



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHERS

*Avos - Perek 2 - Mishna 17*

## Drawing the line at happiness

*By Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita*

In our shtiebl I try from time to time to create constructive discussions, often as not during shiurim or shalosh seudas. There is nothing better than the give and take of a sincere debate to allow participants to not only articulate their own thoughts but allow others to perhaps share with them new and vital insights. Obviously, being a generally friendly chevra we don't allow things to get too bad-tempered. But I seek different paths so we can all grow, and wide-ranging discussion is a powerful tool. Since Pesach the topic has been "Are We Happy, and in terms of a Torah hashkofa? What in fact is happiness?" Let me share some of what we have been discussing.

***"Creating a positive atmosphere brings others to feel the true joy that is a connection with Hashem's will for His creation"***

First, allow me to quote the dictionary definition of happy: "feeling or showing pleasure or contentment." Put simply, "if you're happy and you know it clap your hands", or something of that order. This definition is definitely one that would pass as meaningful in a secular world. As the American constitution says: all men have the "unalienable right of the pursuit of happiness."

Everyone deserves to be happy, which means pleasure and contentment. It is a perfect platform for a society that is focused on individual wants. You want to be happy? Here, watch some films, have a drink, and enjoy. Perhaps buy a bigger house or take an exotic holiday.

For a Yied happiness must mean something different, since we are Hashem's chosen nation, created to be holy. Holiness isn't about contentment. A Yied should never feel totally content with himself; he must always strive to be better. Ours is not a religion that predicates pleasure as a goal. Yes, doing mitzvos brings pleasure with them, but the pleasure should surely be a sense of kedusha and not strictly temporal. Maybe the word happy is not really translatable in Lashon Hakodesh. Simcha doesn't have the same one dimensional feel to it, nor any other word I can think of. Attending a chasunah that turns wild with thumping music, participants gyrating as if possessed, and generally

losing sight of the meaning of *mesameach choson v'kallah* is not happiness in a Jewish sense, although many may display smiling faces.

After hearing everyone's thoughts I offered my own on the matter. In Pirkei Avos Chapter Two Mishnah 17 we learn about Rabbi Yose's guidelines for a proper life. The Mishnah ends: "let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven."

We each have individual roles in life, and every single one of them can be fulfilled for the sake of Heaven. When we know that wherever life leads us is part of Hashem's plan, then each step of the way has potential for Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying Hashem in this world. No two people have the same task, but each individual is indispensable. If you live in a manner that is sensitive to this reality and are conscious of the fact that your path through life is filled with potential for Kiddush Hashem, then true happiness is experienced. Happiness isn't contingent on outside forces; it's about how you feel within. A Torah Yied feels positive, because he experiences a sense of oneness with his goals in life.

I don't mean one must live an austere and morose existence, filled with an aura of dread. Just the opposite! Chazal tell us we must enjoy the gifts Hashem has created in this world. We can laugh, bring joy, feel alive, all this and more, because this all can be done for the sake of Heaven. Creating a positive atmosphere brings others to feel the true joy that is a connection with Hashem's will for His creation. *Ivdu es Hashem besimcha* means just this: be alive, be lebedik, and that will be the greatest Kiddush Hashem possible. It is only when we fall into despair, and find ourselves subservient to superficial tools of empty happiness that we fail in our task here on earth.

The choshuve Rov and teacher Rabbi Moshe Kupetz recently shared a dream he once had. In it he had reached his 120 years on this world and ascended to Shomayim. As he entered, Hashem called him over and invited him into His celestial office, "Let's talk about your life and what you did" the conversation began. As he stepped into the large room a little malach scurried in and drew a line on the wall. After he left Hashem told the dreamer: "you see that line? That's the level of Kiddush Hashem you were meant to create. I knew exactly what your talents were, all your challenges. It was I that gave you the wife you had and the children you raised, I had expectations of you given your attributes and other personal possessions and that's the mark you should have reached. Now, stand over there and let's see how close you came to achieving the target we set. Rabbi Kupetz told me, "I went over to that wall and saw how high that line was; even stretching myself onto my toes didn't let me reach it."

Of course, this was just a dream, and obviously dreams are just that: the meanderings of a sleepy mind. But, think about it: how would we stand against that mark on the wall?

"Let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven." These are wise words from our teachers of old. Let the world be a better place by your creating deeds that bring you a step closer to that line, and in this way experience a meaning of happiness that no founding fathers of America could ever have understood.