



Happy Thoughts

You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of the citron tree, the branches of date palms, twigs of a myrtle tree, and brook willows, and you shall rejoice before Hashem your God for seven days" (Vayikra 23:40). The holy days of Succos are times of great *simcha* to Klal Yisrael. We have a *mitzvah d'oraysa* (from the Torah) to be happy on these days, and indeed on all of the *shalosh regalim* (three pilgrimage festivals). What about the rest of the year? Rav Volbe zt"l cites the Gemora (Taanis 29a) to answer this question. The Gemora states that when the month of Adar enters, we increase our *simcha*. When the month of Av enters, we decrease our *simcha*. What about the rest of the year? Fundamentally, a Jew is happy the entire year. In the month of Adar, he increases his happiness to a higher level. In the month of Av, he reduces it. However, his normal state the year round is joyous. How important is happiness? We see that it is Torah commandment as well as a normal healthy state of mind and body. Additionally, a lack of joy is given as the cause of terrible suffering in Klal Yisrael, as stated in parashas Ki Savo, "Because you did not serve Hashem your God with gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant" (Devarim 28:47).

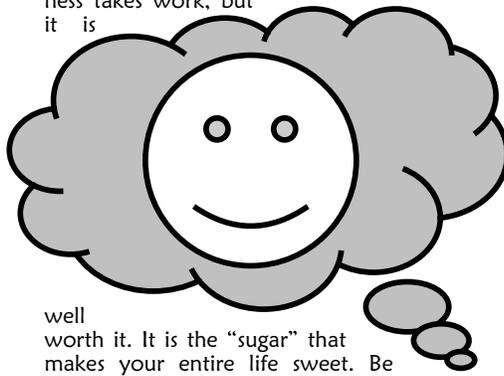
How does one attain and maintain this state of happiness? The Mesillas Yesharim (chapter seven) gives us the key. Outward actions arouse inner thoughts and feelings. If we act and talk with happiness, we will come to think joyous thoughts and become truly {SYN happy}. Let us examine these points one by one.

One of the happiest actions that we can perform is ... smiling! When? As often as possible. Afraid of getting a negative response? Smile at mirrors! They always smile back. As you accustom your face to smiling, you will begin smiling at everyone, regardless of the reaction. However, you will notice that the responses improve. A happy person makes others happy. Walking upright, breathing in the fresh air, eating, and sleeping well also contribute to your overall cheerfulness.

How do we talk happily? Firstly, eliminate negative talk – no complaining, depression, pointless criticism, loшон hora, insults, worry, anger, sadness, or other negative speech. Replace these counterproductive statements with kind, soothing words of gratitude, encouragement, positive advice, and spiritual *chizuk* (strengthening). Talk about Hashem's goodness. Praise the good deeds of oth-

ers. Open your mouth and heart to the Creator in sincere prayer.

We can control our thoughts by training our minds to think joyously. Recall happy times in your life. Feel the delight that you felt then. See the happiness in the present moment. Everything is for the good! Sometimes it is obvious, and other times we need to work to see it. However, it is always there, because Hashem is totally good; therefore, everything that He does is good. Performing a *mitzvah* triggers especially happy thoughts. When I do a *mitzvah*, I am giving the Almighty *nachas ruach* by doing His will! I am getting unimaginable reward for it! It is helping me improve my *middos*!* Delight in the *simcha shel mitzvah*! This is our greatest pleasure in this world and the next. Conversely, one who is not happy, *cholila* (Heaven forbid), when he serves Hashem, causes much suffering, as we see in parashas Ki Savo. As you see, *kinderlach*, attaining happiness takes work, but it is



well worth it. It is the "sugar" that makes your entire life sweet. Be happy *kinderlach*, and enjoy the wonderful life that Hashem has given you.

Kinderlach . . .

Here are a few suggestions to increase joy in your life. Wake up happy and appreciative – Hashem has given you another day of life! Eat with gladness and gratitude for the food and its delicious taste. Pray to Hashem with a warm heart, expressing your love for Him. Learn Torah with inner satisfaction; knowing that you are privileged to hear the Devar Hashem. Perform acts of kindness, sharing the happiness that you bring others by helping them. Honor your parents by being a happy, obedient child. At the end of the day, review your accomplishments and mistakes; thank Hashem for all that He has given you, and ask Him to help you do teshuva and improve. "Love Hashem and His creations! Make Hashem and His creations happy!" (Pirkei Avos 6:1). Live a life filled with joy!

*See Chazon Ish - Emunah and Bitachon - chapter 4

Rebbe Akiva's Students

What a terrible tragedy! Twenty four thousand people killed!" "What was it? Mudslides in Chile?" "No." "Earthquake in China?" "No." "Tsunami?" "No." "Please tell me. I must know." "The Gemora (Yevamos 62b) tells the story. Rebbe Akiva had 12,000 pairs of students from the town of Gvas to Antifras who all died suddenly because they did not give the proper respect to one another. The world was void of Torah until Rebbe Akiva came to the south of the land of Israel and taught five new students: Rebbe Meir, Rebbe Yehuda, Rebbe Yosi, Rebbe Shimon, and Rebbe Elazar ben Shamua. These new students disseminated the Torah. The others all perished between Pesach and Shavuos, from a painful disease called 'ascora.'" "Oy va voy, 24,000 yeshiva students died! So many! How could it be? Was their sin so terrible?"

The Maharal explains that the time between Pesach and Shavuos is a time to prepare ourselves to receive the Torah. This preparation involves perfecting our character traits. One of the crucial aspects that we must work on is honoring our fellow Jews. It is so important that the Maharal calls it the essence of life. Those who did not value the essence of life were not permitted to continue living. They died from 'ascora,' a disease of the throat. Speech comes from the throat: therefore, this disease is associated with sins pertaining to speech. This is the meaning of the verse, 'Life and death are dependent upon one's speech' (Mishlei 18:21)."

Kinderlach . . .

We should use the wonderful gift of speech that Hashem gave us to honor each other and to learn His Torah. Listen to what your Rebbe is saying. Let your chavruta finish speaking before you comment on what he is saying. If you feel that he is incorrect, tell him in a respectful way. That is the proper way to speak. B'ezrat Hashem, we will all work on honoring each other and merit long lives, filled with blessing.

Parasha Questions:

- What is the *mitzvah* of Kiddush Hashem? (22:32 and Rashi)
- When do we begin Sefiras HaOmer? (Rashi 23:15)
- Who receives atonement on Yom Kippur? (Rashi 23:27)