

# Nourishment for the Neshama

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## How to Find Happiness in 2007

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Chapter 1 – Happiness is a sense of wholeness

I had an atheistic friend once who believed that people only chose to believe in a Higher power because they were afraid to think that one day they would die and that would be it. She believed that this was the reason behind religion.

With the world situation today, with so much death, destruction, disease, poverty, stress, starvation, and feelings of lack and discontent, I run the risk of having the ideas that I plan to put forth below simplified into an equally atheistic frame of reference – that people who believe in a Higher power do so because they just can't cope with the world, that they cop out through religion when they can't adapt and conform to survive in the world the way it is going, that they can't deal with reality.

We live in a free country, and anyone can believe whatever they please. Perhaps you have heard such ideas before. Perhaps they have persuaded you in some regard.

What this article hopes to do is provide a frame of reference that might permit you to shift your thinking toward something that could, within the reality of the world the way it is, bring you great happiness and inner peace. This article will do this by showing you that the reality of the world is greater than the reality that meets the eye.

There is nothing new to the ideas that this article will share. In fact, the ideas are very old. They are Old Testament ideas, which means they are the foundation for every major religion. Whatever religion you are or that your family is or was, there is a core of values that are good instruction for how to live joyously in this world. This core of ideas has not changed, because even though societies change, the world itself and the manner and nature of mankind has not changed. Innovations in science have produced much benefit to our health and lifestyles, but innovations in what a person needs to find happiness will never change. If you read the papers and magazines, there are all kinds of stories about very rich people who do not find their happiness through being able to purchase things. They search just like everyone else.

What, then, is happiness? For the purpose of this article, the term happiness means a sense of completion, a feeling of wholeness and a sense of control over one's life. Would you like some ideas on how to accomplish that?

It would be too simplistic to simply say, turn to the Creator without building a basis for you from your own experience. I would no more ask you to leap off a cliff than to just jump into the idea that there is a Creator and that He has given us good instruction in the very best way to live our lives.

Think back to a time when you might have had a near accident and were saved, or were terribly afraid for another reason and then it resolved. Do you remember the feeling you had? Did you develop a sense of knowing that you are alive and how fragile life can be? Was there a moment in that experience where you knew you existed and that your existence was beyond your control? That is the moment of reality that will serve as the door through which you can walk into a frame of reference that can bring you a sense of happiness, completion and inner peace. That split second of reality is a flash that there is more to this world than meets the eye, more of a reality to our existence than we consider on an everyday basis. How does realizing that our existence is not in our control lead to happiness? Doesn't that lead to terrible anxiety and fear? If our existence were dependent on other people or on society, then yes, it would. But our existence is not dependent on other people or on society. It is dependent on the Creator, who is good and who cares about and sustains every living person, animal and thing. It is dependent upon the Creator who only does things that are good for our souls, who is the ultimate loving parent and more. If it is good for us, the

Creator will give it to us.

Step number one is to ask for what we want. If it is good for us, and we pray for it, the Creator will answer that prayer. If we think it is good for us and pray for it, and we do not get it, then in reality, it was not good for us.

## Chapter 2 – Who am I?

There are many ways of thinking about who we are. Our identities are very important to us. We want to be loved for who we are and we want to express ourselves and utilize our talents to be productive. Our identities are determined by our genetics to some degree – our race, our size, our inherited health issues, even our personality characteristics. But there is one thing that is not determined by anyone or anything except ourselves, and that is whether we identify ourselves as having a Creator and whether we choose to accept His Will as our will. What does this mean?

We have many feelings and needs. When we say, "It is who I am," what we are doing is identifying with a certain set of feelings and needs. For example, if a person is artistic, that person may have a whole range of emotions that are expressed in his paintings and sculptures. We can see the style of an artist through their works, and we have a sense of knowing who they are through this tangible expression. How many of you have seen art that is tortured looking, full of pain, expressing the range of dark human emotions? Would it be false to say that such is the artist's identity? Would it be false to say that what is universal in that artwork is because these emotions are part of every person? No, these ideas are very true. We have these feelings and they are part of us. Yet, do they have to be our identity? Is it possible to comprehend and empathize and experience yet hold oneself from an identification with an inwardness that is greater than our physicality? We have an inwardness that exists beyond our senses and beyond our experiences and beyond time and space. We have an eternal part of us, a piece of the Creator, that is at the core of our soul and that will continue after our demise. Through the core of our soul, we connect to something infinite that can take us above the place our negative emotions can lead us.

Imagine the spectrum of colors from white to black, or the spectrum of sounds from low to high. Now imagine our emotions on a simplistic spectrum, such as:

Joy  
Contentment  
Neutral  
Anxiety  
Unreality

Most people fluctuate on this spectrum, sometimes in the same day! Is it safe to say that this is our identity?

Step two is to accept that our lasting identity is that part of us that helps us move through the spectrum, that part of our makeup that can choose tools to help elevate our emotions when we are discouraged. It would not be fair to say it is intellect alone, but more accurate to say it is an intellect with a wisdom that recognizes the Creator, to whom we are attached and who is active in our lives, and whom we should recognize with reverence and obedience. Think of this as a lifeline – when we despair, we can grab onto this lifeline and pull ourselves out through a series of prayer and actions.

## Chapter 3 – Avoiding a sense of lack

When we have an obstacle before us, when we despair, or when we are in need of money, or health or other real concerns, we are often at a crossroads where we can go wrong and make serious errors.

Ideally, we ask for help from above and take actions that are within the guidelines of proper conduct, ethical and honest and truthful. If it is truly good for us, then the Creator wants it for us, it is His Will and He gives it to us. If it is not good for us, or the time is not right for us to have it, the answer can be "no," which it often is. In either case though, our sense of completion is in our control and we accept and have a level of happiness even if we are lacking the matter we asked for. When the lack continues, if we are not accepting of the Creator's will, we look for other solutions, which means we turn away from our eternal identity and from the Creator and go astray.

Going astray means that we listen to a part of us that comes too close in our maneuvering to crossing lines

that break laws or cause harm to others, for which we are accountable. It is urgent to remember that even if we are able to cover our tracks, we will all come to a time when our bodies and actions will testify against us for the things we did that crossed these lines. No words will be necessary in a revealed world. The deeds will speak for themselves and we will feel shame. When there is no darkness, no place to hide, our intentions and our actions will be exposed and will come to light. This image of the shame we would feel should be carried with us at every moment, for it is a very real image that will happen and our fear of it should be very great in order to keep us from going astray. When we cause harm to others, even if people cannot see how we were accountable for it, the Creator can see and we are damaged and will feel shamed and pain to a degree that we cannot imagine. Knowing that there are these consequences is a sign of mental health. Believing that these consequences do not exist or that we will be able to talk our way out of it or hide or justify them to the Creator is a denial of the actual reality of the world and a sign that a person is in a precarious and unhealthy mental state in this world.

What leads us astray is feeling that we lack something. We begin to rationalize doing things we would not otherwise consider. Before we act on these rationalizations, the emergency first aid that we need at that moment is remembering that we are not lacking anything even if we want something, that if it were indeed good for us, we would have it. We remember the shame we will feel and the despair we can come to by harming others and taking matters into our own hands beyond what is permissible. We must remember that shame and despair are far worse than what we feel we are lacking at the moment even if the lack is substantial and permanent, because shame and despair can destroy us mentally and spiritually for eternity. The simple fact that we don't have it means that it is not good for us at that time, and that we should continue to pray to the Creator to rectify the reason that we are in need of experiencing the deprivation. This prayer is an action that brings us a sense of wholeness immediately.

Thus step three is to turn away from a feeling of lack and turn toward the Creator, knowing that He loves us and will care for us no matter what. By just saying "no, I am not lacking anything," our mood changes and we have peace. If we can't get what we want in a proper, ethical manner, then we pray that the blockage be removed. In this process, we might find something in ourselves to improve or to work on as well, as a way to return to a straightness and truth that is pleasing to the Creator. Once again, we have a sense of wholeness and control over our lives, knowing that the One who runs the world and the only One who can give us what we are asking for has been solicited.

#### Chapter 4 – Clearing past transgressions

When we do not have things that we obviously need and that everyone agrees are good, such as money or health, what can we do if we have made every possible effort? One of the most urgent things to recognize is that if a person is living in this world, it is to rectify ourselves in some way. There are no angels here, angels are in Heaven. If a soul is in this world, it is because there is something that the soul has yet to complete. Sometimes, the rectification for the soul is suffering, and suffering can be through money, through health, or through watching loved ones suffer (G-d forbid). Accepting this spiritual reality is important and will help make every day stress more comprehensible. Crying out to the Creator in pain, asking for His intervention, is imperative.

At times, however, there is also acknowledgment of wrongdoing that might be required. When we have pushed the limits beyond what is permitted because we have experienced a lack, our emotions of our core soul have become involved with actions that are identifying us in a lowly manner. It is important to reclaim our identity toward ideals (see Chapter 2 – Who Am I?).

Very often, identifying ourselves with our lowly actions brings us into a state of despair and depression that is far worse than the original thing we felt lacking. This is called neurosis in psychological terms...we have a difficulty and rather than solve the difficulty directly, we come up with layers and layers of neurotic behavior to substitute for a solution. These bring us lower and lower. If the neurotic behaviors actually lead to actions that harm others, then our identity has suffered very greatly and we are in a downward spiral. Again, by reconnecting to the One who is running things, we are able to begin restoring a sense of wholeness.

Step 4 is the proper way to acknowledge wrongdoing. In prayer and commitment to the Creator:

"I confess that I did this wrong thing (name it). I succumbed to a feeling of lack and I was tempted and followed this wrong path thinking that it would bring me a sense of wholeness and happiness and I now regret it. Please forgive me. To show that I know where wholeness and happiness come from, I intend to take on these good deeds that will, in fact, bring me closer to the Creator."

## Chapter 5 – Hating is Bad for People: The Ethical Standards for the Nations of the World

Hating other people is bad for the people who hate. It may also be devastating for the ones hated, especially if the hateful ones are powerful and capable of murder and killing and genocide. But the focus here is how bad it is for the ones who hate to have that emotion.

Let's take a closer look at hatred. When you have a little child, when does that child say "I hate you" to someone? It is when the child does not get what he wants (a triviality) or when the child experiences an evil act from another (more serious and damaging, like abuse or neglect.) In the first case, the words "I hate you" signal to the basically decent other person that somehow this child's feelings are being overlooked or not acknowledged. The decent person might re-examine the connection and do what can be done under the circumstances to take the child into account without sacrificing whatever rule or lesson the parent is attempting to instill. While the wrong reason for doing this is might be that the parent fears rejection of the child and wants to somehow guarantee the relationship between the parent and child, the right reason to make any accommodation is to keep bitterness and poison out of the heart of the child, who has not properly understood the parent's action. A simple example of this when a parent takes a child to the doctor for an injection. How can the parent who loves the child all day long subject the child to getting stabbed with a needle? The parent explains as best she can to the child, in a loving way so that the child not be afraid or feel mistrustful of the parent. In this same manner, we want our children not to hate us, but we must be firm and loving as parents at the same time. In the instance where a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect and truly hates the parent, there are two levels of damage now, the damage done by the abuse or neglect, and the internalization of this evil into the heart of the child, which now has imprinted in it's emotional memory a very destructive thing, hatred. As long as that hatred resides in the child, the damage from the evil never can heal. In some instances, that hatred and the child's right to hate become more overpowering and more central to the identity of the child than the abuse or neglect itself, which evil would have ceased once the child grows up and can care for himself. Expelling hatred from our hearts is imperative because it is bad for us.

Why is hatred in our hearts so bad for us?

G-d created man in His image so that could be similar to G-d by emulating His characteristics. The most pronounced characteristic of G-d is lovingkindness. It is our daily task to maintain ourselves as lovingkind beings so that by being similar to G-d, we stay close to G-d. Staying close to G-d is crucial for people who recognize the Creator, who attach ourselves to the Creator in our definition of our identity, and who recognize the Creator with reverence and obedience.

How do we stay lovingkind when we naturally feel hatred? After all, if we have a belief or a value or a goal and someone exerts power or influence over us to frustrate our goal and we cannot over power them, it is very natural to feel hatred for that power, just as a child says "I hate you" to a parent. We very much identify with the self-motivated goals that we set for ourselves and thereby we can run into a difficulty in distinguishing what are our goals and what is G-d's Will.

In our essence we want to maintain ourselves as lovingkind and close to G-d. We choose this as our identity so that we can connect to something infinite that can take us above the place our negative reactions take us. We choose this because we don't want poison inside our hearts that drags us into unreality. Thus, we train ourselves to see this goal of closeness and emulation as more important than the goals that generated the hatred. Why? Can't we have both?

When there is hatred in our hearts, we cannot be close to G-d because G-d is lovingkind and forgiving and to be close to G-d means that we are similar to G-d. By identifying with our hatred, we move ourselves farther from G-d and acceptance of His Will. And the distance we put and the rationalizations and justifications we apply bring evil to reside inside of our hearts, and this damages us by pushing G-d out.

Every person that we see alive, whether that person is involved with good deeds or bad deeds, is loved by G-d, who is at this very moment giving him or her life, food, shelter, clothing, and opportunities to come close to G-d through acts of kindness and other acts. Any person can bring himself closer to G-d by emulating His kindness and doing His Will.

How can we know with certainty the will of G-d?

The Old Testament outlines the seven Noahide Laws that are to be followed by all people in the world.

Jewish people have 606 additional laws to follow. These seven laws are the pillars of human civilization, and are named the "Seven Laws of Noah," since all humans are descendants from Noah. They are:

1. Do not murder.
2. Do not steal.
3. Do not worship false gods.
4. Do not be sexually immoral.
5. Do not eat a limb removed from a live animal.
6. Do not curse God.
7. Set up courts and bring offenders to justice.

In today's world, how many of these laws are being followed? Globally, where are we today on the spectrum of emotions suggested in Chapter 2?

If you believe that globally we have reached an emotional level of unreality, then perhaps on a personal level, you might be interested in finding a way to pursue happiness that does not depend on what is going on around us, a way that will protect your heart from engraving hatred upon it.

What good can we find in a world that is spiraling downward? By seeing a world at the level of unreality, we have an opportunity to recognize that without G-d in our lives, there is no such thing as coping with the world as it is, because the negative and self-motivated forces operating will bring us all not just to economic demise, but to mental and spiritual demise as well. Within an individual's life, we have the ability to have a sense of wholeness and happiness by identifying and drawing close to G-d, who is lovingkind and forgiving and who instructs us to live according to His Will.

Step 5 is remembering that everything is G-d, there is only G-d, and that He is good and does only good. While what is before our eyes spirals downward, each person while alive has a part of them that can choose to recognize the Creator and emulate the kindness of the Creator. By so doing, we open a doorway to wholeness and peace of mind that is infinite, no matter what happens to our physical selves.