

The Secret Of Joy

By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

The lives we lead as Jews are unique in many ways. Take the month of *Adar*, for example. Regardless of what our situation is, *Adar* obligates us to be happy. We could be worried about the coronavirus, or working too hard in a seemingly Sisyphean battle to make ends meet. We can be longing for a good *shtetter* or a career, or we could be stuck in a dead-end job, and then we open up the *Mishnah Berurah* and find the *halacha* that since it is *Adar*, we have to be increasingly happy.

We wonder how the *halacha* can demand from us not only to be happy, but to be happier. We have it hard enough with the various pressures we are forced to contend with daily, and now we have a new one. On top of everything, we now also have to be happy.

We wonder how that can be. Firstly, isn't *halacha* about things we must do and things we must not do? Since when does *halacha* dictate our emotions? There are people who have really miserable lives. How can we demand of them that they be happy? Obviously, there is more to happiness than we tend to believe.

The Declaration of Independence declares that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are unalienable rights of every American citizen. We all have the right to pursue happiness, but we are sometimes confounded by how to go about it.

People think that if they would be able to do a \$10,000,000 deal, they would be happy. Others think that if they could just hop on a plane and go to Miami for a week or two, they would be happy. If only I could afford what my neighbor has, I would be happy.

In truth, happiness is a sense of spiritual contentment. To be really happy in a way that nothing can displace your happiness, it has to be rooted in something real. A temporary fix is just that – temporary. It only lasts as long as the fix does. If you are sad and you buy yourself a great chocolate-covered ice cream cone filled with the best flavors and topped with colored sprinkles, you will be happy as you look forward to eating it, and then as you eat it, and for as long as the memory of the experience remains. Once that is gone, your happiness will dissipate as well.

A person who lusts for money and power will never have enough money and power to satisfy himself. The more money a person acquires, the more obligations he has and the more possessions he covets. Until he made his first \$15 million, he didn't feel the need to fly on a private plane, but once he reached that level of wealth, it's beneath him to travel with regular people any longer. He needs that plane, and if he doesn't have it, he gets depressed. He needs so many things and is not happy until he gets them, and once he gets them, he needs more. And just when he thinks that he finally made it, he reads in *Crain's* that some other *macher* did a big deal and is now much wealthier than him. And he's back on the hamster wheel once again.

A person who craves honor and recognition can never get enough, because there is always someone who will not bow to him, ruining everything for him. See *Haman*.

A person who is connected to Hashem and understands that whatever happens is for the greater good can be joyful despite his physical condition and hardships. Happiness must come from within you, and the way to attain long-lasting contentment is by engaging in activities that nourish your soul and give your life meaning.

The story of *Purim* reinforces the concept not to become saddened by events. The story played out over a long period, and every day, when the Jews of Shushan and beyond checked the news, all they found were more reasons to

fret. There was a new king and people didn't know what to make of him. Was he a good man or not? Was he intelligent or was he a dope? Maybe in the past he was a decent person, but when his administration took over, it was all downhill and he seemed to be losing it. He appointed anti-Semites to high positions in the administration and they were making life tough for the Jewish people.

The anti-Semites became more emboldened, and the king actually sold out the Jews to their worst enemy, who announced that he would lead an insurrection and have all the Jews killed. There was no way out and nowhere to run. They had all but given up.

The king's second wife was a *frum* girl, but she didn't seem to be helping the Jews much. The people were confounded and worried. They couldn't make sense of what was going on. And then, under the leadership of Mordechai, they *davened* and did *teshuvah* for their misdeeds. The tough times brought everyone together and there was more unity than there had been in a long time.

After everyone had tried everything and given up hope, a miracle happened and the Jews were able to beat back and kill their enemies. As they looked back and studied the events of the prior few years, they saw *Hakadosh Boruch Hu's* handprints on everything that had transpired. They realized that every event that had taken place and caused them to be increasingly sad was actually part of a Divine plan that brought them deliverance from their brief *golus*.

As we are reminded of that time when *Adar* comes around, we become a little happier, realizing that what is happening in our lives is also coordinated by Hashem. We are reminded that although things don't seem to be going according to plan, in fact they are. We smile with that realization, waiting for the day that the solution arrives, and we are able to understand Hashem's actions.

The *Megillah* relates that the *chachomim* at the time of the *Purim* miracle instituted the practice of sending *mishloach manos* on *Purim*. *Chazal* interpret the *mitzvah* as an obligation to send a friend two different types of food.

By examining the meaning of the words used to define the obligation, we can understand the *mitzvah*. *Mishloach* means to send, and *manos*, which is the plural of *manna*, means portions. Thus, the literal commandment is not to send foods, but to send portions to a friend. *Chazal* explain that the portions required are food portions. But perhaps we can also understand that we should not be satisfied just with sending a nice *mishloach manos*, but we should also send people portions of what they need.

People who are sick can use our *tefillos* and messages of hope, inspiring them to have the courage to continue battling the disease without giving up. Others are worried about how they will be able to afford the many expenses coming up. We can help them with more than encouragement. Someone else we know is having a hard time juggling all his responsibilities. We can give them doses of support and encouragement. Others we know are lonely and can use a phone call or a short visit to let them know that people care about them and they aren't all alone in the world.

Everyone can use something. *Purim* is time for us to do what we can to deliver portions of what they need to be happy and joyous.

The *posuk* in *Shmuel Alef* (1:4-5) uses the term *manna* in connection with a narrative describing how Elkana would go to Shilo to offer *karbanos*. When he would go, he would give *mannos* to his wife Peninah and all her sons and daughters. And to Chana he would give "*manna achas apayim, ki es Chana ohev, vaHashem sogar rachmah.*" Elkana would give Chana a double portion, because he loved her and she had no children. The *Radak* explains that Elkana gave her a respectable portion intended to remove her sadness and anger.

The portion that Elkana gave to Chana is the *manna* that we are to deliver on *Purim*. By giving the people we love and care about *manna achas apayim*, double portions, we can help assuage their pain over the things in their lives that aren't going the way they would like. Through *mishloach manos*, we can soothe aching hearts and smoothen out ruffled feathers. The *mitzvah* is to spread happiness and joy. The *mitzvah* is to go from friend to friend with portions of what they require in order to bring them joy.

Every person was put on this earth to fulfill his or her unique mission. We fulfill our mission in life by giving of ourselves to others. If we use our time properly, studying Torah, performing *mitzvos*, effecting positive change and engendering happiness for others, our lives will be imbued with satisfaction and happiness.

Successful people are those who help better others. Successful people work to help others get ahead. They help people find happiness.

The *Rambam* delineates for us the secret to happiness in *Hilchos Megillah* (2:17), writing, "There is no greater joy than to gladden the hearts of the poor and orphans and widows and *geirim*. And the one who brings joy to (these) sad people is compared to the *Shechinah*, as it says in *Yeshayah* (57:15), "For this is what the One who is uplifted and exalted who lives forever and whose name is Holy, I exist in exaltedness and holiness, but I am with the despondent and the lowly, to give life to those whose spirit is low and whose hearts are crushed."

The secret of happiness and joy and the essence of life are wrapped up in the message of *Purim*.

Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman was the *rov* of Ponovezh in Lithuania prior to the war. Everything that he had there was destroyed. He lost most of his family, townspeople, and *talmidim* of the *yeshiva* he established there. Unbroken, he arrived in Israel and resolved to rebuild. It became his life mission, as he set

about buying property, drawing up architectural plans, and raising money to establish Yeshivas Ponovezh once again.

He continued building *yeshivos* and raising funds to maintain them for the rest of his life. As he grew old and suffered from a variety of maladies, he continued his marathon of activity, traveling around the world raising money. Someone asked him from where he derived the energy to keep on going, energetic and happy as he dragged himself around. He revealed his secret.

"Many years ago," he began, "when I was a very young boy, on *Purim*, my parents would send *mishloach manos* to the *rov* of our *shtetel*. There were a few brothers in the family and my father would hold a raffle to choose which one of us would have the honor of bringing the cake our mother baked for the occasion, together with a bottle of wine, to the *rov* and *rebbezin*."

"One year, a few days before *Purim*, my father came home bursting with joy and grabbed his sons together in a circle and danced with them. He explained the cause of his intense joy. He said, 'Every year, mommy prepares the *mishloach manos* that we send to the *rov* and the *rebbezin*. This year, I am going to be sending my own *mishloach manos* to the *rov*. You see, dear children, a peddler of *seforim* came to town. Among his *seforim*, he had for sale a *Gemara Bava Basra* from the Vilna Shas.'

"In those days, barely anyone owned a complete *Shas*, let alone the beautiful newly-printed Vilna edition, and to have even a single Vilna volume was a big deal.

"I bought it,' my father said, 'to give to the *rov* on *Purim*.'

"We were too young to understand the enormity of the gift. My brother won the raffle to bring the *rov* the cake and wine, and I was honored with carrying that heavy volume and giving it to the *rov*. As soon as I handed it to him and told him that it was a personal *mishloach manos* from my father, he broke out in a

wide smile. He held the *Gemara* high as if it were a *Sefer Torah* and began singing songs and dancing around the table with it, as if it were *Simchas Torah*.

"We stood on the side with the *rebbetzin*, transformed as we watched him dance and sing with an awe-inspiring happiness that I shall never forget. When he finished, he asked the *rebbetzin* if she would agree to serve the *seudah* an hour later than planned so that he could go into his room and study from the *Gemara*. 'That will be your *mishloach manos* to me,' he said to her. She readily agreed. He once again picked up the *Gemara* and began dancing."

Said the famed Ponovezher Rov, "I was but a child of nine years old and had no concept of why the *rov* was so happy because he had a *Gemara*, but I resolved right then that if a new *Gemara* can make a person that happy because it will enable the revered *rov* to learn better, I was going to dedicate my life to spreading and increasing the study of Torah. The joy that I saw expressed that day is what keeps me going until this very day."

The secret of happiness, the secret of satisfaction, the secret of accomplishment, is rooted in Torah. The highest form of happiness is derived from the study of Torah. You don't have to believe me. Go and watch people who have very few physical possessions as they study Torah. You can see that nothing else is important to them as they bask in the wisdom of Hashem's Torah. They are consumed by an eternal joy that overtakes their being. As they learn, they are happier than anyone out there.

"*Kimu vekiblu.*" In the days of the *Purim* miracle, the Jewish people rededicated themselves to Torah and its study, and therefore, "*LaYehudim hoysah orah vesimcha vesason vikor,*" they had every type of joy. "*Kein tihiyeh lonu,*" may we follow their example and earn for ourselves sublime joy, in *Adar*, on *Purim*, and all year round.