

GATEWAY to HAPPINESS



Rabbi Zelig Pliskin

GATEWAY TO HAPPINESS (Condensed Edition)

A practical guide to happiness and peace of mind compiled from the full spectrum of Torah literature

By Zelig Pliskin

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It has been 25 years since *Gateway to Happiness* was first published. Since then, there has been a greater awareness of the importance of happiness in our lives.

I thank Bnay Yaakov Publications, the publisher of the complete *Gateway to Happiness*, for giving their permission for this condensation of the first eight chapters for distribution as a free ebook. May they be blessed.

The complete book has 435 pages. This condensation provides the reader with the basic ideas that serve as a foundation for the rest of the work. Applying the principles found in this condensation will enable you to live a happier life.

I have written a number of books on related topics published by Artscroll. For more information about those books see

Artscroll.com/Authors/Rabbi_Zelig_Pliskin.html

The book I would most recommend is *Conversations with Yourself* (Artscroll). There I elaborate on how our self-talk can increase our level of happiness, and how counter-productive self-talk is at the root of unhappiness and needless limitations. This is a practical guide to greater happiness, self-development, and self-empowerment.

PREFACE

Happiness is a skill that can be learned. The essential factor whether or not you will live a happy life is not based so much on external factors such as wealth, success, or fame. Rather happiness is based on your thoughts towards life, towards yourself, towards other people, and towards events and situation. Regardless of how you have viewed these areas in the past, you can presently change your thoughts and master the attribute of happiness.

Rabbainu Yonah (*Shaarey Tshuvah* 3:54) wrote that we are obligated to make an effort to offer sound and appropriate advice to others. He added that this is one of the essential aspects of performing acts of kindness.

My goal in this condensed edition is to offer practical advice that can personally help some readers, and to supply tools useful for those in the helping professions.

Almost everyone is sometimes needlessly sad, angry, or worried. Any normal person has the ability to minimize both the frequency and intensity of negative emotions. The advice suggested in this book has proven itself to be beneficial in alleviating unnecessary suffering and promoting a positive outlook on life.

Most of the source material in this book is from Torah literature that I have translated into English from the original Hebrew. I have selected some of the main ideas that appeared in the larger first edition published in 1983. This condensed version is not meant to be an exhaustive study.

Following some of the citations, I have elaborated on the themes expressed by those scholars. Some of the ideas without a source are original and others were adapted and integrated from many sources.

Every person is unique and a book of this type is not tailor-made for an exact fit for any specific reader. Focus on the ideas you personally find beneficial. The subjects dealt with here require a lifetime of study and effort to implement. Patience and perseverance are necessary for mastering them.

No two people read the exact same book. Moreover, even the same person never reads the exact same book twice. When we read or hear something, we automatically react with our uniquely individualistic prior life experiences, knowledge, personality, and attitudes. In these areas, even two people who are similar have many differences. The second time we read the same book, we are different, either slightly or significantly, than we were the first time we read it. The exact same thought strikes us in a different light. Each time you reread this, you will gain in some way.

Human beings are complex and there are many factors of prior conditioning in every individual's personal history that will evoke distressful feelings. Also, our physiological state (chemical balance, general health, fatigue, etc.) influences our moods. Hence, is it unrealistic to assume that by reading this book and integrating the ideas, you will be totally in control of your emotions. Everyone can have a large degree of control, accept any lapses as normal (don't be sad that you feel sad), and continue to strive for improvement.

There is a context to every idea. In a dialogue, a speaker can elaborate on the limitations and qualifications of his ideas, which he readily admits are part and parcel of the original statements. Readers should take this into account and refrain from prematurely dismissing ideas that could possibly be of great value to them.

There are two types of readers. One looks at ideas and tries to find situations and places when they will not apply. He might be right. But he will miss out on the potential gain he could have had if his focus were on finding when the ideas would apply. The other type of reader keeps asking, "How can I apply this in my own life or to help others?" It is to this type of reader that I address this book.

Reading this book will not make you happy. The only thing that can make you happy is your own mind. To master happiness you will have to internalize the ideas presented here and that is up to you. If the perspectives and concepts presented here are foreign to your way of thinking, you will have to decide, "Am I willing to change my attitudes or do I want to stay the way I am?" If you wish to change your attitudes, you might have to review these ideas many times before they will become part of your automatic way of thinking.

There are three questions to ask yourself that will make the difference between just reading the book and actually developing greater happiness.

1. Do I agree with this?
2. What are the consequences of accepting it?
3. What will I do about it?

Many important concepts for living sound quite simple and obvious in a classroom situation, but are often overlooked by even highly intelligent individuals. This causes them many needless difficulties. This book is to serve as a reminder for many ideas that you already know, but find yourself forgetting.

A book on the subject of happiness has its limitations. Sad people tend to think irrationally, and in order to change their thinking to a more positive direction, they need to be aware of what they are presently thinking and how to change it. In a personal dialogue this is frequently accomplished more effectively than in a book. I would suggest that seriously sad, nervous, or hot-tempered individuals consult a competent counselor. (At times medical problems are at the root of a person's negative feelings. If you have a suspicion that you might be ill, see a physician.)

I am profoundly grateful to all the many Torah scholars whose lectures and personal discussions have made this work possible. I attended scores of lectures of Rabbi Chayim Shmuelewitz, the late head of Mirrer Yeshiva. His emphasis on how one creates one's own emotional world has been the cornerstone of this work.

I am grateful to the late Rabbi Avigdor Miller, originally from Baltimore, for instilling within me a deeper appreciation of the wonders of Creation.

I am grateful to Rabbi Noah Weinberg of Aish Hatorah for placing an emphasis on the importance of happiness in our lives.

I am grateful to Lionel Ketchian for being the founder of the first Happiness Club on our planet. His decision to consistently choose happiness as a way of being is a great role model for everyone else. May his dream of having happiness clubs in every town and village become a reality.

If you are going to read just one chapter, I recommend that you read chapter three: Happiness is dependent on your thoughts.

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Chapter One

HAPPINESS IS AN OBLIGATION

1.1 It is a *mitzvah* (good deed) to be happy.

1. The Bible (Deuteronomy 16:11) states a commandment to be happy: “You shall rejoice with all the good that the Almighty has given you.” My teacher, the late Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, wrote that this is *mitzvah* (good deed). We are obligated to feel joy with what we were given by the Almighty. The question arises, why we need a directive to rejoice since we would automatically be happy when we have good things.

The answer is that we humans have a tendency to always want more. Therefore it is easy to forget to feel grateful and happy with the good that we already have. We should strive to feel a joy that is complete. Lack of joy with what we have is destructive both physically and spiritually. (Rabbi Mordechai Gifter 1915-2001; *Pirkei Torah*, vol. 2, p.107)

2. The Rambam (Maimonides) (1135-1204) advocates happiness in moderation: “Be neither frivolous nor sad. Be consistently in a happy mood with a pleasant facial expression.” (*Hilchos Daios* 1:4 and 2:7)

3. “It is a great *mitzvah* to be consistently in a state of happiness.” (Rabbi Nachman of Breslov -1772-1810; *Likutai Aitzos, simcha*, no.30)

1.2 The reality and the ideal

1. The late Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz (1874-1936) observed: “People become so used to being unhappy they are unaware of the needless misery they cause themselves. They imprison themselves by filling their minds with thoughts of resentment, hatred, envy, and desires. It is amazing how they tolerate living such a life. The only reason they do tolerate it is because they have become so used to living with such thoughts they feel it is the normal picture of life. They mistakenly think that it is impossible for life to be any different. (*Daas Chochmah Umussar*, vol.2, p.139)

You have the ability to make yourself happier than you presently are. A person who mistakenly thinks there is nothing he can do to increase his happiness will fail to make the necessary effort to improve.

2. Rabbi Yeruchem's teacher, Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv of Kelm (1824-1898) wrote: "Creation is for human beings to live a life of pleasure and satisfaction, and not to live a life of frustration and distress as so many people appear to be living." (*Chochmah Umussar*, vol.2, p.355)

1.3 Defining happiness

It is impossible to adequately define happiness with words. Happiness is an emotional state which is an experience and not a concept. Emotions are comprised of physiological states and thoughts and only a person who has experienced happiness first hand can have an experience of what this actually means. By recalling the best moments of your life from your infancy and childhood, and from your entire life until the present, you will know what you personally mean by happiness.

A beautiful sunset and awesome natural scenes must be experienced visually to know what it really is. An uplifting symphony orchestra must be heard to know what it really is. Similarly happiness and joy must be experienced. Your brain will then produce the biochemistry that makes you feel good, and a brain scan will record the brainwaves consistent with these feelings.

When you master the attribute of gratitude and consistently do many acts of kindness, you will increase the amounts of authentic happiness experiences in your life.

1.4 Happiness is an obligation to oneself, to one's fellow human beings, and to the Creator

(A) Happiness is an obligation to oneself

1. There is no comparison between doing something with enthusiasm and joy and doing it without enthusiasm and joy. If we would do everything with enthusiasm, there is no limit to the elevated levels we would reach. Enthusiasm generates power. A person with enthusiasm is able to overcome laziness and pursue wisdom and higher spiritual levels. (*Chochmah Umussar* vol. 2, p.172)

2. Happiness will heal a person from illness. (Rabainu Yonah (d.1263) to *Proverbs* 17:22)

A cheerful disposition is an inestimable treasure. It preserves health, promotes convalescence, and helps us cope with adversity. (Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch 1808-1888, rendered into English by Karin Paritzky-Joshua, Feldheim Pub.)

3. The Torah prohibits us from endangering our health. We must be more stringent in these matters than other prohibitions. (see *Mishnah Brurah* 472:11)

Lack of happiness is dangerous to one's health. A wide range of psychosomatic diseases are caused by distressful emotions such as sadness, worry, envy, anger, and excessive anxiety.

(B) Happiness is an obligation because of our relationships with others

1. The Torah ideal is to greet each and every person with a pleasant facial expression. (*Tomar Dvorah*, ch.2)

One way to keep practicing is to smile to yourself in a mirror. Recent research has shown that this gives you an upgrade in the bio-chemicals produced by your brain.

A young man once came to Rabbi Noson Tzvi Finkel of Slobodka (d.1927) to announce his engagement. Noticing the young man wore a very solemn facial expression, Rabbi Finkel stressed that while this is a great obligation at all times, it is especially necessary when he is in the presence of his fiancée. (*Hameoros Hagdolim*, p.234)

2. People want others to smile and show signs of happiness when they address them. You have the ability to serve as a “shining sun” to everyone with whom you come into contact. Even a tiny infant can differentiate between a face that is shining and one expressing depression and resentment. If you smile at an infant, the infant will smile back at you. A child who lacks friendly smiles is like a plant missing sunlight. (Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, d.2005, *Alai Shur*, vol.1, p.190)

3. When you are happy, you are able to cheer up other people which is a great act of kindness. A happy person spreads his happy feelings. (*Likutai Aitzos, simcha*, no. 38)

As the family eagerly waiting traveling to the wedding of Rabbi Chayim Shmuelevitz's youngest son, Rav Chayim called one of his older students to his home. The student was having difficulties finding a wife, and Rav Chayim counseled him at length providing advice and encouragement.

“Today I am marrying off my youngest child,” the head of the Mirrer Yeshiva told his student. “My joy is very great. I thought to myself, who on this special day can I help out? I thought of you.” (*Sefer Hazikoron*, p.103)

(C) Happiness is an obligation to our Creator.

1. The Baal Shem Tov (founder of the Chassidic movement 1700-1760) said, “The Almighty has sent you into this world for an appointed errand. It is His will that you accomplish your errand in a state of joy. Sadness implies an unwillingness on your part to carry out the Almighty’s will.”

2. A righteous person will enjoy even a small amount of food to such a degree that he might appear to be a glutton. Such a person enjoys what he has, not from a hedonistic love of pleasure, but from an awareness of the benefits the Almighty has bestowed upon him. He takes pleasure in becoming closer to the Almighty, and this benefits him both physically and spiritually. (*Chochmah Umussar*, vol. 2, p.74)

3. Rabbi Chayim of Volozhin (1749-1821) wrote: “When feeling joy, you will be able to gain more from one hour of study than many hours of studying when sad.” (*Ruach Chayim*, *Avos* 6:6)

1.5 Formula for happiness

The classic *mussar* (ethical writings) work *Orchos Tzadikim* (unknown 14th Century author) states the following formula for happiness: “If a person obtains all that he desires and nothing causing him sadness befalls him, he will constantly be happy. His face will shine, he will be physically healthy, and be slow to show the signs of old age.”

At first glance this passage seems to describe an unreachable utopian state. But with a closer look we have an insight on how to obtain happiness. First of all, refrain from desiring what is beyond your reach. The simpler your desires, the greater the chance you will be able to meet their requirements. Anything extra you obtain beyond these demands will give you increased happiness, so you have nothing to lose and much to gain by lowering your demands and expectations. This does not rule out striving for realistic goals, only that you give up your demands for things you are not able to obtain.

Secondly, do not allow events to cause you sadness. At least in common day-to-day occurrences master a perspective of life that will enable you to accept what happens without becoming sad.

1.6 The way to have a guarantee of happiness.

1. A truly happy person does not allow his happiness to be dependent on any external factor over which he does not have control. (*Chochmah Umussar*, vol. 2, pp.331-2)

One who makes his happiness dependent on wealth, fame, success, or other external factors will not be able to master happiness. External factors will be his master. Only by mastering a positive attitude to life's varied situations will you have a guarantee of happiness.

2. Seek happiness in a way that depends only on yourself. We see this concept in the passage in *Pirke Avos 4:1 (Chapters of the Fathers)* which states that the wise person is one who learns from everyone (independent of any intellectual deficiencies in himself); the honorable person is one who honors others (independent of whether others honor him); the wealthy person is one who is joyful with what he has (independent of how much or little he owns). This passage clearly teaches us not to seek or demand happiness in factors dependent on anything external to us. (*Daas Chochmah Umussar*, vol. 3, p.250)

Base your happiness on your own thoughts and attitudes, and you can be its master. If you tell yourself that you can only be happy if others do or say what you wish, your happiness is under the control of those people. You can never have a guarantee how others will behave. Even when they do behave as you wish, you are likely to feel uneasy about how they might behave in the future.

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz (1874-1936) wrote in a letter to his son: "I constantly try to think along the lines of the attitude expressed in this passage. I do not make myself dependent on any other person or any specific place. I am therefore constantly happy."

4. There are definitely external situations which are conducive to happiness: good health, a good marriage, a large number of close friends and relatives, wealth, fame and honor. But none of these can guarantee happiness. Some wealthy and healthy people are nevertheless depressed. Conversely, some financially poor and sickly people manage to be consistently cheerful. Once you accept the responsibility for making yourself happy independent of good or bad fortune, you will be determined to work on your thought patterns instead of chasing illusions.

1.7 Mastery of happiness takes effort.

1. Being in a consistent state of happiness demands effort. Every person has thoughts with which he makes himself unhappy. Make a conscious effort to think in a manner that allows you to feel happy. (*Meir B'ahavah* – Biography of Rabbi Meir Shapiro 1887-1934)

Happiness is a byproduct of thinking and behaving in a positive manner. An unhappy person who has a vague goal of obtaining happiness and is unprepared to changing his attitudes and behavior is doomed to failure. One focusing solely on, “I want happiness where can I find it?” is usually disappointed. Rather, ask yourself, “What thoughts can I think to enable me to be happy” and, “What specific behaviors should I engage in that will increase my happiness?”

2. Some people appear happy but lack inner happiness. They might feel that life isn't too bad and they do feel happy on occasion. Some individuals are happy by nature, but most people must make a conscious effort to master happiness.

3. People differ in their natural tendencies towards feeling happy. A naturally happy person finds it relatively easy to overcome needless unhappy moods. People who tend to be pessimistic and sad have to put in the effort to change their thoughts, statements, and behavior. Invest the necessary time and effort and you will certainly be successful. Do not label yourself as an unhappy person (“It's my nature to be sad.”), for if so you will not make the necessary effort and the label will be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Have confidence that if you try, you will improve.

1.8 The conquest of happiness.

1. The righteous will always feel joy and never feel sad about what the Almighty has decreed upon them because they realize whatever He does is for their ultimate best. (Ibn Ezra 1089 – 1164 in his commentary to Psalms 33:4)

2. A person who lives with a constant awareness of the Almighty will live a life of constant happiness. (Chazon Ish 1878-1953; *Emunah Ubitochon*, ch.1)

3. The Chazon Ish describes the level a person is potentially capable of attaining if he has a long term goal for self-improvement: “If a person constantly strives to improve his character traits, it is possible he will eventually reach a level that he will no longer get angry, will not feel hatred or resentment, will not take revenge nor bear a grudge, will not have ambitions of seeking honor, and will not be addicted to pleasure.” (ibid. 1:15)

4. A person who accepts upon himself the obligation to be happy and constantly strives to master this attribute is able to have a large degree of control. Many elevated masters have mastered happiness to such an extent that their faces glowed with happiness despite any personal difficulties and problems that they experienced.

1.9 Potential mistakes

1. Far too often we judge happiness according to outward appearances and accustom ourselves and our children to overestimate the value of material acquisitions. Happiness is by no means determined by this kind of wealth. In fact, as such acquisitions become everyday needs, they lose their value. On the other hand, if they must one day be relinquished, our senses, which have become used to those superficialities, feel sorely deprived. No person should be rated according to the quantity of his material acquisitions or his status in society. (Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch; *From the Wisdom of Mishle*, p. 144)

2. Complete happiness will not come to one's soul through gratifying physical desires. The only way to achieve perfect happiness is to find spiritual fulfillment which leads to being satisfied with one's material situation. (*Mussar Hatorah*, p.63)

3. Some people are under the impression that in our modern age we need new concepts for obtaining happiness. But people do not change. There are constant changes in external conditions and environment, but the essential person, what makes him happy or sad, his desires and ambitions, basically remain the same. New techniques might be developed, but the scholars throughout the ages in their *mussar* (ethical) works have supplied us with the knowledge necessary for making ourselves happy. (*Toras Hanefesh*, p.11)

4. Happiness as an obligation does not mean that you should feel guilty if you are not happy. The first time you hear this concept you may not be able to demand happiness of yourself when you are sad. It is not feasible for most people to be constantly happy without ever feeling sad, nor is it always appropriate to be happy.

Happiness as an obligation means that whether or not you are happy in your life depends largely on yourself. You have the ability to master the thoughts and attitudes that will produce happiness.

5. While it is possible to choose self-statements and patterns of thought in a short time, for many people it takes a concerted effort over a long period of time before

new ways of thinking become automatic. Even an expert at thinking in a positive manner will most likely be needlessly unhappy occasionally. Expecting perfection is unreasonable and counterproductive.

If you demand to be happy every single moment, you are likely to feel needlessly anxious and guilty when you do feel unhappy. Complete mastery over one's thoughts is an unrealistic goal. But everyone can improve and this is what we should strive for. Accept any lapses as normal and calmly continue increasing your happiness-producing thoughts.

As you acquire the habit of thinking in a positive manner, your general mood will change for the better.

1.10 Selfish happiness is a fault

“The type of joy that is a *mitzvah* (good deed) is the joy you share with those less fortunate such as orphans, widows, those without a family and poor people. If, however, someone closes his doors to others and only utilizes what he has for himself and his immediate family without helping the poor and the unfortunate, his joy is not the joy of a *mitzvah*, but joy of the stomach. Such joy is a badge of shame. (Rambam - Maimonides 1135-1204 *Hilchos Yom Tov* 6:18)

1.11 Influencing others to be happy.

If you see someone who looks unhappy, the first thing to do is to try to empathize with his suffering. Try to understand what is bothering him. At times this can be quite difficult since he himself might not be totally aware of what exactly is bothering him, or he might be embarrassed to tell you. Subtly and tactfully try to influence him to have a more optimistic view of life. If done successfully, this is a great act of kindness.

CHAPTER TWO

APPRECIATING WHAT YOU HAVE

2.1 Human beings were created for pleasure

1. The world with all its details is a source of pleasure. A person's experience in physical and spiritual areas has the potential for happiness without end. What destroys this potential is we become used to what we already have and take things for granted. We do not derive the great joy and limitless pleasure that the natural world could bestow because we become habituated to its sights and experiences. In order that we have an emotional feeling for the kindness of the Almighty, the Sages have prescribed daily blessings that express gratitude for. (Rabbi Noson Tzvi Finkel (1849-1927; *Ohr Hatzafun*, vol. 3, p.84)

2. Rational thinking dictates that we should strive to master the trait of taking pleasure with what we already have. Regardless of what you have, you can always have lasting pleasure that is dependent only on yourself and not on anyone else. Once you acquire this attribute, you have a guarantee for the future. You will be able to have this pleasure your entire life. (*Chochmah Umussar*, vol.2, p.63)

2.2 Learn to appreciate the world.

1. Use your mind intelligently and you will never be considered poor since in your possession is the entire world of nature. Appreciate the potential you have for benefiting from the world. Seeing beauty and wisdom in every blade of grass gives one an awareness of the Creator. (Rabbi Moshe Rosenstein, cited in *Darkai Mussar*, p.27)

2. *All happiness is in the mind.* He who possesses an understanding of the goodness of the world always rejoices. Life is full of intense pleasures which are available to all people, but many fail to appreciate them because of mistaken mental attitudes. The fundamental principle of the goodness of the world is proclaimed at the beginning of the Bible. "The Almighty saw all that He had made and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). The Creator Himself declares that everything is not only good, but very good. The phenomena of the universe are all the Almighty's handiwork and therefore infinitely good. The air we breathe is a great benefit, and is in abundant supply. Water is beneficial for the body and a delight, and the precious fluid is plentiful. The sunlight, the wind, the rain, the trees and the gardens, the mountains and the seas, the moon and the stars, fire, heat and cold, the snow and the dew, the use of our limbs, the ability to see and hear and smell and taste and feel, the faculty of speech, the faculty of thought and memory, the variety of food of every taste and color, the marvel of the body's secretions and

all of its magnificent chemistry, the materials which compose our clothing, the materials which supply homes and utensils, the grains and the vegetables and the fruits, meat and fowl and fish, the minerals, wood and coal and petroleum and all the resources of the earth, electricity, light, electronic impulses of every variety, and on and on: a lengthy list of useful and pleasurable objects and processes which fill our lives with every opportunity for enjoyment. Yet for many people these are as if they did not exist. The universal benefits which all humans possess are ignored. If the happiness of life passes by unnoticed, it also passes by un-enjoyed. When one sees no happiness in his lot, he will indeed see no reason to be grateful to his Creator. (Rabbi Avigdor Miller 1908-2001; *Sing, You Righteous*, pp.17-8)

2.3 Learn to focus on the Almighty's kindness to you.

1. Whenever your mind is free, make a conscious effort to focus on the good that the Almighty has bestowed upon you. (Rabbi Bachya Ibn Pekudah, 11th cent. Spain: *Chovos Halvovos* 10:7)

2. Utilize every opportunity to become aware of the Almighty's kindness to you. This awareness will motivate you to emulate the Almighty and make the attribute of kindness an integral part of your personality. (Rabbi Mordechai Gifter; *Pirkei Torah*, vol.2, p.12)

3. Every single time you have some pleasure, even a very slight one such as gaining a small profit, feel grateful to the Almighty. Every day we have numerous such occasions which are easily overlooked. They are lessons to teach awareness of the Almighty's Divine Providence. (*Hashlomas Hamidos*, ch.9)

2.4 Focus on what you have and not on what you are missing.

1. One who enjoys what he has, regardless of whether he has a lot or a little, will experience life as if he constantly attends parties. He will always be in a positive emotional state. Conversely, a person who keeps focusing on what others have and what he is missing suffers constantly. (Proverbs 15:15; commentary of *Mutzudas Dovid*)

2. People who focus on what they are missing are blinded to what they have. While they could and should be extremely happy because of the positive elements of their lives, they keep thinking about what they are missing. (*Chovos Halvovos*, section 2, Introduction, and Rabbi Yosef Leib Bloch, *Shiurai Daas*, vol.2, p.150)

You will always be lacking things you would like to have. This is inevitable. If you keep thinking about what you do not have, you miss appreciating what you already have.

3. Once you realize that the source of your emotional distress is your own thoughts, you will be more motivated to think thoughts of appreciation and gratitude. Your own thoughts will then be the source of your happiness. I suggest that you read this paragraph over and over again until you totally get it. This is life transforming. (ZP, 2008)

4. Write a list of things you have overlooked appreciating in the past. Be resolved to start feeling grateful for those things.

5. When you look back at your past, focus on the things you can be grateful for. (Rabbi Eliezer Zev Luft; *Tnuas Hamussar*, vol.5, p.302)

All too often people think of their past in terms of their sorrows and problems. Your being alive today means you were able to meet your basic needs until now. Be grateful for that.

2.5 Learn to focus on the positive qualities of each situation.

1. Every season has its positive qualities and its special difficulties. Make it your habit to focus on what is positive.

As Rabbi Avigdor Miller wrote we have the ability to: “Delight in spring, revel in the sunny summer, love the vitality of autumn, and relish the bracing winter, and perpetually be grateful.” (*Awake, My Glory*, p.369)

2. It is easy to focus on the hardships of rain. Train yourself to think of the benefits instead.

2.6 Appreciate life.

As long as we are alive, we can think to ourselves, “How happy I would be if I obtained a large amount of money. No amount of money, however, can compare to the greater value of life itself. (*Pele Yoaitz: simcha*)

Sit down for a few minutes and imagine being the recipient of great wealth. Imagine the pleasure and joy you would feel. Actually try to experience that great feeling. Now transfer that pleasure to the pleasure of living.

2.7 Appreciate your health

When a person is ill, he strongly wants to become well. He imagines that when he is cured he will feel constant happiness. But shortly after he is cured, he takes his good health for granted. (*Chochmah Umussar*, vol.2, p59)

Build up an appreciation for your health and the use of your body. Appreciate being able to walk and use your hands. Appreciate when you are free from pain. Even if someone has some handicap and limitation, there is so much to be grateful for. Keep developing your gratitude and you will increase your feelings of happiness.

2.8 Learn to appreciate things which are usually taken for granted.

1. When we have something for a long time, we usually take it for granted. From the day we were born, we have breathed air and seen sunlight and the beauty of nature. We have had sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch for such a long time we have lost our appreciation for them. We take our daily pleasures and our intellectual attainments for granted. (Rabbi Noson Tzvi Finkel of Slobodka; *Tnuas Hamussar*, vol 3, pp.202-3)

2. Make it a daily practice to view the world as if you were created today. Mentally picture yourself coming into the world for the first time and observe everything with a freshness. This exercise can transform the mundane into a thrilling experience. (Rabbi Noson Tzvi Finkel; *Ohr Hatzafun*, vol.3, p.84)

Just reading this will not help. Set aside some time at least once to try this.

3. There is a great pleasure in appreciating the warmth and glow of the sun. Many people only appreciate daylight and sunshine when they feel satisfaction from some financial profit or have just received honor or other pleasures. When they are full of worries and misery from something they feel they are missing or because of envy, they overlook the light shining on the world. (*Toras Avraham*, p.443)

4. Rabbi Moshe Rosenstein related that Rabbi Yisroel Salanter often expressed his feelings of great joy on the benefit he has from the shining sun which helps humankind in so many ways. Rabbi Rosenstein would ask: "Why don't other people also feel the same joy as Rabbi Salanter?" The main reason is that people feel happier when they have something others are missing. When everyone else in the world has the same thing, they do not feel they have anything special. Rabbi Salanter felt great love for other people. Therefore, the fact that others also

benefited increased his pleasure. Just as a person feels more pleasure when his children also have pleasure, so too, one who sincerely loves other people feels increased pleasure when other also benefit. (*Darkai Mussar*, pp.26-7)

5. It is easy to take mental capabilities for granted. Don't. Try to feel pleasure in your ability to speak and think. Appreciate that you can study wisdom. Even the greatest scholar should appreciate his ability to pronounce words, to read sentences, and to study the basics. A person who masters this appreciation will live a life of joy. (*Ohr Hatzafun*, vol.3, pp.85-6)

6. When putting on clothes, give thought to all the benefits you gain from your clothing. (*Daas Chochmah Umussar*, vol.3, p.67)

7. Think about how much you have gained from your immediate environment. Without other people you would be all alone. What would you be like if you grew up all by yourself in a forest? Not much different from an animal. Appreciate that the people in your environment have taught you much knowledge and understanding. (*ibid.*, p.68)

This type of thinking especially important for someone who finds himself easily annoyed with other people. Without others, life would be unimaginably difficult. The annoyances they cause you is the price you pay for the benefits you gain. Make a long list of all the people you gain from including workers in the food industry, building industry, publishing industry, transportation services, employees of the sanitation department and utilities companies.

8. Every person alive today derives much benefit from comforts and pleasures that in the past were not available. All of the latest inventions and findings of technology serves us to a remarkable degree. For all this we should be full of appreciation and gratitude. (*Nachalas Yosef, Torah*, p.115)

Make a list of items available for your use today that did not exist a few hundred years ago. Notice how these things help you and make life easier and more comfortable. Some examples are: electricity, telephones, refrigerators, cars, airplanes, light bulbs, washing machines, home heating systems, air conditioning, elevators, running water in your home. Some people focus only on how these things could be improved and how frequently they do not perform as well as they could. This focus is fruitful only if you plan to do something about it.

9. Every time you need to buy something and you have the money to purchase it, feel pleasure and gratitude that you have the necessary money. (*Yesod Veshoresh Hoavodah: tzavaah, no.32*)

When waiting in line in a grocery store, instead of focusing on how slowly the line is moving, focus on how fortunate you are that you are able to buy the food you need. Prices might be high, but at least you have enough money to purchase the basic necessities.

10. Every time you need to use any utensil or instrument and have it, take pleasure and feel gratitude for having that object. Most likely you will be able to do this scores of times a day. (*ibid.*)

Some common examples: pens, spoons and forks, cups, keys, watches, chairs and tables.

2.9 Techniques for gaining appreciation

1. The Midrash (*Braishis Rabbah* 14:11) says that with every single breath we breathe we should express our gratitude to the Almighty. As an exercise set a five minute period to be grateful for each breath.

2. If you master the ability of imagining your life without all that you presently have, you will appreciate what you have to such a degree that you will live a life of constant joy. If you were lost in a wilderness without food and water and then found some bread, you would enjoy that bread more than you usually would enjoy the most sumptuous meal. Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm wrote that he personally had such an experience, and it was living in paradise. You will always be able to feel that joy if you train yourself to use your mind wisely. (*Chochmah Umussar*, vol. 2, p.74)

Spend a few minutes imagining what it would be like if you had absolutely nothing: no family, no friends, no possessions, no money at all, no knowledge, no eyes, ears, hands, feet – absolutely nothing. Continue this until you actually feel it. Then picture yourself obtaining what you presently have, one item at a time. (based on *Pirkei Emunah*, p.20)

2.10 Silence can help you appreciate.

At times silence is necessary to appreciate an experience. A person who constantly feels a need to say something and to evaluate everything with words will detract from moving experiences by uttering unnecessary comments. (*Alai Shur*, vol.1, p.178)

2.11 Sharing with others helps you appreciate what you have.

A person does not feel complete pleasure if he does things solely for and by himself. Your own pleasure is enhanced when you share with others.

CHAPTER THREE

HAPPINESS IS DEPENDENT ON YOUR THOUGHTS

3.1 Introduction: you create your emotional world.

1. Life has the potential for happiness, but each person chooses what he will think about and how he will view things.

2. Happiness is a skill that can be learned. To acquire this skill it is necessary to master:

- The ability to focus on happiness-producing thoughts instead of those which cause unhappiness.
- The ability to evaluate events and situations as positive instead of negative, or at least to lower the degree of negativity (rather than considering minor discomforts as tragedies, evaluate them as minor).

3. The life of a person who has a positive attitude to life is likened in Proverbs (15:15) to a life of constant parties. His entire life is full of happiness and joy. Such a person does not need special situations to supply him with happiness. Whatever he does and wherever he is, he finds things to be happy about. He grows constantly from each experience and from each person with whom he comes into contact. Mastering this attitude requires time and effort, but is a very worthwhile investment.

4. We create the world in which we live to a great extent. While many events are beyond our control and we are unable to have a direct influence on them, we still have the ability to control our thoughts and attitudes towards a given situation to a large degree. Hence, the emotional consequences of events is largely up to us. It is unrealistic to expect perfect control, but people who work calmly and persistently on their thoughts will be able to improve.

5. A concise formula for happiness can be put simply: consistently make an effort to think thoughts conducive to happiness and you will be happy. Your mind is constantly at work with various thoughts and images at the forefront of your focus. If you make an effort to keep telling yourself statements conducive to happiness, you will live a happy life. It is your choice. Many people are not completely aware of what they are constantly telling themselves, but by obtaining awareness they will have greater control.

3.2 You constantly choose whether you will focus on the positive or negative.

1. Happiness can be learned. While we probably will never have complete control over our emotions, we have much more control than many people realize. Our thoughts control our emotions and we have the ability to control our thoughts to a great degree. Regardless of how a person has thought in the past, if he is willing to be flexible, he can learn to think in ways that bring happiness.

2. We ourselves choose to think those thoughts which promote our happiness or those with which we make ourselves miserable. This is a most important principle. You choose your thoughts. If you let your mind dwell on whatever thoughts happen to pop in, that too is a choice.

3. To live a happier life, you need to minimize the amount of time spent on negative thoughts and to maximize the time you spend thinking thoughts conducive to happiness.

4. We are constantly repeating messages in our minds. If they are negative, “I’m a failure,” “The world is an awful place,” “Nothing ever goes right,” we make our lives miserable. We have the ability to consciously make an effort to repeat to ourselves positive messages: “I have the ability to keep improving,” “The world contains many wonderful opportunities,” “Everything that happens to me can be used for growth.”

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter stressed the importance of memorizing inspirational aphorisms and passages and repeating them constantly. Little by little they will have a positive effect on your personality and emotions. (see *Tnuas Hamussar*, vol. 1, pp. 252-5)

6. When negative thoughts arise, you don’t need to fight them. Make an effort to think positive thoughts, and the negative thoughts will disappear. (*Likutai Aitzos; machshovos*, no.11)

7. Regardless of where a person actually is physically, he is really where his thoughts are. A person constantly has a choice to think elevated and uplifting thoughts or negative, self-destructive thoughts. How old you feel is greatly dependent on your attitude about yourself. Elderly people can increase their vitality and vigor by considering themselves young. (*Toras Yitzchok*, p.53)

8. We constantly talk to ourselves. We can choose to be our own best friend by telling ourselves positive thoughts, or our own worst enemy by repeating negative thoughts.

The story is told of a worker who always brought jelly sandwiches from home to lunch. A co-worker heard him mutter to himself, "Oh no, it's a jelly sandwich again. I hate jelly." The co-worker asked, "Why don't you tell your wife to make you a different kind of sandwich?"

"My wife doesn't make my sandwiches. I make them myself," was the reply. A person who makes himself miserable by repeating to himself negative thoughts is acting just as foolishly as this worker with his jelly sandwiches. He is needlessly making himself miserable.

9. A person whose major focus is on what is wrong with himself or his environment or what might go wrong in the future is not thinking about the positive things of life. Such a person will be unhappy. To overcome this tendency, make a conscious effort to keep your main focus on what is positive in life and on obtaining spiritual growth. By mastering this you gain in two ways. These thoughts will put you in a state of happiness, and they will prevent you from thinking negative thoughts.

3.3 Your attitude is a key factor to your reaction.

1. What you tell yourself about a given situation is the way that situation will affect you. Your attitude towards any event or situation is not based on its objective reality, but on your own subjective evaluation of the event or situation.

2. Facts themselves are neutral. You do not have emotional reactions to facts. Your emotional reaction is always based on your subjective evaluation of any situation:

- When you evaluate something as negative, awful, tragic, or a misfortune, you will feel sad, depressed, miserable, angry, or full of anxiety.
- When you think that something does not affect you in any way and are apathetic to it, you will feel neutral.
- When you evaluate something as good for you, you will react with happiness or joy.

3. While you might automatically react in a certain way, you can mentally challenge your initial perception of the situation and perceive it in a more positive manner. You might have viewed frustrating situations as awful, and therefore might have reacted with anger or sadness. However you can now view frustrating

situations as challenges to your ability to perceive things in a positive manner. What previously caused you discomfort can now be a rewarding and growth-filled experience. When you have mastered the new way of looking at things, your emotions will be consistent with that outlook.

4. Unrealistic expectations are at the heart of much of our emotional pain. We feel upset and disappointed when our expectations are not met. If we did not have unrealistic expectations, we would not suffer so much. Clarify what you can actually expect from the world. Is it realistic to think that everything will always work out exactly as you wish? Of course not. If you give up your unrealistic demands of how things must be, you will save yourself much needless disappointment.

5. People frequently say, “He made me sad,” or, “It got me upset.” This implies that external factors are the cause of their emotions and they are not able to do anything about it. The reality is that external events cannot make you sad or upset; you do so yourself by what you tell yourself about external events. Get into the habit of saying, “I make myself sad because of what I tell myself about his actions or words,” or, “I make myself upset because of what I tell myself about what happened.” When you speak in these terms, you are accepting the responsibility for your reactions. This will serve as an incentive to change your thoughts and attitudes from those with which you make yourself unhappy to those with which you enable yourself to be happy.

3.4 You have the ability to view an event or situation in many ways.

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz (1874-1936) of the Mir made an observation that should be read very carefully. The point he raises is so important for a mastery of happiness that it should be read a number of times: When a person is born, he finds the world in a certain organized fashion. As he grows up, he tries to adjust himself to the assumptions that are accepted in the world. He views each event that occurs with the same perspective as the other people of the generation. These perspectives originated in the past and have been handed down from parents to children. These assumptions are taken for granted to such an extent that most people react to the accepted perspective of the world as if they were laws of the universe that cannot be changed. They are accepted as reality and are not challenged. Only a small minority of people obtain the necessary wisdom to look at the world with complete objectivity. They take a critical look at each and every thing and try to understand everything as it really is instead of accepting the general prevalent outlook. (*Daas Chochmah Umussar*, vol. 1, pp.75-6)

2. I have frequently found that pessimists say to optimists, “You are not being realistic.” But this is a misconception with serious consequences. If a glass is large enough to hold a quart of water and it now contains half a quart, what is the reality? The reality is it contains half a quart of water. Nevertheless, some people will say it is half full and some will say it is half empty. As regards the reality, both views are correct. Nevertheless, some choose to be grateful for the water they have, and others choose to be bothered by what they do not have. This familiar example holds true for all aspects of life. We constantly choose what we will focus on and how we will view it. It is harmful to rigidly consider reality in a counterproductive way when you can choose positive ways of looking at things.

3. Think creatively and you will have the ability to view familiar situations and happenings in a new perspective. This will elicit new and more positive emotional responses to those situations and happenings that previously caused discomfort, sadness, and anger.

4. When trying to do a good deed which is difficult, do not concentrate on the difficulties involved. Focus on the fact that your merit for doing a good deed is greater when it is difficult. Perseverance in the face of difficulties has an elevating effect. The difficulty need not make you feel worse, but can actually make you feel better.

5. Constantly strive to look for something positive in every negative situation.

6. We can view the manner in which people treat us in many different ways. Why choose a negative approach, when you can choose a positive one? For example, if your parents treat you in a manner you consider suitable for someone younger than you, you might tell yourself it is awful they treat you like a baby. But you can also view this as a manifestation of your parents’ love and concern for you.

7. The exact same job can be viewed either as drudgery and emotionally distressing or as an enjoyable way to spend one’s time. It depends on the individual’s perspective.

Even an act such as washing dishes can have various meanings to different people. For some it represents a boring but necessary task; for others it might mean a rest from harder physical work. To some it is an opportunity to think undisturbed about

important subjects or listening to inspiring recordings while their hands go through the motions. To others it is a demeaning chore for upon them by circumstances. For some it is performing an act of kindness for family or friends. For others it is a time to reflect on gratitude about their good fortune for having nourishing food. What is the reality? It is merely that one is washing dishes. But how it will affect someone emotionally depends upon his own subjective interpretation. Any individual has the ability to look at this task in one manner one day and in an entirely different manner the next. Fortunate is the person able to master thinking consistently in a manner that promotes happiness and spiritual elevation.

8. It is easy to feel frustrated and miserable when you make mistakes. But you can always learn from your mistakes and failures. If you use them as learning experiences, you can view them as positive. Although you would rather not have made those mistakes, you can now view them as stepping stones to growth.

9. When things do not work out the way you would have liked and you see that you can still cope, use it as a lesson not to be excessively worried about the outcome of similar situations in the future.

3.5 You have the ability to change your negative evaluations to positive ones.

1. We all have answers to the question of how we view life in general. Even a person who has not consciously formulated a point of view implicitly manifests one. Some people view life as an adventure, full of excitement and opportunities for accomplishment, which others view life as a painful experience that must be endured. Regardless of how you have been viewing life in the past, you can begin to have a more positive attitude if you consciously make an effort to think along positive lines. Just realizing it is your choice can give you a large amount of control and help you improve.

2. If you forcibly try to remove negative thoughts about a problem, you will often find that the more you try to get rid of the thoughts, the stronger those thoughts become entrenched in your mind. (Rabbi Yisroel Salanter; *Tnuas Hamussar*, vol.1, 284)

Don't try to force positive thoughts; gently and gradually look for more positive ways of viewing things. It might help to ask yourself, "What positive way could I tell someone else how to view this matter?"

3. Whenever you react to an event or occurrence with a negative emotion (such as sadness, anger, or anxiety) divide the situation into three parts or stages:

Stage 1: The situation itself (without any evaluation).

Stage 2: Your attitude about the situation.

Stage 3: Your emotional reaction.

The situation in itself (stage 1) does not cause your emotional reaction (stage 3). It is always your attitude about the situation (stage 2) that causes your emotional reaction. Change your attitude (stage 2) from negative to positive and your emotional reaction (stage 3) will change from negative to positive. Remember, the positive attitude has to be realistic and acceptable to you personally.

Whenever you react negatively (stage 3), figure out what your self-statements is at stage 2, and try to change it to a more positive or less negative outlook.

4. In his later years, Rabbi Yechezkail Levenstein (1884-1974) wrote that those situations which initially caused him suffering were ultimately the cause of good fortune. (*Ohr Yechezkail: michtavim*, p.326)

We can never really be certain that any event will actually be bad for us. Why assess an event as definitely negative, when it can turn out in a way that you will clearly see is for your benefit?

5. Even a person with much life experience and great control over his thoughts and emotions will find that in unusual situations his initial reaction will be negative. Immediately use your ability to weigh the situation objectively and challenge your negative way of viewing the matter. This ability gives you a large degree of control over your reactions. (Rabbi Yosef Leib Bloch; *Shiurai Daas*, vol.3, p. 67)

When you immediately react with thoughts conducive to sadness, anger, resentment, or envy, don't feel you must keep those thoughts until they wear out by themselves. Rather, as soon as you realize you reacted counterproductively, challenge your initial reaction. Tell yourself why the event is not really as negative as your originally considered it to be. Tell yourself reasons why you need not keep thinking in patterns that lead to resentment and anger. The reasons must be real to you. This might take persistence.

Some people half-heartedly try to do this for a few seconds and give up, claiming they are unable to do it. They give up too soon. We are not claiming that it is easy for everyone, or that it can be learned in a few seconds. But it is a skill that can be

learned. Like any other skill it takes sufficient practice to become efficient at it. It is helpful to write down your negative thoughts and then write down positive ways of looking at the event or situation.

3.7 Look at life from the perspective of death.

The best way to gain a perspective about life is to visit a cemetery. (*Chayai Hamussar*, vol. 2, p.176)

Rabbi Nachum of Huradna used to say, “If I had already died and the Almighty told me I could come back to life again, imagine how happy I would be. Now that I am still alive, I should feel that same joy.” (*Chayai Hamussar*, p.200)

3.8 A spiritual perspective of events.

1. Living with a spiritual perspective means that we view all that happens to us throughout the day as being for our ultimate good. Imagine a day when everything went well for you. Every conversation and transaction with others went exactly as you would have wished. All the hundreds of daily tasks and routines you engaged in worked out to your complete satisfaction. How would you feel? Extremely happy, of course. You would most probably be in such a good mood by the end of the day that trivial irritants would not bother you in the least.

2. When you first hear of a new way of looking at things, it will usually not become an integrated part of your perspective right away. The more you repeat these ideas the more they will become part of you.

3. Every aspect of our lives is a challenge and test (*Mesilas Yeshorim*, ch.1) With this perspective, life will never be boring or mundane. Every single situation and occurrence is different from every other one and each is an opportunity for elevation and growth.

When you have awareness that a situation or occurrence is a test, you will find it much easier to deal with. To illustrate this concept, imagine that you went for a job interview and the potential employer should an insult at you. You would most probably feel either upset or angry. But if someone told you in advance that this employer shouts at job candidates to test their reaction to stress, you would find it easy to remain calm. You realize it is just a test and it is in your best interests for pass it. That is how we can view each event and situation. It is a test of our spiritual strength and courage, and we can look forward to passing it.

3.9 It takes effort to change a pattern of thought.

1. A person easily becomes a slave to his habits. The most difficult habits to break are the habits of thinking in a certain manner. You can have a large amount of control over yourself by working to obtain positive habits. Even with habits of thought, we have the ability to utilize the power of habit to form the habit of thinking rationally and productively, and to elevate our thoughts to such a degree that we will have changed our entire thought patterns for the better. (Rabbi Isaac Sher 1875-1952; Introduction to *Cheshbon Hanefesh*)

2. If you want a concept to become part of your thinking, keep repeating it to yourself again and again. Even though you might not gain a deeper understanding of the concept, the constant repetition enables you to internalize it until it becomes part of your own way of thinking. (*Daas Chochmah Umussar*, vol.1, p.114)

3. The Talmud relates that Rabbi Praidia had a student who needed to hear a lesson four hundred times until he comprehended it. Rabbi Moshe Rosenstein used to say that when it comes to elevating our attitudes we are all in the same situation as that student. If we sincerely want a new attitude to be integrated into our own way of thinking, we need to repeat it over and over again. Even if a person is highly intelligent, unless he reviews the concepts hundreds of times, they will not become part of him. (*Darkai Mussar*, p.60)

3.10 Potential mistakes

1. Just because others react to a certain situation with a specific emotional reaction does not mean you also must react in the same manner. Some people might be extremely nervous or upset in certain situations, but you can still look at the situation in a calm and sensible manner. When you see others reaction with irritation, anger, or sadness, ask yourself what other alternatives are possible. What are those people telling themselves and how can those self-statements be challenged? Look for people who have inner peace of mind and happiness, and try to learn from them.

2. Some people ask, “Are you advocating an ostrich-like attitude in which one blinds oneself to the many problems of living?” Of course not. Blinding oneself to the realities of life will usually not bring a person long-term happiness. If you avoid dealing with your problems, they will eventually overwhelm you and bring misery. But anyone able to think straight and sensibly can learn to think in a manner that will increase his happiness. What is needed is the ability to differentiate between productive and counterproductive thinking and behavior. Only think of negative topics when there is some constructive reason for doing so.

3. It would be unrealistic and frequently counterproductive for most people to think they have to be perfect in refraining from counterproductive thinking. Demanding perfection from yourself will make you excessively nervous and prone to anger and guilt. A realistic attitude of being aware of your imperfections in this area and working consistently on improvement will definitely bring about positive changes.

4. Do not suddenly try to force yourself to concentrate on what you wish and forcibly drive away other thoughts. Have patience and a willingness to grow little by little. (*Cheshbon Hamefesh*, no.16)

3.11 Influencing others.

1. The best way to influence other to think and act their way to a happy, meaningful life is to be a role model of happiness based on gratitude and kindness. (ZP: 2008)

2. Do not go around telling other people how they should feel. Unless you are tactful in getting them to change their way of thinking, they will resent you trying to control their feelings and will ignore what you say.

3. If you want to try to influence someone who feels upset or angry about some event to change his way of thinking, keep in mind that in most instances blithely lecturing or quoting some source will not change him. The tool that is needed is appropriate and skillful questions and a generous amount of empathy. In a calm and friendly voice (the tone of voice is crucial), have the person answer your questions in such a way that he will realize on his own there is another perspective to the situation.

4. Our negative attitudes are learned. This places a major responsibility on adults, especially parents, to be careful about the attitudes they express. One person told me that as a child a number of adults told him how lucky he is that he is still a child since adults have many problems. He grew up with an attitude that being an adult is painful and he has had an extremely hard time trying to overcome it. Whatever your attitude towards life and events, you automatically serve as a model for others. By having attitudes conducive to happiness, you influence others to be happy.

CHAPTER FOUR PEACE OF MIND

4.1 The benefits and importance of peace of mind.

1. Peace of mind is one of the greatest pleasures a person can have. Conversely, lack of peace of mind can make one's life constant torture. (Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm; *Chochmah Umussar*, vol.1, p.255)

2. A person who has mastered peace of mind has gained everything. To obtain peace of mind you need to be at peace with the people in your environment. You need to be at peace with yourself: your emotions and your desires. Furthermore, you need to be at peace with your Creator. (*Alai Shur*, vol. 1, p.195)

3. All the possessions and pleasures of the world are only valuable if they are accompanied by peace of mind. A person who has tremendous riches and can gratify all of his desires, will nevertheless suffer if he lacks peace of mind. As a rule, the power-hungry and the status-seekers lack this obvious realization. Why work on obtaining power and status when you have the ability to work on something that is much more precious? A peaceful mental attitude and serenity of the soul are the most important factors for happiness.

It is related that when an ancient emperor was about to sail for Italy, an advisor asked him what his ultimate plans were.

“To conquer Rome,” he replied.

“What will be after that?”

“To conquer Carthage, Macedonia, and Greece.”

“And after you have conquered all that, what are your plans?”

“Then I will be able to spend my life in peace and comfort.”

“But,” queried the wise advisor, “what prevents your being in peace and comfort right now?”

4. “Better a morsel of dry bread and tranquility with it, than a house full of feasting with strife” (Proverbs 17:1). Inner serenity is the true essence of success in life, and this can be attained even with a piece of dry bread.” (*Malbim on Mishle*, p.178)

5. When you have peace of mind, you can use your mind constructively. Lack of peace of mind breeds anger and resentment. (Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz; *Daas Chochmah Umussar*, vol 3, p.169)

6. Only when a person has peace of mind can he really feel love for humanity. Lack of peace of mind leads to animosity towards others. Peace of mind leads to love. (*Daas Chochmah Umussar*, vol. 2, p.203)
7. Only if a person has peace of mind will he be able to pass the test of dealing properly with other people. He will be able to be good and kindhearted to everyone. His peace of mind will enable him to tolerate others and be patient with them. (Rabbi Hillel Witkind, Jerusalem 1944 in *Mussar Hatorah*, p.10)
8. When a person has peace of mind, he will be successful. Furthermore, when a person is successful, he will have even greater peace of mind. For this reason it is inappropriate to think about things that will rob you for your peace of mind. (from a letter in *Ohr Yechezkaill: michtavim*, p.32)
9. Even in the humblest circumstances in the midst of the troubles that are so much part of the present day world (1882!) a life filled with good endeavors will ensure inner peace and serenity to him who leads it. The peace of mind of the righteous is a blissful state little understood by the rest of the world. (Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch; *The Psalms 37:11*)
10. A person who does not know how to use his mind productively will flee from the state of being alone. But when a person has learned how to think, he will greatly appreciate the moments when he is by himself, for then he will be able to utilize those moments for intellectual and spiritual growth. In fact, moments of solitude serve as tests to a person to clarify how thinking-oriented he really is. (Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe; *Alai Shur*, vol. 1, p.178)

4.2 Modern technology is not the solution for peace of mind.

1. Modern technology has brought about the production of many new appliances and machines. While they do save much time and energy, they have somehow not been successful in promoting peace of mind. (*Chayai Olam*, vol.1, ch.2)
2. Some people have the illusion that in time new inventions will foster peace of mind. They believe that while today we are yet lacking the necessary technology, at some time in the future we will have enough inventions to ensure peace of mind. But we can learn a lesson from the false hopes of the past. In a major American journal in 1899, one expert described the effects he envisioned the motor car would eventually have on city dwellers:
 “The improvement in city conditions by the general adoption of the motor car can hardly be overestimated. Streets clean, dustless, and odorless, with light rubber-

tired vehicles moving swiftly and noiselessly over their smooth expanse, would eliminate a greater part of the nervousness and strain of modern metropolitan life.”

Just as new inventions will not automatically give peace of mind, neither will wealth, the collecting of skills, degrees, and possessions, nor the achievements of fame, power, or prestige. The only way to master peace of mind is to master the attitudes that foster it – and this is an internal process, not an external one.

4.3 By accepting whatever happens, you will be able to have peace of mind.

1. Logical and rational thinking shows us that since it is impossible for a person to save himself from the difficulties and misfortunes of life, it makes sense to accept them with a positive attitude. This ensures a person a happy life. (*Chochmah Umussar*, vol.2, p.153)

2. Rabbi Mordechai of Lekhivitz, a Chassidic master, used to say, “If things do not go the way you wish them to be, you should wish them to be the way they are in reality.” (*Magdolai Hatorha Vachasidus*, vol. 20. p.107)

I would highly advise you to repeat this thought many times until it become part of your thinking. Mastery of this attitude can transform a person’s life.

3. A person who accepts calmly whatever is beyond his control is the truly wealthy person. (*Mivchar Hapeninim*, p. 24)

A person needs to master the skill of accepting things as they are when they cannot be changed, and to calmly plan on changing them when they can be changed in order to gain peace of mind. When things do not go the way you would like them to, why add to your loss by making yourself miserable? You have a choice. You can repeat to yourself, “How awful,” and add to your suffering. On the other hand, you can try to find some positive aspects in your present situation or focus on something else. It is senseless and irrational to choose to think in ways that cause you misery when you can choose to think in a way that will lead to peace of mind.

4. In order to have peace of mind prepare yourself in advance to accept with serenity whatever occurs. People who expect everything in life to go the way they wish are caught off balance by difficult life situations. Have an awareness that difficulties constantly arise. Being prepared in advance to accept what happens make it much easier to cope with the vicissitudes of life. (letter in *Ohr Yechezkail: michtavim*, p. 286)

5. To obtain peace of mind you have to free yourself from demanding that things be exactly as you wish them to be. If you demand that your appliances always work, that you have a large amount of money, that you keep a certain job, or that people always respect you, you will lack peace of mind. Your demands will breed feelings of anxiety. You can still prefer that things be a certain way, but as long as you do not disturb yourself if they are not as you wish, you will always be able to have peace of mind.

6. In a letter to a person who lacked peace of mind, Rabbi Yechezkail Levenstein wrote: “The best advice is to develop the attitude expressed by the *Rosh* in his classic work (*Orchos Chayim*, no. 69) ‘Want what your Creator wants for you. Take pleasure in what you have, whether comparatively little or a lot.’ This is the proper path to take. Whatever situation you find yourself in, you will be able to find success. Your life challenges lie in your particular circumstances. My advice to you is to try with all your might to be satisfied with your situation. Once you adopt this attitude, you will be able to find peace of mind and this will be therapeutic for both your body and soul.” (*Ohr Yechezkail: michtavim*, no.106)

7. No person can know what is really good for him in the long run. (*Ohr Yechezkail: michtavim*, pp.170 and 267-8)

We lack peace of mind because we feel anxious and worried about what has happened to us in the past or what might happen to us in the future, and assume those events are bad for us. But the reality is we can never know in advance what the consequences of events will be. Since we cannot really know what is for our best, we should at least look at each event as neutral if we are not able to view it as positive.

4.4 Your perspective of events is an important factor in attaining peace of mind.

Be aware of your main goals in life. When a situation arises that might disturb your peace of mind, ask yourself, “What effect, if any, does this event or incident have on those goals?”

When you realize this present situation does not have a major effect on what is really important, the problem will shrink in significance and once again you will be able to have peace of mind.

4.5 You disturb your own peace of mind.

1. Regardless of how much wealth and how many possessions you have, you will not have peace of mind unless you overcome feelings of envy, overcome your desires, and overcome your demand for approval. If you lack control in these areas, you will destroy your life. (based on *Pirkei Avos*)

2. If some incident upset you, you will merely upset yourself more by discussing it over and over. Although you are presently distressed, you will just ignore the matter it will pass in many instances. At times it can prove beneficial to talk over upsetting events with a friend. But many trivial matters will remain trivial and irrelevant if you view them in that perspective.

To master peace of mind, one needs to ignore unfortunate events unless there is some practical benefit to be gained by talking about them. At times the practical benefit might be that by telling someone of your plight, you will feel better.

When you do feel a need to talk problems over with someone, choose a person with insight who will see things objectively and will offer solutions and constructive advice. Such a person will be able to differentiate between artificial problems and real ones.

Discuss matters with someone who will be able to alleviate your negative feelings by giving constructive advice or by showing you another perspective of the situation so that you can handle it more efficiently. Avoid telling your problems to someone who will magnify them and keep re-upsetting you needlessly.

4.6 Demanding security and certainty prevents peace of mind.

1. If your peace of mind is dependent on your being certain that you have complete control over a situation and all the possibilities that might arise, you are bound to be disappointed. It is arrogant to think you have the ability to foresee every last thing that might go wrong. It is an impossibility, and to demand the impossible is to guarantee frustration. No human has the omniscience to foresee everything. Always realize the unexpected can occur. Plan as much as is appropriate, but realize that regardless of how much you plan there will always be difficulties that you had not previously imagined. By expecting there will always be unexpected occurrences and accepting them, you will have much greater peace of mind than if you have unrealistic expectations of complete control.

2. If many areas of our lives uncertainty is inevitable. You will cause yourself much needless pain if you demand certainty when it is not realistic to expect. If

you give up your unrealistic demands for absolute certainty, you will be able to have the same peace of mind as if you were certain. Even in extremely important areas of our lives we are likely to be uncertain. While it is worthwhile to be as certain as possible, as long as you accept your uncertainty you will not exacerbate your situation.

4.7 Focus on doing what you can do. Not on what you can't do.

When you try to do communal work, focus on what you can do. Not on what you can't do. Realizing you are not responsible for what is beyond your control, will enable you to keep your peace of mind.

If you feel an urge to personally complete the job, you will feel a heavy burden and possibly overwhelming anxiety. The attitude that will allow you to have peace of mind while forging ahead is to feel a sense of responsibility to do what you can while at the same time realizing there are many external factors that might prevent you from succeeding completely. Keep your focus on trying to accomplish with the best of your ability.

4.8 Quieting your inner chatter.

1. Our thoughts are not under our direct control to the degree that our behavior is. A person's mind is constantly busy and does not stay focused on any one topic. The first skill you need to master to have control of your thoughts is to remove all distractions and confusion and to concentrate on one subject. (*Toras Avraham*, p.432)

2. For peace of mind you need to learn the skill of quieting the constant chatter that is going on in your mind. Try to *calmly* keep your mind focused on one thought, while gently stopping other thoughts from entering. Practice doing this for short periods and keep increasing the amount of time.

3. Every occurrence and situation in our lives can be utilized for elevation and growth. When a person's main focus is growth, he will be able to have peace of mind regardless of what the specific situation is. (*Darkai Mussar*, p.186)

4. Keep repeating to yourself some slogan that will be able to supply you with continuous encouragement. One possibility is, "I have the ability to overcome trivial disturbances, bad or good." (*Cheshbon Hanefesh*, ch.1)

5. Try to have topics ready about what to think. Make a conscious decision, “Now I will think about this and now I will think about that.” (Rabbi Reuven Dov Dessler; *Tnuas Hamussar*, vol. 5, p.179)

6. When a number of thoughts about entirely different matters enter your mind, make an order. Decide what matters you will think about first. Only when you have finished the first matter, go on to the second matter, and when you finish thinking about that, go on to the third. This will train you to think in an orderly fashion and will prevent confusion. (ibid.)

7. Regardless of how you have viewed events in the past, you have the ability to learn to view things with a calm and peaceful attitude. Instead of looking at events and situations as overwhelming, you can look at them as interesting and challenging experiences. Give up your demands of how you would have liked anything to be and deal with what actually is.

8. The opposite of peace of mind is feelings of anxiety. It is a very uncomfortable feeling and in modern times more and more people try to drown it out with the use of tranquilizers and other medications. While in extreme situations this might be understandable, it is unnecessary and potentially harmful as a routine practice.

Our bodily reaction of anxiety is for our benefit. It serves as a warning of an impending danger and serves as a cue to keep away from harm. Anxiety is counterproductive if we feel it when there is not a real threat to our well-being. The first thing to do when you feel unnecessary anxiety is to accept it. The more you mentally fight anxiety, the worse you will feel. You can tell yourself, “Feeling anxiety is not very pleasant, but it is tolerable if I will decide to tolerate it.” When you accept your anxiety, it will usually become milder.

The next step is to try to figure out what worrisome thoughts you are telling yourself. You will find that you are usually telling yourself that some situation or the consequences of some action is very negative. If it really is, try to do something to solve it. If it is not really so awful (and usually it is not) or you cannot do anything to change the situation, then accept it. When you mentally accept the consequences of a situation, you will feel much calmer.

4.9 Take a mental vacation to create inner calm.

You feel relaxed when you take a vacation because your mind is at rest. The change in external environment makes it easier to put aside the stressful aspects of your daily life.

While we do not always have the ability to go to the mountains or travel to Switzerland whenever we feel excessively tense and under stress, we do have the ability to take a mental trip to peaceful and serene locations. Sitting in your chair with your eyes closed, you can imagine any place in the world where you can feel calm. Don't wish you were there, but actually feel as if you are there.

See how calm you start feeling as you mentally picture yourself in a peaceful meadow or forest or garden. Imagine yourself being without any worries or anxieties. While a person should not use this as an escape from solving his problems, ten or fifteen minutes can be as relaxing as a short nap and has the ability to ease tension.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE JOY OF ACTS OF KINDNESS

5:1 Acts of kindness can be a source of pleasure and joy.

1. Whenever you help another person in any way, take pleasure and feel joy. There are a multitude of behaviors that are included in this principle. (*Yesod Veshoresh Hoavodah: tzavaah, no45*)
2. It is especially important to express your feelings of joy when giving charity to a poor person. Show the person you are glad to be able to help him out. (*Yorah Daiah 249:3*)
3. When serving something to your father or mother, do so with a happy facial expression. If someone frowns when serving them, even if he gives them the best delicacies it is considered a wrongdoing. (*Yorah Daiah 240:4*)
4. Develop an actual love for helping others. There is a major difference between doing something only because you feel forced to do so, and doing something because you love to. Only when you love to do good, will you do it properly. (Chofetz Chaim, *Ahavas Chesed*, part 2, ch.1)
5. When you develop a love for doing acts of kindness, you will be very happy every time you have the opportunity to be kind. (ibid, part 2, ch.2)
6. Whenever someone asks you to lend him any utensil, tool, or instrument feel joy for the opportunity to do an act of kindness. (ibid, ch.22)
7. When someone feels great joy in being able to help others, he will not have to exert himself to greet them with a smile. He will do so automatically. His joy in doing acts of kindness will be so noticeable in his actions that this will give joy and pleasure to the person he is trying to help. (*Chochmah Umussar*, vol. 2, p.191)
8. When you do something in your home to help your spouse, you are doing an act of kindness and you can take pleasure in it. (Rabbi Noson Tzvi Finkel of Slobodka; *Tnuas Hamussar*, vol. 3, p.250-1)

9. Many routine actions that we do every day can be elevated by focusing on the kindness that you are doing. For example, when you are going shopping for your family, you can focus on the fact that you are doing acts of kindness.

When you say good morning to someone, focus on the fact that you are giving him a blessing.

When you hand something to someone, realize that you are doing an act of kindness.

10. When parents focus on the kindness that they are doing for their children, they can elevate all that they are doing for them. Child-raising has much potential for frustration, but by having loftier thoughts it can be transformed into the source of much joy.

11. A storekeeper or craftsman can elevate his daily behaviors by focusing on how he is helping other people. (Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, cited in *Michtav MaiEliyahu*, vol. 1, p.34-5)

When you are engaged in any job or occupation, focus on how you are helping other people. (*Chochmah Umussar*, vol. 2, p.95)

12. When you are engaged in acts that others consider drudgery and boring, you are likely to become influenced by them and view what you are doing the way they do. But you can overcome this tendency. Think of ways that you can enhance the spiritual aspects of your life while you are doing whatever you are doing.

13. Develop the habit of listening to educational and inspirational recordings while your hands are occupied but your mind is free.

5.2 Joy through growth.

1. There is no greater joy for a wise person than the joy of improving character traits. When someone reaches this level, he will even feel joy if someone insults him and he sees that he is free from animosity and resentment. (Chazon Ish; *Emunah Ubitochon*, 4:15)

2. Take pleasure every time you do not get angry when you might have. Take pleasure every time you are patient with others. Take pleasure in overcoming harmful desires. Take pleasure in reacting positively instead of feeling envious about someone's accomplishments.

3. Our attitude towards even the smallest degree of spiritual elevation should be similar to the happiness and excitement of someone who has found a hidden treasure. (*Toras Avraham*, p. 22)

5.3 The joy of prayer.

1. When a person learns to pray properly, understanding what he is saying and with enthusiasm, he will derive tremendous pleasure from praying. (Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, *Lev Eliyahu*, vol. 1, p.32)

2. Prayer has tremendous potential for spiritual elevation and intense pleasure. How tragic it is that such a great opportunity is often considered a boring chore. On one extreme, there are people who think that the object of prayer is to just rattle off the words. On the other extreme, there are people who try so hard to pray properly that they become very tense and nervous.

The way to have an elevating experience when praying is to calmly recite the words while keeping in mind that you are speaking to the Omniscient Creator of the Universe. Whenever an external thought comes into your mind, gently return your focus to what you were saying in your prayers. You need not fight other thoughts, just ignore them and once again concentrate on the words of the prayers you are reciting. If the thoughts that come up concern a practical problem that must be taken care of, set a time later in the day when you will deal with that matter.

Imagine what it would be like to speak to the wisest, most powerful Being. Realize that you are entering into a relationship with Him and as you talk nothing else in the world exist for you but Him and you. Talk to Him with the ease you talk with your father, there is no need to strain. But at the same time, have the awe and respect a loyal subject would bestow upon a king.

3. When a person learns to pray properly, he will be able to understand what the Chazon Ish 1878-1953 (*Emunah Ubitochon* 1:9) had in mind when he wrote, “When a person merits becoming aware of the reality of the Almighty’s existence, he will experience limitless joy. All the pleasures of the flesh immediately disappear. His soul is enveloped in sanctity and it is as if it has left the body and floats in the upper Heavens. When a person transcends to this level, an entirely new world is open to him. It is possible for a person to be momentarily like a celestial being in this world. All of the pleasures of this world are as nothing compared to the intense pleasure of a person cleaving to his Creator.”

CHAPTER SIX

REALIZING ONE'S SELF-WORTH

6.1 Introduction

A person who has low self-esteem will usually feel needlessly unhappy. When people feel inferior to others, they are likely to feel miserable. Since humility is a great virtue and arrogance a great fault, the importance of feelings of self-esteem is often overlooked. To be happy and to accomplish in life you need positive feelings about yourself, while avoiding conceit.

6.2 The benefits of self-esteem and problems caused by lack of it.

1. A person who realizes the greatness inherent in every human being and hence his own greatness, watches his behavior not to do anything that would be beneath the dignity of someone who is elevated. (*Sanhedrin 37a* and Rashi; *Nachalas Yosef, Torah*, pp. 54-5)
2. One who considers himself inferior will not be careful with his behavior. (Rambam to *Avos 2:13*)
3. If a person does not consider himself an “important person,” he will not free himself from his negative traits. (Rabbi Aharon of Karlin; *Dor Daiah*, vol. 1, p.167)

What a person believes about himself and his abilities serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Believing he is inferior, untalented, unimportant or incapable, influences his actual abilities. One's self-concept greatly determines what one can actually do. If you view yourself as unable to do things, you will be unable to do them. On the other hand, if you see yourself as talented, capable, and important, your self-concept will open up powers and talents that would have remained dormant had you thought of yourself in lesser terms. We have the ability to change our self-concept. Therefore, Rabbi Aharon of Karlin advised people to consider themselves as important, which enabled them to strive for greater accomplishments. Hardly anyone utilizes his entire capabilities. Most people use a low percentage of their potential and could accomplish much more than they realize. By raising your opinion of what you are capable of accomplishing, you will accomplish more.

4. A person who tends to feel unhappy and discouraged should be very careful about trying to work on humility. Such a person needs to focus on his virtues and strengths. Focusing on his faults and shortcomings is likely to destroy the small amount of joy he does have. (*Alai Shur*, vol. 1, p.65)

5. A truly distinguished and honorable person bestows honor on others and does not worry that by showing honor to someone else he is losing out on his own honor. (Rabbi Yosef Leib Bloch; *Shiurai Daas*, vol. 3, p.19)

6. There is an old Jewish saying, “One who has confidence in himself gains the confidence of others.” This is a very important concept to keep in mind when you want to influence others. Be confident that you can succeed.

7. A person lacking internal feelings of self-worth feels a need for honor from others. The greater the lack of self-esteem, the greater the need for the validation of one’s self-worth through the approval of others. (*Michtav MaiEliyahu*, vol. 1, p.99)

8. Some of the faults a person who has low self-esteem may have are:

- *Sensitivity to criticism.* He is defensive and hurt if someone criticizes him in any way. One aware of one’s own self-worth feels safe enough to listen to criticism and is willing to improve. As a rule, the weaker you feel, the more you try to conceal your shortcomings instead of working on them.
- *Over response to flattery.* This could cause him much harm since an insincere flatterer might take advantage of him.
- *Hypercritical attitude.* A person who looks at himself as inferior, feels a strong need to criticize other people. He tries to elevate himself by putting others down. The more faults he finds in others the better he feels.
- *Tendency towards blaming.* He is afraid to take the responsibility for what he does and blames everyone except himself.
- *Tendency towards being reclusive and shy.*

6.3 The spiritual perspective of the value of humans.

1. “Cherished are humans for they are created in the image of the Almighty” (*Pirke Avos* 3:18) The inherent value of every person, regardless of his accomplishments, wealth, or fame, is beyond comprehension. A person who internalizes this concept won’t suffer from an inferiority complex. He loves and respects fellow humans as they have this element of divinity.

2. Some people think that since one's self-image is largely based on one's early upbringing (how their parents, teachers, and friends treated them when they were young), they therefore can do little to change their self-image. But this is wrong.

It is true that our self-image is based largely on our past. But what counts is how we judge ourselves in the present. Regardless of how we were considered by others, we have the ability to change our own attitude towards ourselves.

4. Look back at your past experiences and picture how you would have dealt with difficult situations if you were to have had a positive, confident attitude. Don't look back with regret. Rather, use this as a tool to rewrite, as it were, your past history. This will have a powerful effect on all that you do in the future.

5. Every person is obligated to be aware that he has great worth. This does not refer to the illusory self-worth of arrogantly feeling better than others, but a true self-worth that is mind-boggling in its immensity. Each person is a one time phenomenon, an occurrence that has never been before, and will never be again. You have a unique blend of character traits and personality. You are unique in your particular family constellation, born in a specific time in history and in a specific environment. This uniqueness give you great importance. Only you can accomplish your unique life tasks. (*Alai Shur*, vol. 1, p.168)

6.4 Personal growth independent of external factors.

Some people gauge their value by what they own. But in reality the entire concept of ownership of possessions is based on an illusion. When you obtain a material object, it does not become part of you. Ownership is merely your right to use specific objects whenever you wish and that no one has a right to take them away from you. How unfortunate is the person who has an ambition to cleave to something impossible to cleave to. Such a person will not obtain what he desires and will experience suffering. Fortunate is the person whose ambition is to acquire personal growth that is independent of external factors. Such a person will lead a happy and rewarding life. (*Michtav MaiEliyahu*, vol. 1, pp. 42-3)

6.5 Do not allow another person's evaluation affect your feelings of self-esteem.

1. Do not feel any less self-esteem or become upset if other people speak or act condescendingly to you. The Sages have said that the honored person is the one who honors others. The converse applies: Who is a lowly person? One who tries to lower others. (*Ahavas Maishorim*, p.216)

Being an honored person is dependent on your behavior towards others and not on other people's behavior towards you. Why feel any lack of self-worth just because someone acts disrespectfully to you? Keep your focus on your behavior towards others. When someone does not treat you with respect, it is his problem, not yours.

2. Regardless of how anyone else values you, you still have the ability to have self-respect. Anyone who sincerely works on being a good person has virtues that make him valuable. Never judge yourself as a person based on anyone else's opinion of you. Ultimately, it is your mind that decides on how you will consider yourself. Even when you rely on someone else's judgment, it is your own choice.

3. A low self-image is usually obtained at an early age. A person might have had excessively critical parents or teachers, failed to get along well with other children, or received low marks in school. Though this attitude was formed at a young age from external sources, the only reason it lasts in the present is because a person keeps repeating it to himself. He has the ability to tell himself, "It might be true in the past I judged myself to be inferior, but I will now think for myself and appreciate my true value."

4. A person who worked on self-improvement came to the Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760) and complained, "I have tried for quite some time to become a better person. But I am still very plain and simple."

"To be aware that you are plain and simple is an accomplishment in itself," replied the Baal Shem Tov. "Take pleasure in that." (*Midrash Rivash Tov*)

6.6 Don't allow mistakes to rob you of self-worth.

1. Your feelings of self-worth need not depend on any external situation. Every human being has intrinsic value regardless of what he does. If you make mistakes and transgress, do not feel discouraged and lose your feelings of importance. There is no greater danger than that. Rather, when you have transgressed, strengthen yourself and elevate yourself above those transgressions. Keep your mind focused on your great potential for accomplishment. Regardless of how much wrong you have done in the past, you always can elevate yourself. (Rabbi Noson Tzvi Finkel of Slobodka; *Tnuas Hamussar*, vol. 3, p.273)

2. Try to become as great as you can. Some people are afraid to accomplish because they might make mistakes and those mistakes will be more serious than if they remained simple. This is not valid reasoning. Each person is obligated to develop himself to the best of his ability. The smallest person has potential for greatness if he utilizes all that is within him. (Rabbi Yosef Leib Bloch; *Shiurai Daas*, vol. 3, p.130)

3. Fear of failure is a prime reason some people feel anxiety. They think, “If I don’t succeed, I am a worthless failure.” Someone who fears failure is not willing to take the risks that are essential ingredient in every new undertaking. This prevents him from taking action in many situations in which he could accomplish a great deal. If someone accepts his intrinsic worth as a person even if he does not succeed at a given task, he realizes that his value as a person is never under risk, and will try to accomplish.

4. Rabbi Shlomo of Karlin used to say, “The worst fault a person can have is to forget his intrinsic greatness as a human being.” (*Dor Daiah*, vol. 1, p.172)

5. A person who feels he must always be right in an argument might be manifesting a lack of positive feelings of self-worth. Such a person could be telling himself, “Unless I am always right, I am a failure and a nobody.” He fears to admit the possibility of making a mistake because he fears it will lower his value as a person. However, a person who is a truth seeker and readily admits his mistakes will gain both the respect of others and will ultimately have more self-respect. Instead of looking at admitting mistakes as a sign of weakness, look at it as a manifestation of intellectual honesty.

6.7 A person with high ideals may be prone to negative feelings about himself.

1. There is a strong tendency for an evil person to consider himself good and for a truly good person to consider himself bad. The rationale behind this is simple. Their criteria of good and bad differ greatly. An evil person considers himself good if does not blind someone or rob him of all his money as would really like to do. A good person desires to help others and when unable to do as much as he idealistically wishes, he considers himself as bad. (*Imrai Binah*, p.45)

2. It has been my experience that people with low self-images are frequently very good people by objective standards, but have high aspirations and hence feel frustrated they are not able to reach their lofty goals. Since they are not perfect, they consider themselves failures and this leads to many negative consequences. It is important for such people to realize they are thinking in either/or terms: either

they are perfect or else they are failures. In each area of behavior and personality there are numerous levels along a continuum. If you are not perfect, you need not rate yourself as a failure. Focus on improvement instead of absolute perfection. It is worthwhile for a person with low self-esteem to write a list of the minimum standards of a basically good person. He is then able to have a more objective view of whether or not he is meeting those standards.

6.8 Work on improving yourself.

1. Work on improving yourself instead of wasting time feeling sorry you are not the way you would like. Describe your ideal self: what type of person do you really want to be? Be as specific as possible. One who uses such vague terms as a kind person or to be successful does not have a clear criteria to determine if he has reached his goals. Once you have a picture of your ideal self, you can plan on ways to travel on the path leading to that ideal.

2. People with inferiority feelings keep judging themselves negatively and put themselves down. *They should stop evaluating themselves.* Even if they don't yet think of themselves in positive terms, they can stop condemning themselves. It is much more productive to focus on which behaviors they should avoid and which behaviors they should pursue.

6.9 Parents and educators should try to build the confidence of their children and students.

To increase the self-esteem and confidence of children and students have them become aware of their strengths and resources. Even if someone has many faults and weaknesses, he will certainly have shown positive behavior from time to time. By pointing out to someone how he succeeded in some past endeavor, how he was successful in learning one thing, or how he manifested strength and courage in a specific situation, you are giving him a powerful resource upon which he can build. A person with low self-esteem tends to overlook the positive things he has done and focuses solely on his failures and mistakes. By showing him his strengths, you will be able to supply him with an optimistic attitude towards his latent potential. You have the ability to raise someone's entire self-image and encourage him to achieve important goals. This is one of the greatest acts of kindness a person can do.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FRIENDSHIP

7.1 Friends are valuable for happiness.

1. A person who keeps to himself will find it difficult to be in a state of joy. (Chofetz Chayim, *Ahavas Chesed*, part 2, ch.2)

2. Nothing so influences the faculties of a person's mind as communicating with friends who are striving towards the same goal. Our thinking is shaped and corrected only through the exchange of thoughts with others. An intellect which depends entirely upon itself is prone to stagnation, fantasies, or erroneous ideas. (Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, *From the Wisdom of Mishle*, p.183)

3. The Sages say that having a friend is so important that we should be willing to pay for one (*Pirke Avos* 1:6). For all aspects of living, a close friend can be very beneficial. So beneficial that even if you have to pay some price for one, it is worthwhile. Paying a price does not necessarily refer to financial payments. We might have to spend time and energy to keep a friend. We might have to tolerate some of his negative habits and at times he might quarrel with us. Nevertheless, the price we pay for a close friend is a worthwhile investment.

7.2 We have a need for others, but moderation is important.

“If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am by myself, who am I?” (Hillel, *Pirke Avos* 1:14). Do not make yourself overly dependent on others. If you won't take care of your own needs, how can you expect that others will? On the other hand, be aware of your limitations. To a certain degree we are all dependent on others. Even the richest and wisest person needs others. Consistently reacting in either extreme is bound to cause problems. Hillel advises us to take the middle path. Try to do for yourself what you can; but do not be too proud to ask others for help when necessary.

7.3 The way you behave towards others will affect their behavior towards you.

1. The fool turns a friend into an enemy, and the wise person turns an enemy into a friend. (*Tnuas Hamussar*, vol. 4, p.299)

2. “As in water, face answers to face; so too does the heart of one person to another” (*Mishle* 27:19)

This verse states a principle that is a major factor in our relationship with others. We all want others to be friendly and kind to us. The behavior of others is not in

our direct control, but our own behavior is. We play a large role in creating the world we live in, especially how others will behave towards us. If you behave towards others in a positive manner, they are likely to reciprocate.

When you act hostile and aggressively towards others, they are likely to behave in a similar manner towards you. When you shout at someone, he is likely to shout back at you. On the other hand, if you are caring and cheerful towards others, they are apt to feel love for you. Purely for pragmatic reasons we should be kind and friendly in dealing with others.

3. Instead of complaining about someone's behavior towards you, it is more constructive to work on your own behavior towards him. Even if you have to force yourself, act with kindness and love towards all your relatives and acquaintances. Do it consistently and you will see major improvements in other people's behavior towards you. Adopting this attitude can save married couples much needless quarreling and suffering. Ignore your spouse's grouchiness and anger, and speak cheerfully and with compassion. If you find this difficult, pretend you are an actor on stage. Not only will this prevent a quarrel, but it will influence the other person to behave better towards you.

Be flexible. People differ greatly on what they evaluate as positive and it is necessary to understand the unique needs of the person you are dealing with. If one approach is unsuccessful, try other approaches. But keep trying.

4. If you make an effort to help everyone you meet, you will feel close to everyone. A stranger is someone you have not yet helped. Doing acts of kindness for everyone you can, fills your worlds with friends and loved ones. (*Michtav MaiEliyahu*, vol. 1, p. 37)

Make a list of people with whom you would like to become closer. Besides each name write a few acts of kindness you could do for them that they would appreciate.

5. "Greet each person with a friendly smile" (*Pirke Avos* 1:5). The *Tiferes Yisroel* commented: Doing this act of kindness to all people will increase the positive feelings others have towards us. The recipient of your smile gains, and you increase the number of your friends. When you smile to someone, he is apt to smile to you and this will increase your own positive feelings.

7.4 Treat others with honor and respect.

1. Every person you meet deeply desires to be treated with respect. If you listen carefully, you will hear their cry: “Please consider me an important person.” “Don’t embarrass me or insult me>’ “Please listen to me when I speak.” (*Daas Chochmah Umussar*, vol. 3, p.68)

If you learn to treat every person you meet with respect, you will have many friends throughout your life. Upon meeting people, ask yourself, “What can I say to this person to show him respect?”

2. Every person in the world waits for signs of recognition and affection from others. Students strongly wait for signs of friendliness from their teacher, and truth is that the teacher also waits for signs of friendliness from his students. Children want signs of empathy from their parents, and parent too hunger for signs of affection from their children. Children have a large degree of influence on the emotional state of their parents. A customer wants a salesperson to understand his situation and his needs. But the salesperson also has a need that the customer should not belittle him or his merchandise. (*Alai Shur*, vol. 1, p.191)

3. When you come into contact with another person, make a special effort to see the person’s virtues. Not only look for his good points, but try to feel pleasure when you find a new virtue in someone. A person who masters this trait lives in an entirely different world than someone who lacks it. All the people he meets have positive elements that he notices and hence he will show honor and respect to everyone. (*Alai Shur*, vol. 1, p.119)

4. Flexibility is a most important tool in interpersonal relations. If you are rigid in your demands that others always comply with your wishes, you might frequently get your way but you will not have close relationships with other people. Be flexible and learn to differentiate between what is important and what is not. A person who feels he must always get his way is telling himself, “If I give to others, it means I am a weakling.” The spiritual attitude is that honoring others is what makes a person honored.

7.5 Be careful not to harm others.

We should be careful not to cause suffering to others out of love for humanity. In the context of the conquest of happiness, we should be careful not to harm others as we will ultimately suffer when we cause suffering to others. Some main areas to watch out for are:

- Refrain from insulting others.
- Refrain from talking negatively about others unless it is necessary for a practical and constructive purpose.
- Refrain from lying to others.
- Refrain from deceiving others in financial matters.
- Refrain from causing others pain or unpleasantness through your actions or words. (*Mesilas Yeshorim*, ch.19)
- Refrain from causing others financial loss.

7.6 Pray for others.

1. Pray for the welfare of others even when they are not aware you are praying for them. (Chofetz Chayim; *Ahavas Chesed*, part 3, ch.8)

Every person we meet has needs for which we can pray: success in spiritual matters, success in financial matters, good health, a good marriage, or raising their children properly. Saying a quiet prayer for the people you meet, even complete strangers, will give you much more positive feelings towards people. You have as much to gain as the recipient of your prayers.

2. When Rav Zushe would awake in the morning, he would say, “I wish a good morning to everyone.” (*Gan Hachasidus*, p.131)

3. At times, Rabbi Noson Tzvi Finkel of Slobodka would sit near the window of his house and quietly bestow blessings and prayers on all those who passed by. One of Rabbi Finkel’s students related that he was once walking with his teacher and they passed the home of a member of the faculty of the yeshiva. Rabbi Finkel turned towards the house and said, “Good morning.” The student was puzzled about this since he did not see anyone around. Noticing the student’s surprise, Rabbi Finkel explained, “Most people only bless that someone should have a good morning or a good day when they see that person face to face. But even when we do not see them, we should still develop the habit of blessing them.” (*Hameoros Hagdolim*, p. 233)

7.6 Understand other people.

1. Doing acts of kindness for others is one of man's essential obligations (Hosea 6:8). A person who wants to do acts of kindness must know a great deal about the ways of the world. You must have an awareness of the differences between people and their individual needs. (*Chochmah Umussar*, vol. 2, p.190)

2. Essential to getting along with other people is being able to see things from their point of view even if you disagree with them. When dealing with someone, try to see how he perceives the situation. For example, Rabbi Yisroel Salanter (cited in *Michtav MaiEliyahu*, vol. 1, p.99) said taking away a broken box from a child is similar to sinking the boat of an adult. To a child, his box is his boat and in dealing with him you have an obligation to understand how he views things.

Though difficult to master, this skill is crucial to obtain. Realize that no two people view things exactly the same way. Being aware of how someone else perceives a matter will decrease the chances that you will quarrel with him even though you might disagree.

3. To deal properly with other people it is not sufficient to have a general knowledge of how most people behave and react. You need specific information about the individual with whom you are presently talking. People react differently to things since they have diverse personalities and experiences. In order to love other people and do acts of kindness it requires that we look at the specific individual we are dealing with. Try to understand what exactly will give this person pleasure. Decide in which areas and to what degree to honor this specific person. We have to be aware of his personality traits to know what his needs are. To do this properly requires much thought. (*Toras Avraham*, p.400)

CHAPTER EIGHT

LIVING IN THE PRESENT

8.1 The importance of living in the present.

The cause of much sadness and suffering for many people is not their present experiences. Rather they cause themselves pain by regretting and resenting the past or worrying about the future. By living in the present, you save yourself much needless emotional pain. Keeping one's mind on the present is important because it is necessary to concentrate on our studies and prayers. Just being aware that you frequently fail to keep your mind in the present can enable you to increase your ability to do so.

8.2 Every moment can be viewed as new.

1. Viewing the world as created anew will preserve its freshness in your eyes.
2. To overcome your negative habits, view each day as if it is the first day of your life. Have a fresh view of things each and every day. (Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz; *Daas Chochmah Umussar*, vol. 3, p.183)

Yesterday you may have had difficulties dealing with a situation, but today is a new day. Perhaps today things will go better. Yesterday you might have felt discouraged, but today look at life anew and try once more. Yesterday you could not overcome some of your faults, but perhaps today you will be successful.

8.3 Past, present, and future.

1. There is an old saying: The past is no more. The future is not yet. And the present is as fleeting as the blink of an eye. (*Chochmah Umussar*, vol. 1, p. 452)

The present is the only reality and it is exceedingly short. Being aware of this can make it easier for you to live an elevated life. You need do what is proper for only a short time, that is, the present moments, which race by exceedingly fast.

2. *The past is only memories;
The future is but illusory hopes;
Focus on the present; for that is where your life really is;
And it consists only of tests.*
(*Michtav MaiEliyahu*, vol. 3, p.306)

3. The only difference between a poor person and a wealthy one is the future. Whatever happened to them in the past is no longer relevant. We all live in the present regardless of our life situation. No matter what happens in the present moment, in a split second the present will become the past. Not worrying about the future enables you to enjoy what you have already and are doing in the present. (*Kochvai Ohr*, p. 31)

8.4 You cause yourself a great loss by not living in the present.

1. The Alter of Nevardok said if a person constantly focuses on the future in his present moments, he entirely loses out in his present moments. When the future finally becomes the present, he will continue to focus on the future of that future. Hence he never has a present. (*Chayai Hamussar*, vol. 1,p.67-8)

2. Rabbi Mordechai of Lekhivitz related, “From the day I reached a level of understanding, I haven’t worried a single time about what will be in another hour.” (*Maigdolai Hachasidus*, vol.20)

3. A person who always worries about the future will never be happy. For example, when he has a newborn infant, he will be happy if he lives in the present and appreciates his baby. If a person keeps his focus on all that will happen in the future, he will dwell on the fact that eventually the child will die. Hence the only sensible way to live is to live in the present and enjoy your present experiences. (see *Braishis Rabbah* 27:7)

8.5 Don’t let the past weigh you down.

1. Every person has moments of suffering and unpleasantness in his life. If you master the skill of living in the present, you will keep these moments limited to the actual negative experiences. Both before and after a painful experience you will focus on what actually is at that moment, freeing you from much unnecessary pain in your life. Very young children have this skill naturally (we all had it when we were younger), and that is why they enjoy life unless they are presently in pain.

As we grow older, our ability to use our minds and think about the past and future increases. This ability can be utilized in very beneficial ways, but it can also be used in a detrimental way. We can transform our lives into suffering and torture by keeping in mind all our unpleasant experiences of the past. Forgetting these events, wrote the *Chovos Halvovos*, is the positive aspect of forgetfulness.

2. Only fools waste their present moments regretting what is over and done with. They will constantly say, “If only I hadn’t gotten involved in this venture, I wouldn’t have suffered.” “If only I would have stayed an hour longer, this would not have happened.” We are not prophets and there is no possible way to know in advance exactly what will be. Try to protect yourself from harm, but realize we can never plan for every contingency. (*Cheshbon Hanefesh*, no.77)

When you miss an opportunity for gain, it is easy to feel upset. When you could have invested money and made a fortune but did not, you might keep repeating to yourself, “How unfortunate it is that I didn’t utilize the opportunity.” But this will needlessly cause you extra pain. Not only did you miss that opportunity, but you are now making yourself feel miserable about what is past. Learn any possible lessons for the future, but do not talk to yourself in a manner which increases your loss.

3. In your relationships with other people live in the present. Reviewing past misdeeds and failures of the people you associate with just adds fuel to the fire of resentment. Try to deal with people the way they are now. True, someone might have offended you in the past, but what do you gain by thinking of it now?

If you find it difficult to stop thinking of offenses of others, write a list of what you gain by thinking of that past and another list of what you lose out by doing so. When you see the harm of you are causing yourself, you will be more motivated to improve.

Someone once suggested we mentally put dates after each person’s name. Reuven (1985) is not the same as Reuven (1980). What is more, Reuven (Monday) is not the exact same as Reuven (Sunday). View people anew each time you see them. You might have had a problem with Reuven earlier in the day, but later in the day he is slightly different and so are you. That small difference may make it easier for both of you to deal with each other on a friendly basis.

If someone wronged you or quarreled with you in the past, base your dealings with him on how you can relate to him in the present. Can you now do acts of kindness for him? Can you presently gain from his wisdom or experience? Can you have a worthwhile relationship right now? If the answer is yes to any of these questions, disregard your past experiences, and deal with that person in the present.

4. Even if you have devoted a lot of time and effort to some project, if you presently become aware that it is better to cancel it, do so. The fact that you have invested much energy is irrelevant. Deal only with the question: “Is this the right thing to do now?” (see *Chayai Hamussar*, vol. 2, p.162)

It is reasonable to continue something just because you already started it unless the matter is worthwhile in its own right. What was invested in the past is already over with and need not tie you down to wasteful activities.

5. Don’t disturb yourself over what you have already lost. Just guard what you still have. (*Keser ChochmahI 14:12*)

8.6 Realize what is over is over.

1. When things do not work out as people planned, it is very common for them to keep discussing the matter. Such discussions frequently cause needless anger and irritation. Ask yourself, “Was I right in going to such and such a place?” “Was I right in doing this or that?” If the answer is, “Yes,” ask yourself, “Why should I feel bad about the results when I have met my obligations? If what you did was wrong, even if the outcome was successful, it was improper to have done it and you should refrain from such behavior in the future. Have the attitude that what is past is already gone and there is no value in complaining about it. (*Maarchai Laiv*, p.171)

2. Eventually you will forget the negative things that happened to you. The question is how long that will take. Twenty years from now what presently bother you will have long been forgotten. But the reality is that even a few minutes after something negative happened it is in the past. The more you internalize that something which is past – even just a few seconds ago – is over and done with, the greater your ability to overcome negative events.

Every time you catch yourself saying, “If only...,” or “I should have...” you are trying to live in the past, which is impossible. Since what is over is over, keep your focus on the best possible course of action in the present. Change your “if only” sentences to “next time.”

8.7 The future is always an unknown entity so learn to focus on the present.

1. Since you do not know how long you will live, it is irrational to waste time worrying about how you will manage to support yourself in the future. As long as you have enough for the present, why worry about the future that might never be? A person with this awareness will not build up in his mind an exaggerated picture

of the potential pleasure he will have in the future and hence he will not be overly frustrated if things do not work out as he had hoped. (*Chovos Halvovos* 4:5)

2. “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth” (Proverbs 27:1). The vicissitudes of time are notorious, and since even the events of a day are still unknown in the morning, it is foolhardy to talk with brazen confidence about tomorrow. (*Malbim on Mishle*, p. 272)

3. It is humanly impossible for a person to prepare his future exactly as he would like it to be. No person can possibly figure out in advance all the myriad possibilities of what might happen in the future. It is not worthwhile to give excessive thought about what will occur in the future. Who can be certain how events will turn out? What now appears as good, can be the source of misfortune. Conversely, what you consider bad can eventually be the source of happiness. Every single person can verify the truth of this statement from daily events he is aware of. (Rabbi Yosef Leib Bloch, *Shiurai Daas*, vol.3, p.62)

8.8 Always try to utilize your present moments for growth.

1. A person who masters coping and, better yet, feeling joy in his present moments need never worry about the future. When the future comes, it will be the present and he will be able to handle it. Moreover, if you master feeling joy in your present moments, you need never be concerned you are missing anything, since whatever you are engaged in can be transformed into an elevating experience.

2. View each day as a page in a book of your autobiography. (Rabbi Yechezkail Abramsky)

You have the ability to fill each page with beautiful stories of spiritual growth and kind deeds. Past pages are already written, but you can revise their significance by learning from your mistakes. In a panoramic view of your life, those mistakes become stepping stones for growth. Future pages are not yet ready to be written. Only the present pages are before you. You have the opportunity to be the author of a masterpiece which describes the life of a great person: you.

3. It is easy to build up in your imagination the amount of pleasure and happiness you will derive from future events. By anxiously anticipating these future events you lose your present moments. Frequently those future events turn out disappointing. You had exaggerated their value. The way to make the most out of

your life is to live every second as fully as possible. Regardless of your situation, you have the opportunity to utilize every moment for growth. To someone who has adopted this attitude it will not make a great difference how the exact details of his life unfold. No matter how anything turns out, he still has the opportunity to make it a growthful experience.

8.9 You can alleviate pain by living in the present.

Once something is past, it no longer exists. If you do not add to any pain or insult, it will only last the limited time it actually exists. This is usually very short. Don't add to it by later repeating to yourself, "How awful that was." Realizing that suffering is temporary makes it much easier for you to tolerate insults and slights to your honor. (*Erech Apayim*, p.98)

You might have been insulted by someone a few moments ago. But that is already past. During the rest of the day do not take those insults with you. When you are engaged in other activities, be there fully. Don't live in the past (even of a short while ago) and unnecessarily make yourself miserable.

These nine principles for happiness are listed in chapter 21 of *Conversations with Yourself: A practical guide to greater happiness, self-development, and self-empowerment*.

By reading this list daily, you will find that your self-talk will be more conducive for the mastery of happiness and joy.

1. "I think appreciatively and gratefully."
"What am I grateful for now?"
2. "I speak and act joyfully and kindly."
3. "I assume that there is a benefit."
"What's good about this?"
4. "I strive for meaningful goals."
"What's my goal for now?"
5. "I see myself being the way I wish to be."
"How do I want to be?"
6. "I focus on solutions."
"What outcome am I looking for?"
7. "I let challenges develop my character."
"This, too, will develop my character."
8. "I constantly access positive states."
"My awesome brain stores all my best states. Which state do I want to choose now?"
9. "I smile and wave to mirrors. They always smile and wave back to me."

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At the Artscroll website you will find the table of contents of each book and sample pages.

Conversations with Yourself: A practical guide to greater happiness, self-development and self-empowerment (Artscroll)

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Building Your Self-image and the Self-image of Others

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You create your emotional reality in your brain. In 107 very short, easy-to-read chapters, this joyous little book shows you how to increase your happiness.

Kindness: Changing people's lives for the better

A kind person is a happier person – because the light and joy you bring to others radiates back to you. Once you read it, you'll want everyone you know to do the same.

Courage: Formulas, Stories, and Insights

This precious book will help readers develop courage in ways they hadn't previously imagined: to courage to accomplish and overcome limitations; the courage to ask and request; the courage to begin and begin again; the courage to cope with adversity. Allow *Courage* to strengthen your inner state as you continually experience its benefits in all areas of your life.

Patience: Formulas, Stories, and Insights

Patience is the key to a magnificent life. It is the foundation for reaching goals. With it, one can learn, accomplish, develop one's character, and interact harmoniously with other people. The inner calm and persistence you gain will be valuable resources in every area of your life.

Serenity: Formulas, Stories, and Insights

This book fills one of the critical needs of our time. Words like stress, road rage, and tensions have come to symbolize the strains and pressures of modern life. In scores of easy-to-read, easy-to-follow chapters, this book shows how to create greater inner serenity.

Enthusiasm: Formulas, Stories, and Insights

This is a book that will lift you out of your doldrums and enhance your life. Without a shred of forced cheerfulness, *Enthusiasm* will teach you to tap into your inner resources and develop the genuine qualities that will keep you smiling.

Harmony with Others: Formulas, Stories, and Insights

Lack of peace with other people is at the root of much unhappiness. Some things might be beyond our control. This is a book for those situations that we can do something about. Learn how.

Thank You; Gratitude: Formulas, Stories, and Insights

Gratitude is a foundation for living a happier life. Let gratitude transform and elevate your life.

My Father, My King: Connecting with the Creator

A book that will help intensify spiritual experiences and elevate the mundane.