

## Happiness Isn't a Town on a Map



In our tradition, *Adar* is the month of happiness. We are told that "When *Adar* begins, happiness becomes abundant." This teaching is related to the holiday of *Purim*, a uniquely happy, joyous holiday, filled with levity and a minimum of gravitas. This year of 5771 is a leap year in the Jewish calendar, so we have two months of *Adar*. How much happiness can one take?

Happiness is one of the most sought-after values, and often seems to be the most elusive. Researchers in Germany conducted a study of 150,000 adults, over a period of twenty-five years. They came to the conclusion that once a person's basic needs are met — food, clothing, shelter, and the like — there are six things that make people happy. A good marriage. Strong family ties. A religious connection. Work (but not too much or too little). Social connections. Feeling healthy and fit.

As I first read these conclusions, I thought to myself, it took twenty-five years and 150,000 people to figure this out?! It seems pretty elementary to me.

And yet happiness seems to be the most elusive of goals. And that is because each of the items is far more complex and harder to attain and maintain than it seems to be. Moreover, if we think we can be happy only when we achieve our goals, only when we get what we want, we are setting ourselves up for unhappiness and disappointment.

I have two suggestions for seeking and achieving more happiness in our lives. One comes from our tradition, and one from a contemporary poet.

From our tradition we are taught in *Pirkey Avot, Wisdom of our Ancients*, a tractate of the *Mishnah*, "Who is really rich? Someone who finds happiness at each point of life." Happiness is not a goal; it is a process. It is a quality that is present in every aspect of life. If we search for it, we can find happiness everywhere in life, even when our goals are not met, and even when we are in great pain. It is a matter of attitude. It is to live with an aspect of gratitude for the blessing of life itself. It comes with accepting life as it comes to us, and recognizing that we cannot control it.

A lesson from a contemporary poet reinforces this insight. It is found in the work of Mary Oliver in a poem entitled "Work, Sometimes." In this poem she writes, "Happiness isn't a town on a map, or an early arrival, or a job well done, but good work ongoing." *Good work ongoing*. It is a process of living every day, and doing the best we can, finding within each day's work, each day's interactions with others, opportunities for gratitude, appreciation and fulfillment, and growth.

In this month of *Adar*, our month of happiness, I hope you will find happiness in what each day brings, and in "good work ongoing".

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