From that vantage point he was able to see that his real self was not his "physical wrapper". Actually, his job gave him a glimpse of and an appreciation for who he really was – a soul.

### **Step One of Freedom – Realize You are Truly a Soul.**

### **Equal Parts Angel and Animal**

Judaism teaches that man is a unique creation, one part angel and one part animal. Besides leaving us with somewhat of a split personality, the interplay of these two opposing tendencies provides us with free will. We are likened to a horse and rider, the horse being the physical body while the rider is the soul.

### Question: Who should be in control of where they go, the horse or rider?

The optimal relationship between horse and rider is for the rider to be in control, guiding and harnessing the strength and energy of the horse to bring the rider to his destination. If a person identifies mainly with their body, freedom to him becomes unrestrained gratification with the material aspects of life. Yet if he is a soul, what feels like freedom to his body may actually be enslavement to his soul.

## Let's take a look at 3 cases where confusion over who you are could lead to errors in judgment about what you really want:

- Say you really want to be healthy and eat right. Well if you identify mainly with your body, denying yourself your favorite chocolate cake will feel like enslavement, and it will be really hard to sustain over the long haul. However, if you identify more with your soul, you can actually feel free when you abstain from the cake. Like they say, nothing tastes as good as thin feels.
- How about when you ask your husband to take out the garbage? If he identifies mainly
  with his body, he might feel like it was a burden or a restriction that you are placing on
  him. However, if he is more connected to his soul he might feel that it was an
  opportunity to do something nice for you and show his appreciation for all your hard
  work.
- Imagine someone who wears make-up having to go a whole day without it. If she
  identifies as a body, this would be really uncomfortable and might make her feel very
  self-conscious. If she identifies primarily as a soul, it might be freeing to be able to go a
  whole day not having to care about how she looks, and still feel good about herself in
  the process.

### **Summary:**

We are souls clothed in bodies. We need to take good care of the body, just like the rider must take good care of his horse, yet the rider needs to direct the animal to where he wants to go. If we live life as if we are only "bodies", when we are free we may actually feel enslaved and when we are enslaved, we may actually feel and think that we are free. This type of confusion could lead to poor choices that, in the long run, will actually make us less free and less fulfilled.

Second Step of Freedom- Know what you want.

Question: What does your soul really want?

Usually the answer lies with things that stand the test of time and possess real value:

Question: What are some of those things for you?

Kindness, love, courage, achievement, persistence, hard work, growth, creativity, sacrifice, patience, peace, wisdom, relationship, loyalty, etc.

A free person is someone who can do what they want and seek what they want without restraint. If we identify with the soul, we will actually want "soul pleasure" like those listed above, and much more. In addition, since G-d gave us this physical world to enjoy, we will be able to enhance our enjoyment of the physical by adding a spiritual dimension to it. (eg. A great Shabbat meal, doing acts of kindness, getting the most out of intimacy)

### Step Three - What keeps us enslaved?

Answer: Buying into "Illusions"—about ourselves and about the world.

Illusions about the world - "The Bakery Window"

Life is a lot like a bakery window. Everything in the bakery window looks really good and appetizing and we invest a lot of time and money and emotion to acquire the cakes, pastries and breads in the window. How often does the product live up to the desire that it created within us when it beckoned from the "bakery window". Did it taste as good as it looked? The truth is not nearly often enough to justify the high cost associated with it.

So too this material world of ours: We invest time, money, emotion—our hearts and souls- into achieving goals and pursuing goods, services and experiences. How many of them are really worth it? We have a limited amount of physical and emotional resources to invest in the

different areas of life- career, relationships, lifestyle, recreation. We are really all looking for the same thing – value. What life is really about? Things that stand the test of time. Things which provide the greatest return on investment. Things which last forever.

We get sucked into the bakery window of life, and expend all we have on things that don't satisfy us nearly enough.

Question:

Do you relate to this "bakery window analogy"? Can you remember times in your own life where you gave more than you got back while pursuing something?

### Illusions about Self

We also spend too much time immersed in illusions about ourselves, maintaining personas that we show to the outside world to keep them away from knowing the truth about us. Many times these personas are puffed up and arrogant, covering up all sorts of insecurities.

### Passover – Back to Real Value

**Chametz and Matzah** – the main symbols of Passover, beautifully capture the struggle to break free of our illusions.

Question:

What's the difference between Chometz (bread and cake) and Matzah?

They are both made from flour and water. Matzah is bread that hasn't been allowed to rise -- no air, no puff, no illusion. Just flat-bread, all bread, nothing added. While Chometz takes that flat-bread and adds air, puff and taste to enhance it. The world of Chometz is the bakery window and it beckons us, with its form and fluff and smell promising us a whole world of fulfillment. Yet too often we are left dissatisfied.

Chometz also symbolizes the tendency for the human ego to become puffed up. This is the slavery of arrogance and self-delusion, which robs us of so much fulfillment in life.

Chometz symbolizes all the illusions regarding self and the world that we all too easily fall for!

<u>Matzah is the antidote</u>. It points us in the direction of real value and humility. As we eat matzah we enter a weeklong detox from the world of chometz, helping us break free of the illusions of our desires and the illusions of our skewed self-perceptions. It is a week designed by G-d to bring us back to Value.

### Life After Passover?

Question: How do we stay free beyond Passover?

We need to find a GPS for Value.

Thankfully G-d has given us such a GPS – The Torah. It is a guidebook which helps the soul navigate in a physical world, where true value is often hard to find. Each mitzvah of the Torah is designed to point us in the direction of value; how to eat in a way which brings lasting nourishment to the body and soul, how to love and be intimate in a way that is forever, how to do business in a way which creates a good name for the ages, and much more.

Freedom is living a life in line with eternal values. The concept of "Mitzvah" points us in the direction of that value. Though from the outside they may appear at times restrictive, they allow a person to be truly free; to connect his soul with what "it truly wants" in a physical world. In the end freedom aligns us with soul and in so doing aligns us with G-d.

### **Back to the Beginning:**

We started with a question regarding the appropriateness of freedom as the cornerstone of the first Jewish Holiday. What did it have to do with G-d?

Our explanation of what true freedom entails should help us shed light on this question. While freedom does in fact start with man's journey of self-discovery in this world, if navigated properly and in line with his inner spirit, it culminates in the most beautiful form of service to our Creator. Man's desires, which emanate from his soul, mirror G-d's yet his service is **freely chosen and graciously performed**. What more could G-d want from His children?

Exercises:

- 1. What illusions do you have which keep you from achieving or obtaining what you really want out of life?
- 2. List 3 things of value you need to get back to this year.

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