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And you will be happy on your holiday?



“Happiness is a direction, not a place.” – Sydney J. Harris

Is this quote an accurate portrayal of happiness in Judaism? Why or why not?

Let's look at some classical sources and areas in Jewish life to see how we can understand the description, definition and application of happiness in our lives.

Our primary source will be citations from the Kitzur Shulcahn Aruch and the writings of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z"l.

מצות עשה מן התורה על הכהנים שיברכו את העם, שנאמר, בזה תברכו את בני ישראל. וכל כהן שאין בו מדברים המעבדים אותו ואינו עולה לדוכן, עובר בעשה. ואינו עובר אלא בשיקוראין אותו, שנאמר, אמור להם ותרגם אונקלוס, בד תימרוהו (להו), ועין לקמן סעיף ח. ('המנהג במדינותינו, שאין נשיאת כפים אלא ביום טוב, משום דאז שרויים בשמחת יום טוב, וביום הכפורים יש בו שמחת מחילה וסליחה, וטוב לב הוא יברך) ועין לעיל סימן מ"ה סעיף ה, ('מה שאין בו בשאר ימים, אפלו בשבתות השנה, שטרודים בהרהורים על מחיתם ועל בטול מלאכתם. ואפלו ביום טוב אין נושאים כפיהם אלא בתפלת מוסף, שיוצאין אחר כך מבית הכנסת וישמחו בשמחת יום טוב) ועין לקמן סימן קל"ח סעיף ח. ('עוד נוהגין במדינותינו, שביום טוב שחל להיות בשבת, אין נשיאת כפים, אלא ביום הכפורים, שאפלו חל בשבת, נושאים כפיהם. ויש מקומות שנוהגין שבכל יום טוב, אפלו חל בשבת, נושאים כפיהם, וכן נכון יותר.

It is a positive commandment of the Torah¹Even in our times. (See Magein Avraham 128:41, Peri Megadim etc., unlike the Penei Yehoshua, Maseches Kesubos 24b and Yeshuos Yaakov, who assert that it is de'oraisa only in the Beis Hamikdash.) for the kohanim to bless the people, as it is said: "This is how you must bless the Children of Israel."²Numbers 6:23. Any kohein who is not disqualified and does not go up to the duchan³Platform. It is traditionally built in front of the Holy Ark on the East side of the synagogue. The platform is not essential for the mitzvah, but the Eshel Avraham (Butchatch) says it is preferable. However, the Rambam makes no mention of it in the laws concerning the architecture of a synagogue. violates a positive commandment.⁴Shulchan Aruch 128:2. (Rambam) But he is not in violation, unless he is called upon to do so,⁵Maseches Sotah 38a. It is sufficient to call out kohanim or to tell them to wash their hands (at the appropriate time). as it is said: "Say to them,"⁶The command is stated in the plural. Therefore, they are to be summoned only when there are at least two kohanim. But if there is only one kohein, he pronounces the blessings without being summoned. (Shulchan Aruch 128:10.) and the Targum translates: "When they tell you." It is the custom in our regions⁷This is the custom throughout most of the Diaspora. In Eretz Yisroel, some cities have the blessings on Shabbos, too, while in Jerusalem they are pronounced daily. The custom of the Jews of Seforad is to have the blessings daily. It is also the custom of the Yeshivos, even those not in Jerusalem. that the kohanim bless the people only on Yom Tov because then, people rejoice Yom Tov,⁸The source for the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch's ruling is the Ramah 128:44. and it is said that a happy heart will bless, and on Yom Kippur there is (also) rejoicing over the forgiveness and pardon [of our sins]. This is not true on other days. Even on the Shabbos days of the whole year, people are worried about their livelihood and about being idle from work. And even on Yom Tov, they only bless the people during the *musaf* service, because they will soon leave the synagogue and rejoice in the joy of Yom Tov. We are accustomed in our regions that [even] when Yom Tov occurs on Shabbos, the kohanim do not bless the people⁹See Magein Avraham 128:70, Yeshuos Yaakov, Yosef Da'as (responsa) for various explanations for this custom. except on Yom Kippur; for even if it occurs on Shabbos, they bless the people. There are communities that have the custom, that on every Yom Tov, even when it occurs on Shabbos, the kohanim bless the people; and this is more correct.¹⁰

בְּכֹל יוֹם טוֹב, בְּקִדּוּשׁ שֶׁבְּלֵילָה אוֹמְרִים לְאַחֲרָיו בְּרַכַּת שְׁהֵחֵינוּ עַל שְׂמֵחַת הַחַג, חוּץ מִלֵּיל שְׁבִיעִי שֶׁל פֶּסַח וְלֵיל שְׁמִינִי, שְׁאִין מְבָרְכִין שְׁהֵחֵינוּ, כִּינֵן שְׁאִינוּ רְגֵל בְּפָנֵי עֲצֻמוֹ. וְהַנְּשִׂים, בְּשַׁעַת הַדְּלָקַת הַנְּרוֹת אֵין לְהֵן לְבָרֵךְ שְׁהֵחֵינוּ בְּשׂוֹם יוֹם טוֹב וְקִצְתֵן נוֹהֲגוֹת לְבָרֵךְ שְׁהֵחֵינוּ (חוּץ מִלֵּיל ז' וְלֵיל ח' שֶׁל פֶּסַח) וְלֹא מְחִינֵן לְהוּי (שְׁאִילַת יַעֲבֹ"ץ) (סִימָן רס"ג ת"צ תרס"ח (תרס"ט).

On every Yom Tov, at the conclusion of the *kiddush* at night we say the berachah of *Shehecheyanu* on the joy of the holiday, except on the seventh and eighth nights of Pesach when *shehecheyanu* is omitted, since they are not a separate Yom Tov in themselves. When lighting the candles, women should not say the berachah *shehecheyanu* on any Yom Tov. Some women follow the custom of saying *shehecheyanu* on all *Yomim Tovim* (except on the seventh and eighth nights of Pesach), and we do not protest their practice.

חֵיב לְשַׂמֵּחַ אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ וּבְנָיו וְכָל הַנְּלוּיִם אֵלָיו, כָּל אֶחָד כְּרֹאוֹי לוֹ. הַקְּטָנִים נוֹתֵן לָהֶם אֲגוּזִים וּמְגִדְנוֹת. וְהַנְּשִׂים, בְּבִגְדֵים וְהַנְּשִׂים, בְּבִשּׂוּר וְיֵין. וְנוֹהֲגִין לְהַרְבּוֹת בְּמִינֵי מְאָכְלִים כִּיּוֹם טוֹב יוֹתֵר מִבְּשֻׁבָּת, כִּי כִּיּוֹם טוֹב נֶאֱמַר בּוֹ שְׂמֵחָה. וְלֹא בְּשֻׁבָּת. וְגַם בְּגִדֵי יוֹם טוֹב יִהְיוּ יְקָרִים יוֹתֵר מִשְׁלַל שְׁבֻת (תַּקֵּ"ט).

Every man is obligated to gladden the hearts¹²Rejoicing is an obligation on Chol Hamoed also, but, honoring and taking delight is only an obligation of the actual Yom Tov. (Shulchan Aruch Harav, Mishnah Berurah 529:16) of his wife, his children, and all who are dependent on him, in a way suitable for each. To the little children you should give nuts and candy, to the women,¹³This is the husband's obligation, but women are not commanded to rejoice on Yom Tov and may even fast if they want to. (Rabbi Akiva Eiger Responsum 1) But Sha'agas Aryeh rules that women, too, are obligated to rejoice on Yom Tov. Toras Avigdor says they are forbidden to fast on Yom Tov. clothing and jewelry according to your means,¹⁴At least new shoes. (Eliyahu Rabbah, Maharil, Biur Halachah) and to the men, meat and wine.¹⁵In our times, when our meat is not from a shelamim offering (peace-offering), eating meat is a mitzvah and drinking wine an obligation. (Biur Halachah 529:2, Shulchan Aruch Harav 529:7) Chayei Adam rules that even now, you may fulfill your obligation with meat or wine. It is the custom to serve a greater variety of foods on Yom Tov than on Shabbos, because with regard to Yom Tov, the Torah mentions "rejoicing," but it is not mentioned with regard to Shabbos. Also Yom Tov clothes should be more expensive than Shabbos clothes.

וכשהוא אוכל ושותה, חייב להאכיל גם לגר ליתום ולאלמנה עם שאר העניים האמללים, שנאמר, והלוי ונהגר ויתום וגו'. אבל מי שנועל דלתי חצרו, ואוכל ושותה הוא ואשתו ובניו, ואינו מאכיל ומשקה לעניים ולמרי נפש, אין זו שמחת מצוה אלא שמחת פרסו, ועל אלו נאמר זכחיהם כלחם אונים להם, כל אוכליו יטמאו כי לחמם לנפשם. ושמחה כזאת, קלון היא להם, שנאמר וזריתי פרש על פניכם פרש חגיכם.

And when you eat and drink, it is your duty to provide also for the orphan, the widow and other needy people, as it is said, "And the Levite, the proselyte, and the orphan etc...." (Deuteronomy 16:14). He who locks the doors of his courtyard, and eats and drinks with his wife and children and does not give food and drink to the poor and unhappy souls, is not rejoicing in a mitzvah, but rejoicing in his gluttony. Concerning such people it is said,¹⁹Hosea 9:4. "Their sacrifices will be to them like the bread of mourners; all who eat of them will be unclean; for their bread will be for their souls." And such rejoicing is a disgrace for them as it is said,²⁰Malachi 2:3. "I will spread dung on your faces, the dung of your festival offerings."

כשהאדם אוכל ושותה ושמח ברגל, לא ימשך בניו ובשחוק ובקלות ראש ויאמר כל מה שיוסיף בנה, ירבה במצוות שמחה, כי השכרות והשחוק וקלות הראש אינה שמחה, אלא הוללות וסכלות. ולא נצטוונו על ההוללות והסכלות, אלא על השמחה שיש בה עבודת יוצר הכל, שנאמר תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלהיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרב כל. הא למדת שהעבודה היא בשמחה, ואי אפשר לעבוד את ה' לא מתוך שחוק ולא מתוך קלות ראש ולא מתוך שכרות.

When a person eats and drinks, and rejoices on the festival, he should not overindulge in drinking wine, in laughter and lightheadedness, thinking that the more he indulges, the greater will be the mitzvah of rejoicing. For drunkenness, mockery and lightheadedness is not rejoicing, but licentiousness and foolishness. And we were not commanded to act licentiously and foolishly, but to rejoice in the service of the Creator of all things, as it is said, "Because you did not serve Adonoy, your God, with happiness and a glad heart, when you had plenty of everything."²¹Deuteronomy 28:47. From this we infer that the service of God must be done with joy, but you cannot serve God in frivolity, or lightheadness or in drunkenness.

מדת החסידים אשר ה' לנגדם תמיד ובכל דרכיהם ידעוהו, בעת שמחתם אז יותר ויותר מברכין ומשבחין להקדוש ברוך הוא אשר שמח אותם, ויאמר האדם בלבבו בעת שמחתו והנאתו, אם כך הוא שמחת העולם הזה אשר היא הכל, כי

wind threatens to blow out the candles [on Shabbos], as it passes through the walls, you are permitted to spread a sheet or a garment on the wall.

From the above sources can you list a few descriptions of what Judaism's framework of happiness is?

Is happiness specifically limited to the religious sphere or is there also a social aspect- unrelated to religious ritual?

Read the following citations from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks who discussed happiness in a number of his writings:

“Happiness is about a lifetime, but joy lives in the moment. Happiness tends to be a cool emotion, but joy makes you want to dance and sing. It’s hard to feel happy in the midst of uncertainty. But you can still feel joy.”

Studies in Spirituality, (Koren, 2021), p. 258.

“Happiness is largely a matter of satisfying needs and wants. Meaning, by contrast, is about a sense of purpose in life, especially by making positive contributions to the lives of others. Happiness is largely about how you feel in the present. Meaning is about how you judge your life as a whole: past, present, and future.”

Studies in Spirituality (Koren, 2021), p. 12.

“Happiness, or blessedness – the terms are almost interchangeable – means living in accord with the word and will of God, which is how the Bible construes the moral life. It means doing well, living in harmony with the fundamental values embedded in the universe by its Creator.”

Morality (Basic Books, 2020), p. 103.

“*Simcha* is usually translated as joy, rejoicing, gladness, happiness, pleasure, or delight. In fact, *simcha* has a nuance untranslatable into English, Joy, happiness, pleasure, and the like are all states of mind, emotions. They belong to the individual. We can feel them alone. *Simcha*, by contrast, is not a private emotion. It means happiness shared. It is a social state, a predicate of “we,” not “I.” There is no such thing as feeling *simcha* alone.”

‘Collective Joy,’ *Re'eh*, Covenant & Conversation, 5779

How would Rabbi Sacks answer the above questions? Does he differ or expand our traditional explanations of happiness? Please substantiate your answers with specific examples from his writings.

If you were writing to a friend who was not happy, depressed, or lonely what would you write them about Judaism's view to help them reach a level of happiness in their lives? Write a brief paragraph in letter format from you to another student helping them understand the role of happiness in Judaism.

Extra Credit: Are there any other areas in halacha where happiness is discussed that were not enumerated above?

Extra Credit: Although we have limited the sources to halacha—are there any Jewish personalities in Tanach that embody this temperament and embody or use the descriptions that are listed above?
