



Pouring Positivity

Two people with an equal amount of money and prestige may be in the same place and doing the same thing, and yet one is miserable and the other one happy. Why? Because of a different mental attitude. "Your attitude determines your altitude on life." Do you see the cup half-empty or half-full? A wise man sees it half-full. In fact, the word חסם is an acronym of חצי כוס מלא, seeing the cup half-full. The formula for happiness is simple: focus on what you have and you will be happy.

When one takes pleasure in what he has, he never has to be envious of anyone else. The best anyone can obtain from possessions, experiences, accomplishments, fame, skills, and so on is happiness. If one has happiness from what he does and has already, then he never has to feel as if he is missing anything, since the ultimate goal of acquiring things is the same as what he presently has: happiness.

When R' Zelig Pliskin was doing research for his book Gateway to Happiness, he asked a certain Torah scholar what he had to say about sadness. His immediate reply: "The world is so beautiful, how can anyone be sad?" This is in contrast to the person he asked a few days earlier, who remarked, "How can anyone be happy? The world is so filled with problems and misfortune?" Two people living in the same city at the same time can live in entirely different worlds, although they both have the potential to view the world in the same light (Gateway to Happiness, p. 169). Both are healthy and have their basic needs met, but their perspective of daily events is vastly different. The world of one is beautiful and full of opportunities for growth, while the other's is the opposite.

The analogy is given of a thermostat that is set, for example, to 72 degrees Fahrenheit. Even if a window is opened and cool air enters, the chill will only be temporary, since the thermostat will make sure the room temperature stays at 72 degrees. In order to change the temperature in the room, one needs to adjust the thermostat. The same is true with life. A good or bad occurrence may change one's mood, but the change will only be temporary, since mood is based on one's outlook on life.

A researcher followed identical twins who were separated at birth. Although they had the same genes, they were raised in different environments, having

been adopted at birth by different parents. The girls were now six years old. The researcher asked one mother how her daughter was doing, to which she replied that she was doing great except for mealtimes. They were always difficult, with constant fights, because the child refused to eat anything unless it had cinnamon on top—cereal, potatoes, noodles, and everything else. When he asked the other mother the same question, she said her daughter was doing amazingly well, and that mealtimes were the easiest. "All you need to do is put cinnamon on her food, and she will eat anything you give her!"

Another study was conducted which had equally interesting results. A clip was shown of a mother telling her child to go to bed. The child responded, "Let me play for another 10 minutes until I finish the game." The mothers of aggressive boys interpreted this request as being non-compliant. Furthermore, many of them attributed malicious intent to the child.

One who has a negative attitude toward life loses out. Moreover, who wants to be around such a person? We must keep in mind that "when you harbor bitterness, happiness will dock elsewhere."

Why should we avoid sadness at all costs? Because of this powerful deterrent: By being sad, we lose out on health, enjoyment of life, friends, closeness to Hashem, quality of learning, and a multitude of other pleasures. We should constantly ask, "What can I do to make myself happy?"

Rebbitzin Chaya Sarah Kramer, who was childless and poor, but always happy, was asked how she could be so happy in her situation. She retorted, "Should I be childless, poor, and also miserable? Someone put it this way: "People have troubles anyway. So why go around being sad as well?" We should instill within us this motto: The only disability in life is a bad attitude.

The Gemara (Brachos 5a) teaches different strategies to overcome the evil inclination. After mentioning being engaged in Torah and reciting Shema, it says that if one is still not successful, he should remind himself of the יום המיתה, day of death. The Iyun Yaakov (S.v. וחי) as well as the Chidushai Harim (Likutai Harim, Brachos 5a, s.v. לעולם המיתה) wonder why the Gemara didn't just say יום המיתה first. The answer is that since this tactic can bring us to sadness and

depression, it is suggested only as a last resort. As long as there is a different way to be saved from the evil inclination, we should pursue that.

The quality of your life depends on the quality of your thoughts. "All happiness is in the mind!" In December 1981 a flight from Kansas City, Missouri, to Dallas, Texas, was cancelled. When one of the passengers was told this, his reply was, "Fantastic!" The woman behind the counter was bewildered as to what was so fantastic about that. The passenger said, "The cancellation must be for one of three reasons. There is either a problem with the weather, the pilot, or the plane. In either case, I would rather be down here than on the plane! Anyway, this airport in Kansas City seems very nice and I can't wait to see what it has to offer! I am also grateful that I am indoors on this cold, wintry day." He then said, "They can cancel my flight, but they cannot cancel my day!"

In light of this we can explain מה האיש החפץ חיים אהב מינים לראות טוב: Who is the one that desires life and loves his days? The answer is לראות טוב, the one who sees the good in everything (Tehillim 34:13).

How can we do this practically? One technique is that if we get annoyed, we should rate the situation on a scale from one to ten. We can then determine if it is a tragedy or a minor inconvenience. Another technique to deal with a negative reaction to a situation is to write out our negative thoughts, followed by writing positive ways of looking at the situation.

We should also realize that most information we possess is in essence from other people—our parents, people we grew up with, and so on. We need to ask ourselves if this information is really correct. Our minds are full of other people's thoughts. Where did those people get these thoughts? From other people. Is this information accurate or is it rather that these people believe it's true? The bulk of the information we have in our minds is not who we are but who we learned to be. Therefore, if we are listening to the voice in our head, we may actually be listening to others who may be wrong. When thoughts of confusion, worry, negativity, etc. arise, we must ask ourselves, "Do I want to entertain these thoughts? Will these thoughts empower me?" We must consciously monitor our thoughts and choose empowering ones.

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