

## Rosh Hashanah 5768 Drush 1 – Yom Teruah: Learn How to Appreciate Everything

Benjy had done very well in business. He was a multi-millionaire and had been knighted by the Queen for his endeavours. One day, after completing yet another very successful business deal, he decided on the spur-of-the-moment to take his wife Sadie to Israel. He asked his secretary Carol to make the arrangements.

Carol rang the Tel Aviv Dan hotel and asked to speak to the manager.

"I am happy to inform you that Sir Benjy and his wife have chosen to stay at the Dan next week. But as they are very wealthy and require total privacy, they would need to book the entire hotel for their stay. Money is not a problem. Can you set this up?"

The manager didn't hesitate. "Yes, I can move all guests to a sister hotel."

Carol then asked, "Is there a private beach?"

"Yes."

"What colour is the sand?" asked Carol.

"Silver," came the reply.

"Well that will be a problem as Sir Benjy always insists on golden sand."

"OK. I can get round it," said the manager. "There's a quarry nearby and I will arrange for golden sand to be laid on the beach."

"And finally," said Carol, "Sir Benjy prefers a blue sky without a cloud in it. Is the weather going to be perfect next week?"

"No problem," said the manager, "I will get the Israeli Air Force to seed the clouds and so disperse them."

The following week, there was Benjy and Sadie sunbathing on the wide expanse of the private beach of the Dan hotel. Benjy looked all around him and said, "Sadie, just look how beautiful everything is. We have privacy, there is not a sound coming from the hotel, the sand is beautifully clean and golden and the sky is so blue without a cloud in sight. **Sadie, with all of this, who needs money?**"

The stark difference between the way the secular new year is celebrated as compared to the Torah's new year may be evident in the manner by which we greet one another on the occasion. In anticipation of *Tishrei* we wish each other a *Shanah Tovah*, a good year, while with the advent of the secular year all that we hear is "Happy New Year."

That is not to say that happiness is not a desired feature for the New Year in *Tishrei*. The "good" we wish for each other in this season surely contains within it a hope for a year filled with happiness.

Pursuit of happiness in life is no mean feat. Many feel that lasting fulfillment, true happiness, is a daily balancing act that must be learned so that immediate personal needs can be integrated with long-term goals.

This, in essence, is the subject of a Harvard University course that is the best-attended in the university's history. Taught by an Israeli-born professor of psychology, Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar, the first such seminar, which he conducted in 2002, began with eight students. Within five years, the numbers burgeoned to 1,400 registered students, by far an unprecedented class of any department at the university.

Without a doubt, the quest for happiness is a driving force of today's generation. The abiding question, however, remains: just how does one attain the lasting fulfillment we seek?

***We will talk more about this topic during the alternative class today called, The Secret Behind the Secret."***

Ben-Shahar course identifies three types of individuals and defines their approach to life's fulfillments.

- First, there is the "rat racer" who lives to be happy sometime in the future and is unable to afford himself/herself any reasonable pleasures in the here-and-now. The rat-racer needs control of all that will be in the future. He/she lives a life focused always on "what if" (the future) rather than "what is" (the here-and-now).
- Then, there is the "hedonist" who can only find happiness in the good things in life – good wine, good food, good company, and all sorts of other "good" things – but from all of these he/she is unable to derive any lasting fulfillment and meaningful happiness.
- Finally, there is the "nihilist" who has completely given up on finding any happiness in life. He has resigned himself to his present unhappiness and expects the same sort of life in the future. "*Hevel havalim...hakol hevel.*"

Learning a balance between the "rat racer" and the "hedonist" types, according to Ben-Shachar, is what will lead to the sought after happiness. Note that the single recurring theme in *Megillat Kohelet* is the pursuit of *simchah*, which is clearly happiness in the sense of fulfillment in life. So how do we strike this balance?

This is what Rosh Hashanah is all about. It is a day in which we come together and reflect that G-d created humanity 5,768 years ago – in order to give us pleasure and purpose. It is also the day in which mankind displayed ingratitude towards all the kindness that G-d did. G-d puts mankind in Paradise, asks them to heed one commandment, and they fail miserably.

Rosh Hashanah is a day in which mankind has the opportunity to express its appreciation to G-d. When something unbelievably good happens to you, and you are filled with such appreciation and love, you can't say anything. You can't speak or make a sound. Finally, when you calm down, you just give a *krechtz*.

***Rosh Hashanah is the day when a person is capable of feeling something that is so good – that it takes your breath away.*** King David said, "Were our mouth as full of song as the sea, and our tongue as full of joyous song as its multitude of waves, and our lips as full of praise as the breadth of the heavens, and our eyes as brilliant as the sun and the moon, and our hands as outspread as eagles of the sky, and our feet as swift as hinds, we still could not thank You sufficiently Hashem , our G-d, and G-d of our forefathers, and to bless your name for even one of the thousand thousand, thousands of thousands, and myriad myriads of favours that You performed for our ancestors and for us." On Rosh Hashanah, we have time to reflect on the past year, our lives, our nation's history, and praise the Master of the Universe for all our blessings.

***That is the symbolism of the Shofar. Words can not express our thanks to Him for the gift of life and the opportunities it presents for us. So we blow the Shofar, which represents our collective voice that expresses feelings of gratitude that are beyond words.***

When you think about it, you begin to realize that our lives are filled with all types of events. We have those big events that happen. They are symbolized by the long and loud Tekiah blast. There is no way that we can deny how important they are. Getting married, having a child....these are unmistakable Tekiahs. When I hear the Tekiah today, I will think about my two daughters who were married this year and my son who is engaged to marry in the winter. Big events indeed!

We also have those Shevarim events – while not as spectacular as a Tekiah, but are nonetheless very noteworthy. Children getting accepted into university programs, getting a prestigious job, etc.

Both of these types of events are very noticeable. We spend a lot of time working towards them, looking forward to them. However, they all suffer from one major drawback, as is so aptly described by Dr. Ben-Shahar in the beginning of his book. He describes how, at age 16, he won the Israeli national squash championship. An event that brought the subject of happiness into sharp focus in his life.

He trained five years for this event and had always believed that winning the title would make him happy, and alleviate the emptiness he felt so much of the time. During those five years he felt that something important was missing from his life – something that all of the miles run, the weights lifted, the self-motivating speeches playing and replaying in his mind, were not providing. He believed that it was only a matter of time before that “missing something” would find its way into his life. He writes that: “After all, it seemed clear to me that the mental and physical exertion were necessary to win the championship. Winning the championship was necessary for fulfillment. Fulfillment was necessary for happiness. This was the logic I operated under.”

And in fact, when he won the championship, he was ecstatic, happier than he had ever imagined feeling. Following the final match he went out with his family and friends, and celebrated together. He was certain that the belief that had carried him through five years of preparation – the winning the title would make him happy – was justified; the hard work, the physical and emotional pain, had paid off.

He goes on to describe that after the celebration, he went to his room, sat on his bed and wanted to savour, for the last time before going to sleep, that feeling of supreme happiness. Suddenly, without warning, the bliss that came from having attained in real life what had for so long been his most cherished and exalted fantasy – disappeared, and his feelings of emptiness returned. He was befuddled and afraid. The tears of joy shed only hours earlier turned to tears of pain and helplessness. ***For if he was not happy then, when everything seemed to have worked out perfectly, what prospects did he have of attaining lasting happiness?***

He tried to convince himself that he was feeling a temporary low following an overwhelming high. But as the days and months unfolded, he did not feel happier; in fact, he was growing even more desolate as he began to see that simply substituting a new goal – winning the world championship, say, - would not in itself lead him to happiness. There no longer seemed to be a series of logical steps for him to follow.

And Dr. Ben Shachar’s experience happens to so many of us. We experience reaching a certain milestone and it does not bring us the emotional payoff we expected. How often do we say “If only, \_\_\_\_\_ happened, I would be happy”; or “If only I had a \_\_\_\_\_, I would be happy.” “If

only the situation was \_\_\_\_\_, I would be happy.” We spend our lives miserably wishing for these things to happen, only to find ourselves once again miserable shortly after they happen!

This can be very disappointing and frustrating. But isn't that what we exactly do and set ourselves up for on Rosh Hashanah? We ask G-d to bless us with circumstances, things, people that we think will make us happy. “G-d, if I got married this year – all my problems would be over!” “G-d, if I had a child, I would have meaning in life.” “G-d, please make sure I get accepted into Medical school.” Most of us our asking for Tekiahs, or at least Shevarims. But aren't we engaged in an exercise of futility to ask for things that will not even make us happy after we get them? Could this be what Rosh Hashanah, such a holy day, is all about? And what if those Tekiah Gedolas never come – did we waste our time on Rosh Hashanah asking for them?

However, what word does the Torah use to describe this day where we blow the Shofar? It is called “Yom Teruah” – not “Yom Tekiah.” We will say after the Shofar blows “Ashrei Ha'am Yodei Teruah.” – “Happy are the people who understand the sound of the Teruah.” The message here is that we need not focus so much on the Tekiah or Shevarim events in life, which indeed do not come so often. Rather we need to be able to look at all the little points in life and connect them all together. Then we would be happy. But you need *Sechel* in order to do that. People who are only looking for the “Tekiah Gedolas” are always unhappy.

Rosh Hashanah is not only a day to coronate G-d as the king for what he does as a king, which include the Tekiah Gedolas, but to recognize that His kingdom reaches every aspect of our lives. He is providing every little thing that we need to make our lives as meaningful as possible.

The Ba'al Hatanya explains that the word “Rosh,” which means the head and the brain, is meant to teach us that on Rosh Hashanah we need to create a “mind set” of appreciation and thankfulness. Many of us go through life waiting for Tekiah Gedolas, and are always disappointed. ***This Rosh Hashanah, we have to learn how to listen to the Teruahs that we constantly experience, but usually don't think about them. We have to learn to equally appreciate all the notes of life and hear the unified message that it pronounces from G-d: “I have never and will never stop loving you. I bring you all the notes, but you don't have to wait so long to hear them, because those Teruahs come often!”***

Afterwards, on Yom Kippur, we can have the ability to feel sorry for the mistakes we made during the year. We apologize for the things that we did, which we were not grateful for. How? If we really appreciated what G-d does for us on a continuous basis, then we would not have sinned. A person who is genuinely happy all the time, is filled with endless appreciation, and would never think of not heeding the source of all that happiness.

And this all applies to relationships as well. If we really would appreciate what others do for us, we would never be unhappy nor ever hurt them.

Let me ask all of you a question? When you got married, what kind of spouse were you expecting? A Tekiah Gedola? Or at least a Tekiah! Let me ask you this: What kind of spouse do you think you have now? Are you happy with the spouse that you have?

You can have a woman who is waiting for her husband to sound a Tekiah Gedola by being the super romantic who can say something Shakespearean or love ballads to her, who is forever

disappointed with his lack of excitement. There are women who divorce good men over these things. They feel let down and disappointed. If she would be clever enough to notice all the little Teruahs – points of kindness - that her husband does in terms of loyalty, kindness, responsibility – and sew them together [nowadays most women don't know how to sew – they buy ready made clothes], she would be choked up with appreciation. And the same goes for the husband who is waiting for his wife to “rekindle the romantic flames of the past,” and foolishly falls prey to the superficial Tekios that other females can temporarily provide. He is not observant enough to notice where his wonderful kids got their good manners from, and how the home is consistently running smoothly. And perhaps if he helped around the house more often, his wife would be less rundown and could have time to rekindle some passion in the marriage.

You have people having such difficulties in establishing new and permanent relationships because they will only entertain Tekiah Gedolas. They only want to meet the most perfect person possible – which does not exist. The expectations on dates are not realistic. People starve themselves to wear Tekiah Gedola outfits so that people will take notice of them.

If you don't see the Teruahs in life, how can you love? All you can see is frustration and anger. You are always bitter. The truth is that there are so many good and wonderful people, and a wise person who is perceptive, would get married and then continually adore their spouse for the millions of Teruahs they can offer.

And then there are people who excel in making Tekiah Gedolas – when it comes to birthdays and anniversaries, he is amazing; but his Teruahs are not good. The big sounds in life are very nice, but they don't sustain you. You have the parents who take the family on amazing vacations and have albums of these trips – but during the rest of the year the parents have no time to help their children with homework or to play with them. And the parents wonder why they spend so much money on the vacation, yet they are do not feel closer to their children!

How is G-d supposed to make us happy, happy with ourselves, happy with our parents, with our spouses, children? This, I believe, should be on the top of our list of what we are praying to G-d for. We need to ask Hashem to help us to be able to open up our eyes to see all the good that surrounds us all the time. To be happy with what we have. This is what King David requested in Psalms 119;18: “Unveil my eyes that I may perceive wonders from Your Torah.”

As Rabbi Avigdor Miller writes in “Awake My Glory” pg. 376: “basic pleasures, are not only readily available to all, but also are the only real important pleasures. ***Happiness is the sum total of many details, therefore those who learn to rejoice in more details of life will have so much more cause for happiness.***” We should pray to G-d to help us become aware of those details.

We begin this effort in appreciation by thanking Hashem for the big things, which are easy to notice, as they come from time to time; and then to zero in on the things that we take for granted - those Teruahs that we forget and do not pay attention to. So we start with the Tekiah, then the Shevarim, and finally the Teruahs.

Dr. Ben-Shaher concludes his book with the following observation: “One of the common barriers to happiness is the false expectation that one thing – a book or a teacher, a princess or a knight, an accomplishment, a prize, or a revelation – will bring us eternal bliss. While all of these things can contribute to our well-being, at best they form a small part of the mosaic of a happy life. The fairy-

tale notion of happiness – the belief that something would carry us to the happily ever after – invariably leads to disappointment. ***A happy – or happier – life is rarely shaped by some extraordinary life-changing event; rather, it is shaped incrementally, experience by experience, moment by moment.*** – Happier by pg. 167-168.

May I suggest that in order to connect your Teruahs in life, that you make it a habit to spend 5 minutes each day, either before you go to bed, at dinner time, especially when stuck in traffic or waiting in line; alone or with a friend, and write down 5 things for which you are grateful, where you enjoyed levels of emotional and physical well-being. These can be little or big: from a meal or even a coffee that you enjoyed, to a meaningful conversation you had with a friend, from a project at work to G-d.

If you do this exercise regularly, you will naturally repeat yourself, which is perfectly fine. The key is, despite the repetition, to keep the emotions fresh; imagine what each item means to you as you write it down, and experience the feeling associated with it. Doing this exercise regularly can help you to appreciate the positive in your life rather than take it for granted. If every person thought of 5 daily Teruahs about their spouse, how much less divorces would we have? If every person thought of 5 daily Teruahs about their family, how much happier would their home be? If every person thought of 5 daily Teruahs about their friends, how much Loshon Hora would there be? If every person thought of 5 daily Teruahs about G-d, how less angry we would be at him?

There is a story of a great artist who invited his friends to his gallery to witness the uncovering of his new painting, entitled “The Door to Happiness.” The crowd marvelled at the beauty and color. The wood grain captured on canvas the outstanding craftsmanship. The painter told them that there was a flaw, but they could not find it, until one clever observer remarked that there was no handle. Everyone gasped at the omission, for the artist had forgotten to paint in this feature. The artist smiled confidently, and told them: ***“This is the door to happiness. It is opened from the inside.”***

Let us use the power of the Shofar to consider the different gifts in our lives – especially the Teruahs – so that we can open up our souls from the inside and feel all the good that we have from G-d.

- During the first set of 30 blasts, think of your family, and all those detailed Teruahs that enjoy from them every day.
- During the 30 blasts during the repetition of the Amidah, think of your friends and your community.
- And finally during the last 40 blasts, focus on G-d’s daily gifts that consistently sustain us throughout our lives.

Such a perspective on happiness would unquestionably be within the parameters of what we will wish one another “*Shanah Tovah.*” Or, may you be blessed with the daily joy of lasting fulfillment in the year to come.