

Pulse OF Emunah

ANI
MAAMIN
Foundation

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life

LESSONS

ELUSIVE HAPPINESS

Reproduced from "Living Kiddush Hashem" by Rabbi Shraga Freedman, with permission of ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications.

One of the most effective ways to bring others to Torah is showing them that observance leads to happiness. When people who observe *mitzvos* are happy and fulfilled, the non-observant are more likely to be inspired to follow their example. And when fill our homes with *simcha*, our children are more likely to remain firm in their *Yiddishkeit*.

Happiness is the one thing everyone seeks. It is crucial for mental and physical health alike. At the same time, it is elusive. Everyone is searching for it, many in places where it does not exist. People often think they have found happiness when they have attained nothing more than fleeting fun. Happiness can be described as a state of contentment and serenity. False happiness, on the other hand, is often a temporary feeling of excitement. It may create a "high," but it is no substitute for genuine happiness.

How can one tell the difference between true happiness and mere thrills? Rav Pam zt"l said that the litmus test is permanence: true happiness lasts, while excitement fades after the experience ends.

My *talmid* was an avid football fan. One day, he came to school exhilarated: his team had won the Super Bowl! The next day, though, he was dejected. "Rebbi, it's over," he lamented, as the glow of victory faded. "What do I do now?" I gently explained that he had discovered the difference between happiness and excitement. Pleasure over sports did not afford him a lasting sense of contentment. 



gem

OF THE WEEK

SEEING OUR CHOICES

Based on excerpts from the commentary of Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch zt"l on Chumash, with permission from the publisher.

The whole nation of Jews stood at Har Gerizim and Har Eival, with the Cohanim and Leviim in the valley between the two mountains. The Leviim called out the blessing and curse. When the people responded "Amen", they pronounced to themselves and all future generations the choice between blessing and curse. When Hashem said in 11:26 for us to see that He is putting before us a blessing and curse, it was a transition to the compilation of *mitzvos*, and was for the generation that would enter Eretz Yisrael.

"Re'eh" is not a teaching that is accepted on the basis of another's credibility, rather Hashem addresses us on the basis of everything we experienced ourselves. These experiences have formed a conviction that Hashem has placed our future in our hands — for blessing or curse — through means of the Torah that was communicated to us through Moshe Rabbeinu.

There is a choice between two opposites of blessing and curse, which has been placed before us by Hashem's Torah, and whether we will bring upon ourselves blessing or curse. This depends on us.

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powerful
PRAYER



V'LEYERUSHALAYIM:
THE CHOSEN CITY

Yerushalayim was not only the capital, it was actually designated by Hashem as the dwelling place of His Shechina. When the Jews first came to Eretz Yisrael, the temporary Mishkan was placed in Shilo, with the assumption that a permanent site would be chosen eventually. No one knew where it would be. The Torah calls it "*makom asher yivchar*," a place Hashem would choose. This was the uniqueness of Yerushalayim, and this is what this bracha asks: that the Ribbono Shel Olam once again make it the place where His Presence rests. 

Adapted from Biur Tefillah (Ani Maamin Foundation)

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ELUL IS ALMOST HERE

By Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation

This coming Shabbos we will recite the Birkas Hachodesh for the month of Elul. There are only a mere forty days from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Hakipurim. It's not so simple to get into the Elul mode while we are still engrossed in summer activities. But let us try, while hiking or in the swimming pool, to at least be prepared for Elul when it arrives.

Rav Yisroel Salanter wrote in letter (#14 Ohr Yisroel) "In earlier times, as I know, every person was overtaken by trembling from the holy announcement of the coming of Elul." He notes there an interesting point, that the person who was weaker in his service to Hashem, and seemingly should have had more reason to fear the up and coming judgment, was less frightened by its approach than the person who was on a higher spiritual level.

Rav Yisroel explains this phenomenon with the concept עבירה מטמטמת לבו של אדם. An *aveira* blocks the feelings of the heart, as if there were a signal coming from above to stir our emotions to what we should feel, but it is diminished by this spiritual blockage. And since in our time, (referring to his time), the people of great *yiras shomayim* are no longer with us, we hardly ever see the trembling that accompanies the announcement of Elul. Rav Yisroel, in his great humility, was speaking in relative terms. In his time, and even after, there were certainly very great people who were terribly frightened by the approach of *Yamim Noraim*.

Rav Itzele Peterburger was a *talmid* of his and once fainted when the *chazan* called out "Elul!" When this writer was still a *bachur*, I went to Eretz Yisroel to learn in the Ponivez Yeshiva. The first time I entered the Yeshiva was Friday night, Rosh Chodesh Elul. The saintly Mashgiach Rav Yechezkel Levinstein was speaking. He banged on the *shtender* numerous times, and shouted (in Yiddish) Elul! It is Elul! Over and over again, until you felt Elul in your bones. I can picture the scene as if I were still there.

I once needed some advice from the Mashgiach two days before Yom Kippur. I went up to his room which looked out over the whole *bais midrash* and knocked on the door. You could see Yom Kippur on his face. He asked me anxiously if my question could wait till after Yom Kippur, and when I said yes, he told me to come back the morning after Yom Kippur, and closed the door. One could feel that he was in the middle of his preparations for the day of judgement. It hasn't been an easy time for the Jewish people. Will things get better, or *chas v'shalom*, worse? Only the One above knows the answer. Let's all try to focus on the serious days ahead, so that hopefully Klal Yisroel will be judged positively 🕯

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Observing the Torah is in itself part of the blessing. It does not come only as a result of obedience of and doing mitzvos, but materializes in the act of the *mitzva* itself.

The advancement of our whole being is in the spiritual and moral act of faithfully observing the Torah, resulting in every time we carry out a *mitzvah*, we bring blessing on ourselves.

However, the curse — the loss of all self-worth and losing our distinct identity — is only a *result* of disobedience. Every step away from the Torah is a step toward *avodah zorah*.

From this it follows that every advocacy or belief of *avodah zorah* is considered as a denial of the entire Torah, and conversely every denial of *avodah zorah* is an acceptance of the whole Torah (*Sifre*).

This statement is the very antithesis of the notion that "belief in one G-d" is sufficient to qualify a person as a complete Jew even if he turns his back on all of Hashem's commandments.

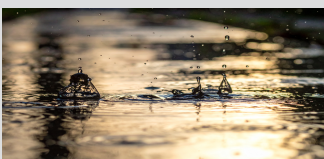
Here, we are saying that the recognition of Hashem's unity is linked with our personal acknowledgment that we are duty-bound to observe all Hashem's *mitzvos*.

The "belief in one G-d" is not simply in Hashem's existence, it is realizing His rule over us, while submitting our whole fate and all our actions to His will 🕯



wonder WORLD

CONTRASTING CLIMATE



Can there be different climates next to each other?

In the mountainous climate of the Sierra Nevada Range moist air from the ocean is pushed by the wind and rises up the mountain slope. The air is cooled and condensed, dropping heavy rain and snow on the windward side. The air loses most of its moisture when it passes over the peak. The now dry air sinks down, what is called the leeward side, warming while absorbing moisture, creating an arid desert right next to a lush forest. This is called the rain shadow effect. Animals adapt and thrive in their separate environments. The desert dwelling Great Basin Pocket Mouse lives in the lower dry desert climate while Pacific Fisher makes their home in the forest 🕯