

**New England  
National Conference**



**NER Region  
of Synagogue Youth**

198 Pine Street, Lowell, MA 01851

Ari M. Solomont, Director

# Happiness

## Discussion Session

**Prepared by Daniel Loew for NER NCSY. Layout by Shimmy Trencher.**

**Portions based on a session written by Rabbi Dinovitzer of Atlantic Seaboard NCSY.**

The goal of this session is to discuss with the NCSYers what true happiness is and how to attain it. Being truly happy in life is not a result of momentary pleasures, but stems from a sense of accomplishment and worth. Our goal is to show how the Torah is designed to aid us in attaining this type of happy life.

Because of the nature of this topic, this session will be truly discussion oriented. The NCSYers will only receive the sources; the discussion is for the advisors to lead. Please feel free to use any or none of these sources if you wish (and are sure you know what you're doing!). We recommend that you use the sources to reinforce points made in discussion. Also, depending on what the NCSYers say, you may have to deal with the material in a different order (so it behooves you to **know it cold.**)

To get the NCSYers thinking about the topic, you may want to begin your session with one of the following questions. Since many of the answers given by the NCSYers will focus on pleasure rather than fulfillment, these questions can be used as a springboard into a discussion on the Jewish view of pleasure. Answers given that relate to fulfillment can be used to steer the session later on.

*Are you happy? What makes you happy?*

*What is true happiness?*

*Do you know anyone who is truly happy? If so, what makes them happy and why?*

**How does happiness differ from pleasure?****What is the Jewish view on pleasure (vs. that of Christianity)?**

*Source 1 (Weiss-Rosemarin)* discusses the Torah's stance against asceticism.

The following story may aid in your discussion:

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch once went from his home in Germany to visit the Alps. He was asked why he bothered to take such a long journey just to see the mountains. Wasn't it a waste of his time and an unnecessary difficulty? He responded that when he passes away and goes up to heaven, God will ask him, "Nu, did you see my Alps?" He wanted to make sure that he fully appreciated the glorious world that we live in because to not appreciate the creation is to not fully appreciate the Creator.

*Source 2* discusses the Torah's encouragement of joy rather than gloom.

*Source 3 (Shema)*. In Shema, which we say twice a day, Hashem promises many things as rewards for the good we do. One might expect these things to deal with the world to come, with spiritual achievement, etc. Actually the rewards are very physical in nature and are received in this world. So we see that the Torah does not frown on pleasure and success in this world. Rather it is something we can and should strive for (in the proper way, of course!).

*Source 4 (Nedarim 10a)*. We see from this Gemara that abstaining from permitted pleasures of this world is actually sinful!

*Source 5 (Eye of a Needle)*. We see that pleasure is not only permitted but it is encouraged and is seen as a vehicle for service of God!

**But can pleasure lead to happiness?**

Apparently not... *Source 6 (Rav Dessler)* points out that wealth does not necessarily (and usually does not) lead to happiness. The more one possesses, the more one wishes to possess.

*Source 7 (more Rav Dessler)*.

**So what is it that all of these people are missing? What is the secret to a life of happiness?**

It has nothing to do with material possessions ... *Source 8 (Pirkei Avot)*. Torah without physical sustenance is impossible. We must take care of ourselves physically in order to grow spiritually. However, the inverse is true as well. If we do not nurture ourselves spiritually, the physical sustenance will be worth nothing.

We can conclude from this Mishna that even if we have tons of "Kemach," worldly possessions and pleasures, we will accomplish nothing. We will not arrive at happiness.

But come on! There have been plenty of times in our lives when we were happy because of something physical, something pleasurable. How many times have we been happy by watching a great TV show

or seeing a movie. How about food? Candy!? You can be very happy because of material possessions (for instance I just got a new computer, which I'm typing on right now, and it has brought me much happiness. *Ed. Note: Daniel was referring to his new Macintosh Powerbook 5300, which I might note, was purchased after he saw my new Powerbook 5300, which has brought me much happiness.*)

But we must draw a distinction between momentary happiness, which we can label as joy, something very similar to and perhaps an outgrowth of pleasure, and a life of happiness. Being truly happy in life is never due to momentary pleasures or material possessions. We saw this in *Strive For Truth* and we see this in the following famous Mishna as well.

*Source 9 (Pirkei Avot).* Wealth should not be measured by the size of our checking account or the amount of real estate we possess. It is dependent on our attitude, our approach to life.

**What is this life approach? What is true happiness? Can you think of someone who you believe has attained true happiness in life?**

Happiness stems from a sense of accomplishment, fulfillment, satisfaction, and worth. If we are doing something that has purpose for us, if we are striving to attain a goal that we believe in, then life has meaning. When we feel we are doing something important and worthwhile, we can be proud of ourselves and happy with our lives.

This can theoretically be accomplished in many ways. You can join the Peace Corps and run off to Africa because you feel it is important. You may want to spend your life working with developmentally disabled individuals, or doing social work. You may want to enter the sciences to find cures for diseases or make life easier for mankind. These very pursuits make many people very happy throughout the world because they have found **meaning** in their lives.

It is very interesting to note that almost invariably we feel a sense of purpose and worth when we are working for something that is greater than ourselves. This is what provides a sense of fulfillment and happiness; not selfishness, but selflessness!

And here's where Torah fits in: *Source 10 (Eye of a Needle)*, states that God gave us the Torah specifically in order for us to achieve happiness.

**But how does this work? How does doing Mitzvot make us happy?**

Torah provides us with purpose in this world. For we who believe that God gave us the Torah in order for us to learn it and follow it, doing so is the ultimate fulfillment of our purpose in the universe. In fact, it is the purpose for the universe! By living a Torah lifestyle we can feel proud and worthwhile. Serving God to the best of our abilities provides meaning for our lives. This will bring us true satisfaction and happiness.

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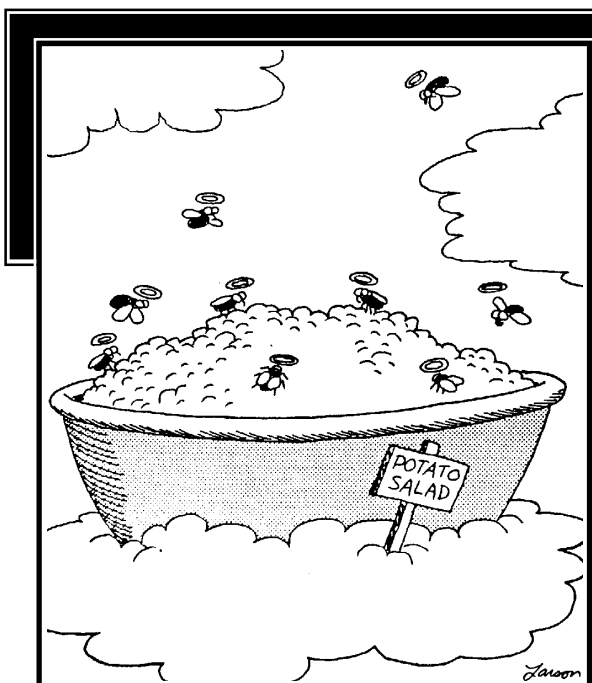


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## Fall Regional Convention 5756



FlyHeaven

# שמחה

## Happiness

What is True Happiness  
Anyway?

**October 27-29, 1995 • 3-5 Cheshvan 5756 • Providence, RI**

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NCSY is the youth movement of the Orthodox Union



### 1 Dr. Trude Weiss-Rosemarin, *Judaism and Christianity – the Differences*

Judaism is indigenously optimistic. Affirming a beneficent Creator, it regards the whole world and all that fills it as “very good.” God, however, did not only create the soul but also formed the “flesh” and its desires. Judaism therefore does not condemn the “flesh” as wicked, nor does it postulate an irreconcilable antithesis between the “flesh” and the “spirit.” It sees harmony everywhere . . . The ideal of Jewish saintliness is not realized by the ascete who has “purged” himself from all fleshly desires but, on the contrary, by him in whom those desires burn fiercest and yet, without being altogether starved, are tamed and governed . . . Jewish piety does not consist in fasting, celibacy, solitude, and other ascetic deprivations contrary to human nature and God’s purpose. To the Jew abstinence of any kind is outright sinful, for it bespeaks the rejection of the good things created by God’s bounty. The sages even threatened that in the world-to-come man will have to account for every legitimate enjoyment he denied himself (Yerushalmi kiddushin IV end).

### 2 Dr. Weiss-Rosemarin

To the Jew the law is not an onerous burden. Therefore one must not serve the Lord with gloom and fear, but with joy and gladness . . . To the Jew, beauty is not the lure of satan, as so many Christian saints propounded, but the work of God.

### 3 Devarim 11:13-15 (Shema)

And it will come to pass that if you continually hearken to My commandments that I command you today, to love Hashem, your God, and to serve Him, with all your heart and with all your soul — then I will provide rain for your land in its proper time, the early and late rains, that you may gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil. I will provide grass in your field for your cattle and you will eat and be satisfied.

וְהָיָה, \* אִם־שָׁמַעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹתַי, אֲשֶׁר | אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה |  
 אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם, לְאֵהָבָה אֶת־יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעִבְדוֹ,  
 בְּכָל־לְבַבְכֶם, וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁכֶם: וְנָתַתִּי מְטַר־אֲרָצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ, יוֹרֵה  
 וּמִלְקוֹשׁ, וְאֶסְפַּתְּ דָגְגֶיךָ וְתִירְשָׁה וַיִּצְהַרְךָ: וְנָתַתִּי | עֵשֶׂב | בְּשָׂדֶיךָ  
 לְבִהְמֹתֶיךָ, וְאָכַלְתָּ וּשְׂבַעְתָּ:

#### 4 Gemara Nedarim 10a

As it was taught: Rav Eleazar ha-Kappar Berabbi said: *And he shall make atonement for him, for that he sinned against a soul.* Against which 'soul' then has he sinned? But it is because he afflicted himself through abstention from wine. Now, does this afford an argument from the minor to the major? If one, who afflicted himself only with respect to wine is called a sinner, how much moreso one who ascetically refrains from everything.

\*רתניא ר' אלעזר הקפר ברבי אומר  
וכפר עליו מאשר הטא על הנפש וכי באיוו  
נפש הטא זה אלא שציער עצמו מן היין  
והלא דברים ק"ו ומה זה שלא ציער עצמו  
אלא מן היין נקרא חוטא המצער עצמו  
מכל דבו על אהת כמה וכמה

#### 5 Eye of a Needle, Aish HaTorah, 23-24

In Judaism we are encouraged to marry, have children, eat, drink, and take pleasure in the world around us. Jewish tradition places great emphasis on "simcha" . . . Our holiday gatherings are replete with good food, song, dance, and exuberant rejoicing.

#### 6 Strive for Truth, Rav E. Dessler

A happy life? Isn't that what we all want? So, presumably, we have a clear idea of what happiness is. Surely it's obvious, you may say: happiness is having everything you want. . . If we want to go into the matter systematically, . . . We must go among people and ask them about themselves. . . Let us start by asking the rich - those who have more money than they know what to do with, who live in mansions and travel in the most expensive cars. . . they will let out the secret: they are not happy. Jealousies and lusts disturb their peace of mind; domestic troubles are rife . . .

#### 7 Strive for Truth, Rav E. Dessler

Perhaps the middle-income bracket? . . . They work hard all their lives, often getting stomach ulcers in the process, but they never seem to find time to enjoy their money. During their working years, they are always busy preparing for happiness. However, when their working life is over, . . . without a day's work to do they can hardly find any point in living. . . Let's ask the workers. They work hard day by day, and sometimes nights, for their weekly wage-packet. But . . . they feel that they are getting a raw deal; they are missing out on all the good things in life. . . They - the workers - produce the wealth, but they are not allowed to enjoy it. Others rob them of the fruit of their labors. Is this happiness? Surely not. . . It seems we [must conclude] - "A happy life? There is no such thing!"

## 8 Pirkei Avot 3:21

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said: Where there is no Torah, there is no proper conduct; where there is no proper conduct, there is no Torah. Where there is no wisdom, there is no reverence [for God]; where there is no reverence, there is no wisdom. Where there is no knowledge, there is no understanding, where there is no understanding, there is no knowledge. Where there is no flour [bread], there is no Torah; where there is no Torah, there is no flour [bread].

כאן רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר: אם אין תורה, אין דרך ארץ; אם אין דרך ארץ, אין תורה. אם אין חקמה, אין יראתה; אם אין יראתה, אין חקמה. אם אין דעת, אין בינה; אם אין בינה, אין דעת. אם אין קמח, אין תורה; אם אין תורה, אין קמח.

## 9 Pirkei Avot 4:1

Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? — he who learns from every man, as it is said: From all my teachers have I acquired wisdom. Who is strong? — he who subdues his [evil] inclinations, as it is said: He that is slow to anger is better than the strong man; and he that rules his spirit is better than one who conquers a city. Who is rich? — he who is happy with his lot, as it is said: When you eat from the toil of your hands, happy shall you be, and it shall go well with you: *happy* in this world; *and it shall go well with you* in the world-to-come. Who is honorable? — he who honors the creations, as it is stated: For those that honor Me will I honor, and those who despise Me shall be degraded.

או בן זומא אומר: איזהו חכם? הלומד מכל אדם, שנאמר, מכל מלמדי השכלתי (כי עדותיך שיקח ל). איזהו גבור? הכובש את יצרו, שנאמר, טוב ארך אפים מגבור, ומושל ברוחו מלכד עיר. איזהו עשיר? השמח בחלקו, שנאמר, יגיע כפיה כי תאכל, אשריך וטוב לך. אשריך, בעולם הזה; וטוב לך, לעולם הבא. איזהו מקבד, המקבד את הבריות, שנאמר, כי מקבדי אכבד, ובני יקלו.

**10** *Eye of a Needle, Aish HaTorah, 24*

God created the entire world for our [happiness]. Just as parents want only the best for their children, so does our Father in Heaven want only the best for us.

That is why He gave us the Torah.

Imagine someone gave you a state-of-the-art food processor, with a whole variety of gadgets and features that let you prepare exquisite dishes with ease and efficiency. If you ignore the instruction manual and never learn how to use all the features, or worse, if you use the machine as a paperweight, your enjoyment of it will be extremely limited. You will . . . use only a fraction of [the machine's] potential. God wants us to go through life first class. So He gave us an instruction manual (the Torah) to show us how to get the most out of life; how to use everything in the world to get the maximum [happiness].

*This publication contains God's name and should be treated accordingly.*