

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

DECEMBER 28, 2019

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Aliza Freydke bas Chaim by her son Bernard Zyscovich. "May her Neshama have an Aliya."

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 10

30 KISLEV

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS MIKEITZ

The Secret to Achieving Happiness

Behold, there came up from the river seven cows good looking cows and fat; and they fed in the reed grass (41:2).

Rashi (ad loc) makes an extraordinary comment on this verse; "this (the seven nice looking cows) represents the seven years of satiety whereupon all creations look kindly at one another, no one begrudging anyone else."

Rashi seems to be changing the very meaning of the *possuk*. Instead of translating "nice looking cows" literally, Rashi explains that it means **they look kindly at each other**. Additionally, it is commonly understood that Pharaoh's dreams represented that there were going to be seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine. Yet Rashi translates the "good years" as years of satiety not years of plenty or abundance.

Rashi characterizes the good years as years of satiety for a simple reason; having an abundance doesn't mean that one is happy or even satisfied. In other words, abundance and famine aren't really antonyms; as having a lot doesn't necessarily mean you have enough. The Torah is promising that the seven years will be years of satiation; everyone will appreciate what they have and it will be enough.

But this is a difficult standard to achieve. In fact, many people don't even know if they are satisfied let alone happy with what they have.

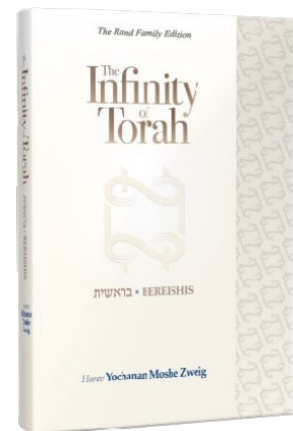
Rashi gives us a stunning life lesson for knowing if you're a happy person. The years of abundance weren't measured in quantity but rather in perspective. If you want to know if you're happy, examine your reaction when you look at other people's successes. Are you happy for them or are you a little bitter? When your neighbor gets a new car and you need one as well, are you happy for them or do you begrudge them a little? If the latter, then you aren't happy or satisfied with your own life. For the most part, being happy has very little to do with how much you have, it has to do with how you feel about yourself. The path to becoming a happy person is found totally within oneself. This is the deeper meaning to the Mishna in *Pirkei Avos*, "Who is

a rich man? He that is joyful with his lot." Personal satisfaction leads to joy and ultimately to a lasting happiness.



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Who are We Competing Against?

One of the more unique aspects of Chanukah has to do with a very unusual *halacha*: Maimonides (*Hilchos Chanukah* 3:4) says that a person who lights candles on the first night of Chanukah makes three blessings (*lehadlik ner, she'aso nissim, and shehechayanu*). Incredibly, one who hasn't yet made the blessings can recite the second two blessings **upon seeing another person lighting their own candles**. In other words, you make a blessing on another person's act of fulfilling the *mitzvah*. This isn't found anywhere else! What is it about Chanukah that creates this opportunity?

The holiday of Chanukah, as we know, celebrates the victory over the Greeks who tried to eradicate the study of Torah and its values. One of the greatest differences between Greek culture and Judaism is how we view our relationships with others. This is very clearly highlighted by the Greek view on competition. In fact, the lasting legacy

that Greek culture has left the world is the Olympics and athletic competitions. That is, the Greeks defined themselves by how they achieved in comparison to others. The jargon of competition is so ubiquitous that we hardly notice how violent the descriptions are. This team "beat" the other. One can easily substitute (and probably has on more than one occasion) the words "slaughtered," "killed," "destroyed," etc. for the word "beat." This kind of attitude defines measuring one's achievements by not only what you have accomplished but also in the demoralization of your opponent. Of course this is unfair as everyone was created with different strengths and weaknesses. Judaism doesn't believe in judging oneself in comparison to others. The only competition is against yourself.

Unfortunately, American society has adopted this Greek philosophy and it shows in many levels of our culture, from

sports to business to what college one wants their child to attend ("My son is in Harvard!"). The hardest part is when one loses in any of those "arenas" - coming to terms with another person's success means that by comparison you're a failure.

However, Judaism celebrates personal achievement as measured by one's own innate capabilities. By extension, it means we can celebrate other people's successes as it doesn't come at our expense; we can be genuinely happy for others.

That is why on Chanukah, when we are celebrating the triumph of Judaism over Greek culture, we make a point to make a blessing when we see others fulfilling the *mitzvah* of lighting candles. We are internalizing the message that we are happy for another person's achievements.

Did You Know...

1. The original war between the Chashmonaim and the Seleucid Greeks lasted three years before the Maccabees recaptured Yerushalayim and purified the *Beis Hamikdash*. In all, it took more than another two decades for the Maccabees to force the Seleucids to retreat from Eretz Yisroel.
2. Chanukah wasn't the only significant event that happened on the 25th of Kislev: All the work for the Mishkan was finished on the 25th of Kislev (though it wasn't inaugurated until the first of Nissan).
3. The foundation laying of the second *Beis Hamikdash* was on the 24th of Kislev and the celebration began that evening (the 25th of Kislev).
4. The 25th word in the Torah is *or* (light).
5. The 25th place that the Jewish people camped while journeying through the desert was called Chashmonah.
6. Maimonides (*Hilchos Chanukah* 4:12) says, "The *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah candles is extremely beloved... Even if one is getting his food as a charity, he must borrow or sell his clothes in order to acquire oil and wicks to fulfill his obligation."
7. Chanukah is known as the festival of lights. Maimonides (ibid 4:14) states that light in a home promotes *shalom* and that the entire Torah was given in order to create peace in the world.
8. The vigilantly observed custom to eat fried foods (*sufganiyot, latkes, etc.*) to commemorate the miracle of the oil, isn't exactly "diet friendly." The average *sufganiyah* (doughnut) packs 400-600 calories and one potato *latke* has about 150 calories. Israelis devour some 24 million *sufganiyot* during the eight-day holiday – adding up to 10.8 billion calories.

