

## Count your blessings

As Jews we spend a significant amount of time asking the One Above for everything we need, or we think we need, in life. I snuck a qualifying statement in the middle of the first sentence, “or think we need” because that one statement is the key to our happiness. Simple. End of article.

Last Shabbos in Shul we recited the Tefillah of Birchah Hachodesh. In this prayer, said on the Shabbos before a new month begins, we ask Hashem to bless the upcoming month with all sorts of goodness. As I write this my daughter just handed me a homemade chocolate chip cookie. Now THAT is goodness, at least according to me. Even I know, however, that this is not the most important thing in life. What is important? What are our priorities? How does this monthly proclamation help us?

I offer to you a loose translation/personal explanation of the Tefillah. May it be your will, Hashem, that you renew in this month good and blessing. Give us long life, a life of peace, a life of goodness, a life of blessing, a life of livelihood, a life of physical health, a life that includes fear of Heaven and fear of sin, a life without any form of shame, a life of wealth and honor. A life of love of Torah and fear of Heaven (stated twice). A life in which Hashem should fulfill all of our requests for the good.

In shul last week Rabbi Blass quoted Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky, ZTZal as the consummate example of one who knew how to be happy with everything and pleasant with everyone. Two classic well-known examples include Rav Yaakov’s habit of personally greeting toll takers as well as his acquiescing to the desires of his Mechutanim when planning Simchas. He was able to recognize the good and blessing that Hashem has bestowed on mankind. We know that Rav Yaakov understood how to view the world but when we ask Hashem for the list of items mentioned above, what do they really mean to us? Stop and think for a moment.

“Visiten Lanu Chaim Aruchim”. . . grant us long life. . . I know when I ask for a long life, it makes me think. The Creator put me here for a purpose so, presumably, giving me long life gives me longer to fulfill my purpose. If I define goodness and blessing in only material terms, such as the value of my car, size of my house or shine of my jewelry, then my long life would only reflect accomplishment if I amass these things. If that is the case, then my personal sense of happiness balances precariously on my. . . diamond ring? (I’d be really sunk in that case because I lost my diamond ring a few years ago and never replaced it.) Yes, we daven for livelihood, but how do we gauge how much is enough? Remember, how we define this determines our happiness.

“Chaim Shel Parnassah”, a life of livelihood . . . I believe that we each need to recognize what gives us a sense of satisfaction with life. Regardless of budget, one person may feel dressed for Shabbos as long as their outfit is clean, and the other might only feel dressed Lichavod

Shabbos if their outfit is ironed. One might feel it is more honorable to spend more on the fish for Shabbos and less on the meat and another person spends more on the meat. In any of these examples the focus is not on the materialistic expression of how we keep Shabbos, but rather on the loftier goal of Kibud Shabbos. Each of these individuals can find happiness in their actions because they are doing what is important to them as it relates to an important concept. It does not matter if one is a millionaire and one is on a more limited budget. They are defining their priorities by framing them within what Hashem has given them, with the understanding that whatever Hashem has given is the right amount. By perceiving adequate Parnassah as only that which affords me what others have, then I will never be happy. By perceiving it as that which affords me the opportunity to do what Hashem expects me to do, then I can be happier with what I have.

“Chaim shel Chilutz Atzamos”, a life of physical health. . . When you are confronted with someone who does not have the physical strength, health or ability that you have, I am sure that you think to be thankful. Our lives can be so much more enriched if we recognize this and are thankful for it more often. It’s not only our actual physical health that makes us happy but how we view this blessing. Let’s say we have a family simcha and have worked tirelessly to complete all of our lists, buy the food, cook, clean, dress the family (and, of course, plant new flowers in front of the house) and we are now exhausted. Do we focus on how washed out we feel or do we focus on the fact that, without the physical health that Hashem has given us we would not have even had the capacity to do all that we have done to make us exhausted! Let’s learn to thank Hashem for being exhausted!

“Chaim shetihai vanu Ahavas Torah ViYiras Shamayim”, a life in which we have a love for Torah and fear of Heaven. . . The bottom line is that all of our happiness in life is determined by our set of priorities. The fact that I don’t own a Rolls Royce does not affect my happiness because a Rolls is not on my list of priorities. The fact that I own a van with which I can give people rides does affect my happiness because doing Chesed is on my list of priorities. We are lucky because we were given THE Book of priorities. On our monthly quest for happiness we ask Hashem to reconnect us to this guide so that we will understand how to count our blessings and how to truly be happy!

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