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The Spirituality of a Smile



Are you seeking true happiness? Still looking for that million-dollar smile? A search on google.com for “happiness” listed over 13,000,000 sites! With everlasting happiness harder to find than ever before, we should not be surprised that so many people are looking for help. After all who wants to be sad? The search for happiness is seemingly endless.

Money. Cosmetic surgery. Food. Cars. Drugs. Relationships. Alcohol. Clothes. You name it, people try it all! And yet they still come up empty-handed. But they do not give up. The search continues with a younger wife, or a brand new sports car, a new wardrobe or that diamond necklace they just have to get! What about you? Have you found true lasting happiness yet?

Go ahead, keep trying, but let me try to save you some time.

The Short Cut

Ever notice how some people are always able to be content and bounce back, no matter what the circumstances? This is not a gift or a talent. It is a skill that they have developed. Surprised? Well, guess what: You too can put to work their technique and finally experience true happiness and inner peace, while at the same time increasing your spirituality and connection to God!

Not a bad deal—right? Sounds like a win-win situation!

Let's Begin...

In Judaism, health does not depend on simply eating an apple a day. Rather, you achieve true health when there is proper balance between body and soul. For

thousands of years, Judaism has taught us that happiness is the fuel for the soul. An airplane may be cleared for flight, but without gasoline, it cannot move an inch. Similarly, Judaism teaches us that our body may be in the best physical shape possible, but we cannot begin to elevate ourselves without the spiritual fuel known as—happiness. In fact, King David acts as our spiritual fitness trainer by advising us all to, “Serve God with happiness!”¹ Several years later, his son, King Solomon, continued where his father left off, telling us that happiness is not only a way to increase spirituality, but it also banishes sickness. As he put it, “A happy heart is good for healing.”² Therefore, by achieving true happiness you maintain a healthy body and soul.

Do you still need to be convinced that there is a connection between happiness and spirituality?

Well, the Midrash³ teaches us that at Mount Sinai, God spoke to the Jewish people in a language of happiness.⁴ Elsewhere, the Midrash enlightens us by remarking that, “The authentic spirit of Torah (the Bible) can be experienced only through happiness.”⁵ The Talmud⁶ also reiterates this concept. It tells us that happiness is an essential ingredient towards achieving true spirituality. What’s more, the Sages teach us that, “The Divine Presence only rests upon a person who is in a

happy mood!”⁷ As such, our Sages are telling us that happiness is both a prerequisite to Divine service and a key ingredient in this service as well.

What the Kabbalists Say...

Around the same time that an Italian navigator, Giovanni de Verrazano, discovered the island of Manhattan, a baby boy was born to a distinguished family of Spanish descent in Tzfat, Israel. This boy, Rabbi Moshe Kordovero (1522-1570), also referred to by the acronym “the RaMaK,” ultimately had a monumental influence on Jewish mysticism. In his major work, *The Palm Tree of Deborah*, Rabbi Moshe expressed the following idea, “The Torah ideal is to greet each and every person with a pleasant facial expression.”⁸

Moreover, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria (1534-1572), arguably the greatest Kabbalist in the past five hundred years, also comments on the connection between happiness and spirituality. Just how great was this man? He is often referred to as the ARI, an acronym for the Hebrew translation of the Godly Rabbi Isaac. No other scholar ever had the extra Hebrew letter *Aleph*, standing for Godly, prefixed to his name. This was a sign of what his contemporaries thought of him. Furthermore, just by a person's scent he was able to know all of his actions! What was the key ingredient

that he used to reach the secret path leading to spiritual heights? He states emphatically that if he had not connected to God in a happy mood, he would not have mastered the deep mystical secrets of the world.⁹

Lastly, one of the great Chasidic leaders, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810), also maintained the importance of achieving happiness. He was the great grandson of Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (1698–1760), the founder of the spiritual movement known as Chasidic Judaism. Rebbe Nachman was well respected for his knowledge of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah. He is famous for saying, “It is a great mitzvah (commandment) to live life in a constant state of happiness.”¹⁰ Simply put, Rebbe Nachman believed that anyone who mastered the great mitzvah of happiness could climb the spiritual ladder of life.

Regarding happiness, it is worth noting that not one of the commentators sees happiness as being one of the 613 commandments of the Torah. Nonetheless, as a Chassidic Rebbe once said, “Although happiness is not a positive commandment, and sadness is not a sin, happiness can bring a person to such great heights as no mitzvah can; and sadness can bring a person to such depths as no sin can.”¹¹ We have just seen that for thousands of years, from King David to

the greatest of Kabbalists, happiness and spirituality seem to go hand-in-hand. This being true, perhaps there is something in the Jewish tradition that will help us in our pursuit of true happiness.

Let Us Look Further...

Judaism has a small six-chapter instruction manual that guides a person in the areas of morals and ethics. Compiled in 190 C.E., *Ethics of the Fathers* represents 1,500 years of Jewish wisdom. This book of Talmudic literature contains the “greatest hits,” (the greatest sayings) of our Sages from the time of the Talmud. In the fourth chapter to this small but powerful volume, the Sages ponder the question of who is truly rich. The Sages answer with the following response: “The one who is happy with what he has.”¹² In other words, if you appreciate what you have, then you will feel rich and satisfied. If you do not appreciate what you have, then you will never feel rich and satisfied. This advice is contrary to the popular belief that happiness is dependent upon what you own. Judaism reminds us that true happiness is a state of mind. Even a person living on a low budget can still be considered wealthy. On the other hand, a person can have all the riches of the world, and possess whatever his or her heart

desires, and yet never be satisfied. Interestingly, the famous poet and playwright, William Shakespeare (1564-1616), expresses this very concept as well; as he phrased it, "Tis the mind that makes the body rich."¹³

Secrets of the Hebrew Language

Did you know that every Jew has the ability to become a master in the art of appreciation? Let us investigate this concept by looking at the inner essence of the Hebrew language. The Sages refer to it as a holy language,¹⁴ for it was through this language that God created the world, by speaking the world into existence. Every letter, large or small, despite its apparent simplicity, contains special secrets, significance, and meanings locked inside it. Let us learn how to become a master in the art of appreciation by analyzing the Hebrew word for Jew.

The Hebrew word for the Jewish people is *Yehudim*. The name derives from Yehuda (Judah), one of the 12 sons of Yaakov (Jacob). There were 11 other names to choose from; why was the name of this particular son chosen to symbolize the Jews?

When Leah, one of Jacob's four wives, had her fourth son, she said, "Now I must be grateful to God."¹⁵ The Midrash states that Leah knew prophetically that Yaakov was to

have 12 sons. Consequently, she assumed that each wife's share would be three sons. When Leah gave birth to a fourth son, she wanted to permanently instill her initial feelings of appreciation and happiness in her descendants to ensure that her feelings would not be diminished with the passing of time. To do this, she built her gratitude into the very name of her child, Yehudah. As Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk (1787-1859) explains, the name Yehudah comes from the root word *hod*, appreciation. Hence, the very name for a Jew in Hebrew, *Yehudi*, represents an awareness and appreciation for everything.

Furthermore, Rabbi Elie Munk (1900-1978) notes that the name Yehuda also holds within itself the four-letter name of God—a *yud*, then a *heh*, then a *vav*, then a *heh*: the Tetragrammaton.¹⁶ As he put it, "In the name Yehuda, the ineffable Name of God is glimpsed as it shines forth on the Jews. Their destiny is forever linked to the Divine Name..."¹⁷

How can we master the art of appreciation and have the name of God shine upon us?

It's simple.

Let us begin by following in the footsteps of our Matriarch Leah, who clearly mastered the art of appreciation by appreciating her fourth son as an unexpected gift.

How Do We Do This?

The Tikunei Zohar points out that the Hebrew word *machshava*, thought, contains the same letters as the Hebrew word *b'simcha*, being in a state of happiness.¹⁸ This alludes to the fact that the key to happiness is found through our minds. Thus, in order to master the art of appreciation, we must train ourselves to weed out any negative feelings that kill happiness, and foster thoughts that enhance our appreciation.

So how do you learn to appreciate what you have? You feel stuck at your job, you have a car payment overdue, and on top of it all, your babysitter just canceled on you an hour ago! Are you happy? It's simply impossible to be in a state of happiness in this case!

Or is it?

A Practical Technique...

For thousands of years, the Sages have used a particular technique that has been effective in mastering the art of appreciation. The Sages know that life is really one big roller-coaster. Nevertheless, the Sages help you to put everything in perspective, from the minute you wake up in the morning until you go to sleep at night.

What are the first words a pious Jew

says upon arising from bed in the morning? A person recites a simple statement of appreciation for renewing the body and soul. The prayer begins with the Hebrew words *modeh ani*, “I thank you.” Let’s be honest. Some people have difficulty expressing gratitude. Spirituality requires overcoming such reluctance. From the moment a Jew wakes up, he identifies with the fact that he is a *Yehudi*. By saying this one short, simple phrase, you can set the spiritual tone of the day and begin mastering the art of appreciation.

Yet another example of ancient wisdom is found in the structure of the Jewish morning prayers. The Sages designed the morning prayers to begin with small, brief, and basic statements to God. Look closely. You will find blessings thanking God for giving us our soul, for giving us life, and for giving us the understanding to discern between day and night. Should morning prayers really begin with such basic statements?

Yes.

The Sages were aware that you cannot simply feel devotion or a desire to cleave to God. Rather, only through recognizing all of the seemingly small things that God provides for this world free of charge will a person realize the greatness of God. Only out of true appreciation will a person genuinely praise

God with lofty and substantial blessings.

By structuring the blessings in this format, Judaism provides us with an important message: Take small “baby steps.” You can learn to appreciate anything. However, if you zoom forward, you will ultimately “crash and burn.”

Let us apply this ancient wisdom specifically to the pursuit of happiness. Before we begin, remember, nothing God commands is unattainable. Your instinct may respond by saying, “Impossible. I can’t help the way I feel!”

Wrong!

We are all quite capable of controlling our thoughts and our feelings. It is very difficult to break old habits (I will be the first one to admit, it is not an easy task). But nobody ever said that the road to true happiness would be a quick fix. It is not easy, but it is *possible*.

In order to succeed, accustom your eyes to appreciate all of the small things in life.

Why?

Because often the things that count most in life we find the greatest difficulty in recognizing. However, by using the “baby step technique,” you will soon begin to appreciate and take notice of the grass, the fact that you are clothed, or your healthy body. While stuck in traffic, you will be thankful for the beautiful sunset that accompanies you on the drive

home, or just the fact that you have a running car, food to eat, or even Starbucks coffee, and so on and so on....

Interestingly, Albert Einstein (1879-1955), who was considered to be one of the wisest of all men, was aware of this technique as well. As he put it, “There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

Let’s be honest. Training your eyes to “take inventory” of every little detail in life is a difficult task. However, if you can afford just ONE minute a day, you will successfully implement the technique mastered by the wisest of men, become a master of the art of appreciation, and achieve everlasting happiness!

List of Personal Blessings

People often marvel at the many accomplishments of Helen Keller (1880-1968). She visited 39 countries during her lifetime, and was the first deaf and blind person to earn a college degree. In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Regarding happiness, she said, “When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.” She was aware that

many of us, far too often, blind ourselves to the happiness that she experienced on a daily basis.

So how do we open up our eyes?

Well, it's quiet easy, and it takes only one minute! While waiting for a red light to turn green or a file to download, seize the moment! Jot down just **one** thing that you appreciate in life. Remember that you have: two hands, feet, eyes, ears, the sense of smell, or a good friend. Repeat this exercise everyday, and after one month you will have compiled a list of **30** different things that you personally appreciate!

When you are having a rough day at work, use your List of Personal Blessings (LPB) to place everything in perspective. Step by step, with your LPB in hand, all of your doors of happiness will remain open. What's more, you will gradually master the art of appreciation—and build a solid foundation towards a lifetime of true happiness and that million-dollar smile!

3 Ways to Master the LPB

- Consistency is vitally important. Do not skip a day. Remember it's just **one** minute. We all have **one** extra minute!
- Focus. When you are writing, think about things that you see as a blessing and appreciate.

- Never leave home without it! Keep your LPB with you. Write it on a small note card so that it fits in a pocket or a purse. You never know when or where it will come in handy.

What the Kabbalists Say...

What happens if you find a hole in your pocket, and realize that your LPB is missing! Or you were late for work and left your LPB at home? What aids are available to help put you in a state of happiness? Let's see what advice the great thinkers of Jewish Mysticism offer.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov suggests that when you do not feel happy, you should fake it!¹⁹ That's right, pretend to be happy. Is that too hard to do? Let us put it in perspective. How often do you find yourself at a social gathering that you just do not want to be at? And yet, you fake a smile to appear polite? Why not put a smile on your face when you feel unhappy? Try it. You will soon find that a smile, even a put-on smile, is contagious. Furthermore, research shows that when you smile, blood flow to the brain is increased, endorphins (painkilling hormones that give you a sense of well-being) are released, and levels of stress hormones drop!²⁰

Another famous Kabbalist, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, also known by his acronym the RaMCHaL, was born in Padua, Italy, in

1707. He was a child prodigy who quickly mastered the Talmud and even wrote plays! The Ramchal clearly attained all of the levels of piety, purity, and holy spirit that are found in his many works. By the young age of twenty, his speeches drew young and old people to return to their Jewish roots, and his study hall was a flourishing center of Kabbalistic study. He later moved to Amsterdam (1732) and worked as a lens grinder. It was during this time period that he composed his major work, *The Path of the Just*. In this book, we find that Rabbi Luzzatto also believed in this method by writing that your exterior stimulates a reaction in your interior.²¹ Simply put, in most cases, your behavior is going to awaken your spirit, not the reverse. Jewish wisdom tells us that if you put on a smile, ultimately you will find reason to smile.²²

In reality, this Kabbalistic insight stems from the following Mishnah:²³ “Greet every person with a cheerful face.”²⁴ Let us now analyze the words of our Sages. The Mishnah uses the Hebrew words, *beseiver panim yafot*, with a cheerful face. Grammatically, the wording presents a problem. The expression *panim yafot* means “cheerful face.” But what does the seemingly additional word *beseiver* accomplish?

The Hebrew word *beseiver* is derived from the Hebrew word *savar*, to suppose,

believe, or imagine. By inserting the word *beseiver* into the text, the Sages are teaching us, "Receive everyone with a cheerful face, *even if you are not in a cheerful mood!* By adding the additional word, our Sages are giving us a phenomenal insight. When you meet another person, despite any negative feelings or emotions, get yourself into the habit of greeting them with the image of a cheerful face.²⁵

In truth, great contemporary leaders have also implemented this ancient method. After being shot in an assassination attempt, President Ronald Reagan made a humorous remark to show that he was cheerful. Even if he felt discouraged or hurt, he wanted to show no sign of this. He knew that if the leader appeared to be down and morose it would rub off on the rest of the country.

So if you find yourself without your LPB, get your endorphins moving and put on a big smile!

Music, Song, and Mysticism

Traditionally, many Chassidic masters used music to increase their level of happiness and spirituality. Let us briefly explore the mystical ramification of music according to Judaism.

Music is a unique language. It has the ability to powerfully impact a person with the

rainbow of emotions, including happiness. According to Jewish tradition, when God created the universe, he discussed with the angels the concept of giving humanity the ability to sing, the ability to play, and the ability to dance. The angels believed that music should stay where it was—in Heaven. Ultimately, God decided to give us the gift of music, so that even if we are stuck in our material world, we will have music to lift our spirits into another place.

Historically, great Jewish prophets used music to place their minds in the proper spiritual mindset. Elishah, the prophet, commanded his people, “Now play for me the instruments of music...and when the musician will play...the hand of God will be affixed upon me.”²⁶ We see from here that music has the ability to bring someone to one of the highest levels of spirituality; namely, prophecy. In fact, the Zohar²⁷ says that music is the language of spiritual worlds, and through music a person can elevate himself into this spiritual realm. Furthermore, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov teaches that the spiritual roots of music and song are very deep and can lift our hearts and raise our spirits.²⁸

Therefore, if you ever find yourself without your List of Personal Blessings, tap into the spiritually uplifting dimensions of music and song. But remember that music is like a

syringe into the heart and soul. It can be used for the good or it can be used for the bad. Thus, it is important to choose the right kind of music; music that is powerful and conducive to spiritual growth.

The Spiritual Month Of Happiness

Did you know that there is even a month in the Jewish calendar that symbolizes happiness?

That's right!

The Talmud teaches us, "With the advent of Adar, we increase our happiness."²⁹ However, before we begin to understand this statement, let us learn a little bit about the Jewish calendar.

The Jewish calendar consists of 12 lunar months. However, Jewish holidays follow the solar year. The lunar year is roughly 354.3 days in length, while the solar year is roughly 365.5 (approximately 11 days longer). Consequently, certain festivals, such as Passover, would occur in the wrong season! To prevent this mishap from occurring, the lunar calendar is regularly adjusted to conform to the solar calendar. This is done through the periodic addition of a thirteenth month, known as Adar Sheni (second Adar). This event takes place seven times in a nineteen-year lunar cycle. Why not create two months of Kislev, the month that we celebrate Chanukah?

It is by no coincidence that the Sages designed the calendar with two months of Adar. By having two months of happiness, the Sages stress the continued importance of happiness within the context of the Jewish year.

Furthermore, not only is Adar a highly spiritual month because of the increase of happiness, but according to Jewish tradition, Moshe (Moses) was born and died on the 7th of Adar.³⁰ The Sages give Moshe the title *Rabbenu*, our teacher. What does he teach us in regards to this spiritual month?

In many ways we can view Moshe as a “finished person.” He reached the highest level of spirituality that a person can reach, and received the greatest prophecy that a person will ever see. He embraced the great level of happiness found in this month, and was able to reach the highest spiritual level. As such we should utilize the symbolism found in this month and focus on our appreciation and happiness. By doing so, we also can elevate our level of spirituality.

Do You Want to Go to Heaven?

Still need to be convinced that by simply maintaining a state of happiness you can increase your spirituality?

Well, this story should do it for you: The famous Rabbi Baroka of Huza was fond of

visiting the marketplace at Lapet. Upon one particular visit, Eliyahu (Elijah) the prophet appeared to him. Rabbi Baroka asked his visitor, "Is there anyone among all these people who will have a share in the world to come?"

Eliyahu answered apologetically, "Sorry, there is none."

Later that very day, two men came to the marketplace, and Eliyahu said to Rabbi Baroka, "You see those two men over there? They will have a share in the world to come!"

With growing interest the Rabbi approached the two men and asked, "What is your occupation?"

They replied, "We are comedians. When we see a person who is sad, we cheer him up."³¹

Most of us are not professional comedians. Some people are just not that funny. However, if you properly implement the ancient wisdom of the Sages, you will no longer need to pursue happiness. Rather, you will achieve real lifelong happiness, and fulfill the words of King David, ""Serve God with happiness!" Remember, with a simple warm smile you can brighten someone's day, cheer a person up, release some endorphins, serve God, and begin to reserve yourself a seat in Heaven.

The Least You Need to Know

- It is very difficult to break old habits. It is definitely not easy, yet it is *possible*.
- Remember, to take baby steps.
- Use your List of Personal Blessings. In time, you will master the art of appreciation and ascend towards true happiness.
- In times of true desperation, FAKE IT!
- If you need to, turn on uplifting music that is conducive to spiritual growth.

Chapter 1 Notes

¹ Psalms 100:2

² Proverbs 17:22

³ The allegorical part of the Oral Law.

⁴ Midrash Tanna D'Bei Eliyahu Rabbah, Ch. 13

⁵ Midrash Tanna D'Bei Eliyahu Zutta, Ch. 17

⁶ The Talmud is considered an authoritative record of rabbinic discussions on Jewish law, Jewish ethics, customs, legends, and stories. It is a fundamental source of legislation, customs, case histories, and moral exhortations. The Talmud comprises two components, the Mishnah and the Gemara. It expands on the earlier writings in the Torah in general and in the Mishnah in particular, and is the basis for all later codes of Jewish law. Next to the Torah itself, it is the most important text for the Jew, providing the basis for all Jewish law, practice, and theology.

⁷ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat, 30b

⁸ The Palm Tree of Deborah, ch 2. A bi-lingual edition is translated and annotated by Rabbi Moshe Miller, New York, Feldheim, 1993.

⁹ Rabbi Yisrael Meir Hakohen, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim Mishnah Berurah, ch. 669:11. See also Rabbi Yaakov of Polonnoye, Toldot, Yakov Yoseph, Parshat Reah

¹⁰ Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Likutei Moharan, Part 2:24. See also: Kesser Shem Tov Hosofot ch. 169 that states, "In the eyes of Chasidim, joy is considered a biblical commandment, a mitzvah."

¹¹ Rabbi Dovber Pinson, *Inner Rhythms*, pg 52.

¹² *Ethics of the Fathers* 4:1

¹³ *The Taming of the Shrew*, Act 4, scene iii

¹⁴ See Nachmonides, *Exodus* 30:13

¹⁵ *Genesis* 29:35

¹⁶ The Tetragrammaton is the ancient name for God. According to actual count, it occurs 5,410 times in the Torah, being divided among the five books as follows: Genesis 153 times, Exodus 364, Leviticus 285, Numbers 387, Deuteronomy 230 (total in Torah 1,419); Joshua 170, Judges 158, Samuel 423, Kings 467, Isaiah 367, Jeremiah 555, Ezekiel 211, Minor Prophets 345 (total in Prophets 2,696); Psalms 645, Proverbs 87, Job 31, Ruth 16, Lamentations 32, Daniel 7, Ezra-Nehemiah 31, Chronicles 446 (total in Hagiographa 1,295).

¹⁷ *The Call of the Torah: I*, pp. 402-3

¹⁸ Rabbi Matityahu Glazerson, *Torah, Light, and Healing*, pg 157.

¹⁹ Rabbi Nachman's *Wisdom #43*. Note that this advice is similar to the theory of cognitive dissonance, first explored in detail by social psychologist Leon Festinger.

²⁰ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4449199.stm>

²¹ *Path of the Just*, ch. 7.

²² *Talmud Bavli*, *Pesachim* 50b

²³ The word Mishnah literally means instruction. The word Mishnah (pl. Mishnayot) represents the six volumes compiled by Rabbi Judah the Prince: (1) agriculture; (2) Sabbaths, fasts, and festivals; (3)

marriage and divorce; (4) civil and penal laws; (5) sacrifices; (6) holy persons and things. The commentary of the Mishnah is called the Gemara.

²⁴ Ethics of the Fathers 1:15

²⁵ Also see Cohen, Rabbi Simcha Bunim, Rav Avigdor Miller Speaks Volume 2, pg 40

²⁶ 2 Kings 3:15

²⁷ Zohar, Part 3:223b

²⁸ Likutei Moharan. Part 1, ch 3.

²⁹ Talmud Bavli, Taanit 29a

³⁰ See Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 38a

³¹ Talmud Bavli, Taanit 22a