

Tzav

Perceptions • Nissan 14, 5785 • April 12, 2025 • Issue #2092

One of the biggest *yetzer haras* we have tells us that we can't be happy until we have more. It tells people that though what they already have might be good, it is not yet great. "Like the billboard said," it pushes, "we're not complete until we have that thing...or that thing...or, etc."

This means, sadly, that for many people, tomorrow is not the only thing "only a day away." Happiness too. For them, happiness is only a day away the rest of their lives. "I will be happy with my portion," they defend, "as soon as I get it." No wonder they go through life dragging their feet and smile-less.

It gets worse. If being unhappy was the only fallout, then it might be manageable. But it is not. It turns out that being happy is instrumental to personal health and productivity, and it has a direct effect on the people around us. Rav Yechezkel Levenstein, *zt"l*, the *Mashgiach* of the *Mir Yeshivah* once berated someone who came to the *Bais Midrash* with a sad face. He told them that what we feel inside is for us to deal with. But our faces, he explained, belong to the public, and for the public we have to look upbeat.

It even says, "Serve God in joy" (*Tehillim* 100:2). On a simple level it means, make a point of being happy about what you do for God, which is *everything*. Fight the urge to be sad and depressed whenever you can, and do your *mitzvos* with enthusiasm, even when you don't have any.

On a deeper level it means that you can't really serve God if you're not happy. Happy people are aware people, while sad people are usually distracted by their feelings. Happy people tend to be more considerate of others whereas sad people have a difficult time seeing past themselves. Most importantly, happy people sin less than sad people. Happy people tend to be more appreciative, and therefore more willing to do the right thing.

Though these "rules" may not be absolute, they're close to it. In fact, rarely do you ever find happily Torah-observant people decide to turn their backs on God and do

something else. If I had a dollar for every time someone told me they left religion because they were miserable, I'd struggle less to pay my bills. The irony was that turning secular didn't make them happier, just their *yetzer bara*. They were just relieved to no longer have to fight the good battle against it.

"Are you happy?"

Asked this question, a person does a quick self-analysis to see how they feel. If nothing is bothering them at the moment, they'll answer yes. If something does concern them, they will temper their answer to reflect their current mood.

But if you then ask, "No, are YOU happy?" they'll probably start to wonder who the "You" is that you refer to. Until that moment, they probably just assumed, like most people, that "you" is what you see every time you look in the mirror. They probably thought that "you" is what does all the feeling and moving around. They probably rarely considered that their "you" is hidden deep inside, imprisoned in a physical body and abused by its instinctual whims.

The more accurate question, therefore, is: Is your *soul* happy? Though it is important to keep your body happy, it is crucial that your soul be happy. You can polish your car, but if you don't take care of the engine and it breaks down, what good will polishing your car do? The body matters, but the soul is essential.

The good news is that it is easy to please the soul. Just do *mitzvos*, and do them well. The bad news is, the body loves physical comfort, which *mitzvos* are not famous for providing. The additional good news is that the body can be trained to do as the soul says, and learn to love it. *Tzaddikim* may have started off by going against their natural bodily drives, but they only became *tzaddikim* once their bodies bought into the soul's approach to life.

That's why we have to start off with *tzav*. The *yetzer bara* is like a child who can't yet relate to why doing the right thing is good for them. So, to make sure they do it anyhow, they have to be commanded to do it until they can command themselves. Once they can, they will truly be free. . .and happy.

Motzei Shabbos we will sit down for the 3,337th time, b"H. We will commemorate and celebrate the freedom we were given by God when we left Egypt. But the only reason why it is a celebration is because of where we ended up, at Mt. Sinai receiving Torah. As it says in *Pirkei Avos*, freedom was engraved on the tablets, chiseled out by the 613 *mitzvos* God gave to us. Leaving Egypt freed our bodies. Receiving Torah freed our souls.

This is the question we are asked each year at the *Seder*: How do YOU feel? Is your soul free, or still incarcerated inside of a materially-demanding body? If the answer is

no, then just sit back and enjoy the ride. But if the answer is yes, as it is for so many, the Seder provides the opportunity to right the wrong, free the soul, and serve God with joy.

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