



THE SECRET TO HAPPINESS

SOURCE SHEET AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Myth #1:

We all think that if only our life circumstances would be different we would be happy. Due to this belief many of us spend a lot of time trying to expertly manage our life circumstances. Perhaps this notion is a myth. Consider the following source:

SOURCE 1: Exodus 16:4, Numbers 11:6

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

Now our life is so boring (our souls are parched); there is nothing. We have nothing to anticipate but the Manna. Numbers 11:6

יֵאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הֲנִי מִמְטִיר לָכֶם
לֶחֶם מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֵּצֵא הָעָם וַלְקִטּוֹ דָּבַר־
יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ

וַעֲתָה נַפְשֵׁנוּ יְבֹשָׁה אֵין כָּל בְּלִתֵּי אֶל־הַמָּן
עֵינֵינוּ:

The Manna was the ultimate daily pension plan for our ancestors 40-year trek in the desert ; Their most important need – sustenance – taken care of for them. Yet, in short order the Manna became a source of complaint.

Q: Why do you think they ended up feeling this way about the Manna?

SOURCE 2: Numbers 11:8 and Biblical Commentary of Rashi

The people would stroll and gather it, and grind it in a mill or pound it in a mortar and cook it in a pot or make it into cakes, and it tasted like dough kneaded in oil. (Numbers 11:8)

Rashi: The Manna was not actually put in a mill, nor in a kettle , nor a mortar but its flavor would (miraculously) change into foods cooked in these ways, based upon what you wanted it to taste like. (according to the Sifrei 89)

שָׁטוּ הָעָם וַלְקִטּוֹ וְטָחְנוּ בְרִחִים אוּ דָכוּ
בַמִּדְכָה וּבִשְׁלוּ בַפָּרוֹר וְעָשׂוּ אֶתֹו עֲגוֹת וְהָיָה
טַעְמוֹ כְּטַעַם לֶשֶׁד הַשָּׂמֶן:

לֹא יָרַד בְּרִחִים וְלֹא בַקֶּדֶרֶה וְלֹא בַמִּדְכָה,
אֲלֹא מִשְׁתַּנָּה הָיָה טַעְמוֹ לְנִטְחָנִין וְלִנְדוּכִין
וְלַמְבֹשְׁלִין

The people's attitude is all the more surprising given that the Manna could taste like anything they desired it to be! Their reaction revealed more about them than it did about the Manna.

Q: What can we learn from this about our livelihood and other life circumstances that we face?

Our circumstances don't dictate our attitudes and happiness, it's more about us and how we relate to them.

One great take-away from this insight is that my happiness will depend more on how I see and relate to my life circumstances than by trying to ceaselessly manipulate or control them. (as if we could anyway). Keep striving for more in life, but realize that at every juncture **you're not so much a victim of your circumstances as you are a victim of your "attitudes about your circumstances"**.

Myth #2:

Most of us feel that happiness is directly related to money; the more of it the happier we would be. Surprisingly, a famous Torah source actually links money and happiness in a very direct way:

SOURCE 3: *Ethics of our Fathers (Pirkei Avos 4:1)*

Who is the rich person? One who is happy with what he has.

איזהו עשיר, השמח בחלקו

First appreciate that the Mishna in fact links wealth and happiness, so we are not all that crazy for doing it ourselves. Second, the Mishna raises the question, who is wealthy? Isn't the answer fairly obvious, that it's the one with the most money?

Q: Why does the Mishna bypass the straightforward answer and what is it trying to teach us? Consider another question before you answer.

Q: Who is wealthier, the man with 10 million in the bank who doesn't appreciate it, or the man who thanks G-d every day for the 50k job which enables him to happily take care of his family? (Before moving on, answer this question and go back to the one above.)

- Emotionally the man with 10 million dollars who doesn't appreciate it is like a poor man with millions in a safety deposit box that he doesn't know about.
- Real wealth and happiness are inextricably linked. Wealth is something possessed, not just physically but emotionally. Since happiness is what we are really after when we pursue money, it's the real barometer of true wealth.
- To bust another myth, happiness doesn't kick in at some magical dollar amount as some would believe; it's an attitude which comes from gratitude that you either have or you don't. With it a poor man can feel wealthy, without it a rich man can never feel wealthy enough.

SOURCE 4: *Two Examples which illustrate the relationship between wealth and attitude:*

Rich Man, Poor Man. Children can have a basement filled with toys and actually complain to their parents that they are bored. If a friend comes over to the house and sees all the toys, he feels "rich"! Yet, the kid who owns the toys feels "poor" because they don't make him happy any more.

Feeling Like a Queen. Queen Victoria of England in the 19th century was the richest person in the world, yet in real terms was poorer than any low-income person in America today. Yet, whom do you think "feels richer", the Queen or the low-income person?

Q: What do these examples reveal about the relationship between happiness and wealth?

The Rabbis were right to link money and happiness, we just get the order wrong. Money doesn't necessarily lead to happiness, but happiness (gratitude for what you have) turns money into true wealth.

The Kiss of Death.

There are several key factors that rob us of gratitude in life, but one stands out head and shoulders from the pack. Consider the following source:

SOURCE 5: Genesis (Bereishis 29:35)

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

שְׁנֵטְלִי יוֹתֵר מִחֶלְקִי, מֵעַתָּה יֵשׁ לִי לְהוֹדוֹת

Q: What does this keen observation from Rashi tell us about the nature of gratitude and the happiness born from it? When does a person feel gratitude and when don't they?

Q: Based on this Rashi, what's the kiss of death which can rob us of vast amounts of happiness in life?

A sense of **"entitlement"** is a sure path to unhappiness and lack of fulfillment in life. Imagine feeling a sense of entitlement to all the many blessings each one of us has in life. We would feel like we have nothing to be happy and grateful about. Everything we get we are owed.

The antidote is seeing life as an "ongoing free gift". If all of **"life is seen as a gift"**, it can be focused upon, appreciated and will be a source of ongoing happiness and true wealth!

Optional Homework to make your life happier:

Gratitude is something that needs to be "woken up" through practice. Here is a 4 step process guaranteed to increase gratitude, happiness and to change your life....if you do it.

- 1st week: Each day for a week spend 5 minutes writing in as much detail as possible a pleasure in life you really enjoy. Can be really mundane, like your morning coffee, a hot shower or the great experience of eating an orange. (3 of my favorite things.)
- 2nd week: Each day for a week spend 5 minutes writing in as much detail as possible about a pleasure you know you should enjoy but you don't always enjoy it. Ex. Going to gym, loving a sibling, loving our work.
- 3rd week: Each day for a week spend 5 minutes writing in as much detail as possible about a pleasure that you totally take for granted. Ex. The warmth of the sun, a beautiful day, the dexterity of your fingers typing, the beauty of the moon.
- 4th week: Each day for a week spend 5 minutes writing in as much detail as you can the good that you can see in difficult circumstances in your life.

If you have gotten this far and think it has made a difference, do it again and your life will never be the same again.