The Secret of True Happiness

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Fun vs. Happiness

I live in the land of Disney, Hollywood and year-round sun. You may think people in such a glamorous, fun-filled place are happier than others. If so, you have some mistaken ideas about the nature of happiness.

Many intelligent people still equate happiness with fun. The truth is that fun and happiness have little or nothing in common. Fun is what we experience *during* an act. Happiness is what we experience *after* an act. It is a deeper, more abiding emotion.

Going to an amusement park or ball game, watching a movie or television, are fun activities that help us relax, temporarily forget our problems and maybe even laugh. But they do not bring happiness, because their positive effects end when the fun ends.

I have often thought that if Hollywood stars have a role to play; it is to teach us that happiness has nothing to do with fun. These rich, beautiful individuals have constant access to glamorous parties, fancy cars and expensive homes, everything that spells "happiness." But in memoir after memoir, celebrities reveal the unhappiness hidden beneath all their fun: depression, alcoholism, drug addiction,

broken marriages, troubled children, and profound loneliness.

Yet people continue to believe that the next, more glamorous party, more expensive car, more luxurious vacation, fancier home will do what all the other parties, cars, vacations, homes have not been able to do.

The way people cling to the belief that a fun-filled, pain-free life equals happiness actually diminishes their chances of ever attaining real happiness. If fun and pleasure are equated with happiness, then pain must be equated with unhappiness. But, in fact, the opposite is true: *More times than not, things that lead to happiness involve some pain.*

As a result, many people avoid the very endeavors that are the source of true happiness. They fear the pain inevitably brought by such things as marriage, raising children, professional achievement, religious commitment, civic or charitable work or self-improvement.

Ask a bachelor why he resists marriage, even though he finds dating to be less and less satisfying. If he's honest, he will tell you that he is afraid of making a commitment. For commitment is, in fact, quite painful. The single life is filled with fun, adventure and excitement. Marriage has such moments, but they are not its most distinguishing features.

Similarly, couples that choose not to have children are deciding in favor of painless fun over painful happiness. They can dine out whenever they want, travel wherever they want and sleep as late as they want. Couples with infant children are lucky to get a whole night's sleep or a three-day vacation. I don't know any parent who would choose the word *fun* to describe raising children.

But couples that decide not to have children never experience the pleasure of hugging them or tucking them into bed at night. They never know the joys of watching a child grow up or of playing with a grandchild.

Of course I enjoy doing fun things. I like to play racquetball, joke with kids (and anybody else) and I probably have too many hobbies. But these forms of fun do not contribute in any real way to my happiness. More difficult endeavors – writing, raising children, creating a deep relationship with my wife, trying to do good in the world – will bring me more happiness than can ever be found in fun, that least permanent of things.
Understanding and accepting that true happiness has nothing to do with fun is one of the most liberating realizations we can ever come to. It liberates time: now we can devote more hours to activities that can genuinely increase our happiness. It liberates money: buying that new car or those fancy clothes that will

do nothing to increase our happiness now seems pointless. And it liberates us from envy: we now understand that those rich and glamorous people we were so sure are happy, because they are always having so much fun, actually may not be happy at all.

The moment we understand that fun does not bring happiness, we begin to lead our lives differently. The effect can be, quite literally, life-transforming.

What is Happiness?

In the Holy Language of the Bible, the root of a word describes the essence of the concept. The root of "Osher," an advanced form of happiness, is "Asher," which means valid, to validate. Happiness is a state of being, where a person feels validated, good about himself and worthy.

One of the reasons that happiness is so difficult to find in our society today, undoubtedly has to do with the phenomenon that since Darwin, most people believe that they are the result of accidents rather than creation. Creation bespeaks purpose; evolution bespeaks accident. If we are here by accident, then our lives have no purpose. Who, without true purpose, can feel validated?

In his best selling book, Man's Search for Meaning, the world famous psychiatrist, Victor Frankel,

presents compelling evidence that the underlying cause of the majority of mental health problems is man's feeling a lack of meaning and purpose in his life.

Depression is so commonplace in our society today. The relationship between lacking purpose and depression is very obvious. If man chooses his own purpose without any information as to his true purpose, he still feels that much is missing. Only a creator can know the real purpose of his creation. If we could have guidance from our Creator as to the true purpose for which He created us, we would feel truly validated and happy.

Judaism claims such a revelation from our Creator, and this offers the possibility of true purpose and lasting happiness.

What Happened At Sinai?

There are only five religions that make the claim that the Creator appeared to millions of eyewitnesses and revealed His purpose in Creation. They are: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and Bahai. Interestingly, they all claim that this event took place only with the Jews at Sinai.

Judaism is therefore the only religion that claims that the Creator and Almighty Master of the Universe

revealed Himself publicly at Sinai to them, to the entire Jewish people, and gave them His Divine directives. This claim is substantiated through a combination of factors, which indicate, beyond any reasonable doubt, the truth of the claim.

The key words in this process are testimony and evidence. Our Torah includes in itself a system for recognizing and transmitting the testimony of the original generation of eyewitnesses, to the revelation at Sinai, down to this very day. An understanding of this system, provides a very credible basis for the truth of Torah from Sinai

The second word, evidence, refers to the fact that the Torah, both the written and the oral
Torah, is full of information that no-one other than the Creator and Ruler of the Universe could have known at the time the document was written. The Torah is also replete with indications of the Creator's control of the world.

Both of these concepts are unique amongst the religions of the world, only to be found in Judaism. Even though the other major religions came after Judaism and copied so much from it, no religion ever dared to claim eyewitness testimony to a public event of revelation by G-d, in front of millions of live witnesses. This can only be understood by the realization that this claim is extremely difficult to

fabricate and if, in fact, it did not happen, then it will not be accepted or believed.

In fact, the major religions, in a desire and need to base their religion on more than the claim of one person to a private revelation, also acknowledge that the only public revelation was by the Creator to the Jews at Sinai. They then go on to claim, however that G-d changed His mind about Torah and the Jewish people.

This claim, of course, is very tenuous, because G-d Himself, commanded in the Torah, that no prophet, even with the performance of amazing miracles, could be believed to change the Torah or lead us astray.

The other major religions do not fare better when it comes to evidence for the truth of Torah. Most of their pronouncements refer to future events in the world-to-come, or very vague statements, not very testable in this world. The Torah, however, is full of very specific information and prophecy of future events in this world that no one can deny.

This information is so compelling that the Talmud states, in “Chullin”, that this type of information, that no human could have known at the time, serves as an answer to anyone who would question whether or not the Torah is from G-d.

To properly convey the dual concepts of testimony to the events of Sinai and evidence for the Divine truth of Torah requires a detailed sophisticated analysis of a wide range of material, which is beyond the scope of this work.

For the purpose of this work, some highlights of the basic concepts are presented here with the advice to the reader to do further research and be exposed to further information in this area.

The unique position of the first generation of actual witnesses to the Divine Revelation at Sinai can be better understood by a simple story. A Chassidic Rebbe passed away and left two sons. They were conflicted about who would be their father's successor. All of the Chasidim got involved and took sides. One day the younger son walks into the shul and announces that the conflict is resolved. "Father appeared to me in a dream," he said, "and proclaimed me as his successor." The other brother and his supporters responded, "If father truly wanted you to be his successor, he should have appeared to us and told us directly."

The only religion that claims a revelation in front of an entire nation, millions of witnesses, is Judaism, the others, if they claim revelation, like Islam and Christianity, claim a private revelation to one person with no other witnesses. This story underscores the difference in credibility between the two approaches.

Anyone can claim that he had a private revelation; no one can claim a public revelation unless it, in fact, really happened.

When the Torah, which describes this public revelation in detail, clearly states that the people of that generation witnessed these events and heard Hashem speaking to them and to Moshe, then the fact that they all passed this document on to their children, is a powerful testimony to these events.

Parents do not lie to their children, millions of parents certainly don't tell the same lie to their children. If a parent tells a child that a certain event took place, then the child knows that his parent honestly believes that the certain event took place. If a parent says, "I saw that event take place" then the child knows that, in fact, it did actually take place.

The Torah was passed from generation to generation, always publicly read and always prohibited from even the slightest change. Not only was the document passed down and preserved, but it was always read and studied by a nation that performed many observances, generation after generation, based on the text. To date, the text survives, all over the Jewish world without differences in text of any significance, unlike the New Testament, which has hundreds of significant differences in text. This process can be seen in action when a Torah reader makes a mistake in the public Torah reading; the

listeners, yell out corrections and never let a reading mistake go by. If and when there is a written error or peeling of the letter in the Torah, the Torah is put away, with the "gartle" on the outside, announcing its inappropriate status and must be fixed within thirty days. This system has preserved the Torah throughout the ages.

The Torah abounds with evidence of its Divine authorship, in the form of information both prophetic and scientific that no author could have known, when the Torah was first given. All sources, including secular historians, admit that this was, at least approximately 2,250 years ago, because then it was translated into Greek.

The Torah clearly prophesizes the events of the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash, the exile, the Holocaust, the return to Israel, in intricate detail, leaving no room to question the prophetic ability of its author. The Torah gives us vast amounts of modern scientific information, both in the written and oral Torah, no human could have known without Divine revelation.

That fact that the pig is the only animal ever, anywhere in the world, that has split hooves and does not chew its cud, could not have been known to Moshe Rabbeinu, without Divine revelation. Nor could he have known that never will there be a species of fish that has scales but does not have fins.

Who could have dared to say that the Western Wall of the Bais Hamikdash will never be destroyed and who could have known that during the 20th Century, our enemies will use poisonous gas against us. Or who could have known, thousands of years ago, that the final determination of whether an embryo is male or female only takes place after the 40th day after conception. It goes on and on. This is what the Talmud says in "Chullin", that the scientific information that no one could have known at that time, serves as an answer to anyone who would say that Torah is not from Heaven. Our Rabbis do not say this is how we know the truth of Torah, but rather, an answer to anyone who might question its veracity. We know Torah is Divine, because of the unbroken chain of testimony from generation to generation, with no skipping of a generation. However, if anyone still harbors any doubts, how can he explain the extensive, detailed and accurate information that we find in our Torah?

Were You Aware?

- The New York Times reported in 1990, a radical revolution in scientific thinking, that the gender of an embryo is not finally determined at the moment of conception, as previously believed, but rather 40-some days after conception, as stated in the Talmud

Brachos, 60a, known to our Rabbis over 1,500 years ago.

- In 1925, science revised its concept of how many stars exist in the universe, based on Einstein's theories to 1.06×10^{21}. If you compute the figure given in the Talmud Brachos 32b, you find this figure, known to our Rabbis over 1,500 years ago.

- Louis Pasteur, in the late 19th century, spent 30 years fighting the entire scientific establishment to convince them that insects carry disease. This was to known to the Rabbis of the Talmud Kesuvos over 1,500 years ago.

- The concept of immunization, developed in the 19th century, was known to our Rabbis in Yoma over 1,500 years ago.

- As late as 1963, scientists still believed that nothing the mother saw or heard effected the child she was carrying. Today, accepted scientific wisdom agrees with the Rabbis of the Kabbalah and Talmud that the embryo hears and learns and has a certain level of understanding, but forgets everything when it comes out.

- Over 25,000 species of fish are known today, and not one of them has scales and no fins. This scientific fact was told to us by the Rabbis of the Talmud over 1,500 years ago.

- The Torah promises that if we allow the land of Israel to lie fallow every seventh year, then it will be blessed in the sixth year with enough produce for the sixth, seventh and eighth years. This illogical prediction has been true throughout history.

- The Medrash, which is over 1,500 years old, tells us that towards the end of days, everyone will be afraid that the world will be devoured in fire in a brief moment. Until the dawn of the nuclear age, no one could imagine what the Rabbis were talking about.

- The Talmud, over 1,500 years ago, warned us of the threat of the unleashed power of Germany and its union with Italy to destroy the world.

- The Torah tells us that no nation will ever claim that the Creator revealed Himself to them in front of millions of people. The Jews are, in fact, the only nation to make such a claim, and our process of transmission of that testimony, over the ages, has provided us with

the living testimony to the truth of the events that took place at Sinai over 3,300 years ago.

- The Medrash tells us that the Almighty promises that the Kosel Hamaaravi, the Western wall of the Bais Hamikdash, will never be destroyed. Jerusalem was destroyed at least nine times with devastating consequences, but this wall could never be destroyed.

- The Torah tells us that when the Jewish people will be expelled from Israel, it will remain desolate. Until this century, when Jews started returning, no occupier could make the land flourish.

- The Hebrew word for ear is "ozen." This root means balance, equilibrium. Moznei Tzedek refers to a scale. This classical problem of morality cannot be solved by any human being. We cannot establish our own moral values judging only by logical reasoning. The Torah is the absolute guide. We need to adhere to, to listen to and to obey the Divine word. So too, it is the ear which is the organ that spiritually takes care of our moral equiblirium. Hence the Hebrew name – "ozen." Moveover, the location of the physical equilibrium is in the middle ear, known to science only about 200 years ago.

- The Torah puts itself at risk of devastation by predicting the likes of: The Kosel will never be destroyed, no species of fish will ever be found to have scales and no fins, only the Jews can make Israel flourish, the precise details of the destruction of the second Bais Hamikdash, written much before it happened, only one species of animal, the pig, has split hooves and does not chew its cud, etc…

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