Jewish Tribune – Ki Sovo

**True Happiness**

“Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” is, said Thomas Jefferson, a self-evident truth.

And yet, there is always something else. The pursuit of happiness is just that. An elusive pursuit. Like the mechanical rabbit at the greyhound races, it is something people chase but rarely find.

And if you think it is “*that* new car” or “*that* new job” or “*that* life”, you are mistaken. As a wise man once said: “If you are not happy while getting rich, chances are that you will not be happy when you do get rich.” And so too, with all the other things that people think will make them happy.

The Torah of course is our guide for life. And this week’s sedra contains the secret of what real happiness is.

The possuk (Devorim 26,11) reads:

וְשָׂמַחְתָּ בְכָל הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְךָ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ וּלְבֵיתֶךָ ... וְנָתַתָּה לַלֵּוִי, לַגֵּר לַיָּתוֹם וְלָאַלְמָנָה, וְאָכְלוּ בִשְׁעָרֶיךָ, וְשָׂבֵעוּ.

And you shall rejoice with all the good that Hashem, your G-d, has granted you and your household … and you shall give them to the Levi, to the stranger, the orphan and the widow, so that they can eat in your cities and be satisfied.

Therein lies the secret. Sharing with others creates happiness.

This is echoed in the Rambam in Hilchos Yom Tov (6,18):

... וכשהוא אוכל ושותה חייב להאכיל "לגר ליתום ולאלמנה" עם שאר העניים האמללים, אבל מי שנועל דלתות חצרו ואוכל ושותה הוא ובניו ואשתו ואינו מאכיל ומשקה לעניים ולמרי נפש אין זו שמחת מצוה אלא שמחת כריסו.

And when he eats and drinks (on Yom Tov), he is obligated to feed the stranger, orphan and widow and other downtrodden people. Anyone, however, who locks the doors of his courtyard and eats and drinks along with his wife and children, without giving anything to eat and drink to the poor and embittered souls, does not observe a simcha of mitzva but indulges in the celebration of his stomach.

Achieving real simcha on Yom Tov involves sharing and thinking of others.

And perhaps this is the explanation of a difficult and strange possuk in the tochacha, which appears later in our sedra.

After listing the dire punishments that litter the low points of Jewish history, the possuk (Devorim 28, 45-47) says:

וּבָאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל הַקְּלָלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה, וּרְדָפוּךָ וְהִשִּׂיגוּךָ, עַד הִשָּׁמְדָךְ: כִּי לֹא שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ לִשְׁמֹר מִצְוֺתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו, אֲשֶׁר צִוָּךְ ... תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָבַדְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוּב לֵבָב, מֵרֹב כֹּל.

All these curses will befall you, pursuing you and overtaking you to destroy you, because you did not listen to Hashem your G-d, to observe His commandments and statutes which He commanded you … because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with happiness and with gladness of heart, when [you had an] abundance of everything.

Really?

All the horrific travails that has befallen Klal Yisroel over the centuries is because we didn’t serve Hashem with simcha? I shook the lulav, but without exuberance?

Perhaps the meaning is in line with what we have said above.

True happiness is sharing with others the gifts that Hashem blesses us with. Closing our doors, digging our moat and raising our drawbridge is not the route to happiness. In fact, it represents a skewed attitude of what life is about and is so antithetical to what the Torah expects of us, it could lead to the dire consequences of the tochacha.

The Gemoro in Shabbos (153a) describes the banquet awaiting people in the world to come. According to one opinion in the Gemoro, those who were wise and spent their lives productively preparing for olam haba, will partake and enjoy the feast but those who did not, will go hungry.

How can two groups of people sit at the same banquet, with some eating and some not?

The Ba’alei Mussar describe it as a feast without elbows. In other words, everyone is seated at this banquet, but no one has use of their elbows. Everyone has outstretched arms and cannot bring the food to their mouths.

The wicked sit there and sadly gaze at the delicious food in front of them, unable to partake. They can reach it, but they can’t bend their elbows to put the food into their mouths. The tzaddikim have a solution - they feed each other.

It is a moshol but it is a solution that is borne out of a lifetime of giving. Wicked people find it hard to see beyond themselves. The righteous have spent their lives training themselves to be outward focussed and can enjoy the ultimate reward in the world to come.

Many studies now point to the benefit of volunteering. The main findings of a recent comprehensive review that looked at over 17,000 published reports and included evidence from 158 studies from the UK and internationally are that volunteering is associated with enhanced wellbeing, including improved life satisfaction, increased happiness and decreases in symptoms of depression.

An insightful friend of mine recently told me that while many have concerns about today’s youngsters, their most outstanding virtue is their volunteering and chesed. Countless teenagers spending so much of their free time with wonderful organisations like KEF and Shabbat Walk, selflessly giving to those less fortunate than themselves.

So that is the secret to happiness – sharing and focussing on others. Something to think about as we head towards the Yamim Noraim.

**Rabbi Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**