

## **Shabbat Shalom, Shanah Tovah, and Gut Yontif.**

At the end of this drash I was going to let you know that My wife Lori and I, with our children Sophie and Evan, wish each of you a Shanah Tovah umetukah.

And then I was prepared to go further: I was going to offer my prayer that in this new year each of you would be blessed with health and happiness- for you and all your loved ones. And of course before getting to those heartwarming closing thoughts I was prepared to offer hopeful and thoroughly riveting sentiments about new beginnings and...blah... blah... blah.

But something happened this week that put the kibash on that drash. (Yes, it's Ok to groan.) I was watching a segment on a morning show - it was an interview with an author- that struck me in a profound way and made me feel that my prepared words were going to miss the mark. So, as if I had nothing else going on this week, with 72 hours til Rosh Hashanah, I began editing my remarks. I went back and rewatched the segment on Youtube, and came to yet more new revelations. And then.. have any of you ever fallen head first into the rabbit hole of Youtube? Well, I saw the author and his co-author were making the rounds on numerous morning shows, and on each show, with different interviewers and different questions, they had more to say. And I had more to think about. And falling deeper into the rabbit hole of Youtube- apparently I had been found out by the search algorithms of Google, because- I was bombarded with content about this author and his co author. Youtube videos, and podcasts, magazine articles galore. And at some point I crossed that line from editing my drash to just starting over from scratch.

So let me tell you what it was that I had seen that stirred me so profoundly. The author is a man you might've heard of, named Arthur Brooks. He's a neuroscientist that's authored several books, he teaches at Harvard University, and he writes a regular column in the Atlantic- all on the topic of HAPPINESS. His life's work and passion is the study of HAPPINESS, and his mission is to share what he's learned with all of us. The new book he's promoting is called BUILD THE LIFE YOU WANT- THE ART AND SCIENCE OF GETTING HAPPIER. His co author - you might have heard of her. She goes by Oprah. Their friendship and shared interest in the study and pursuit of happiness is an interesting but tangential story.

So, at the outset of his interview Wednesday morning- the thing that grabbed my attention- Brooks revealed that only 25% of Americans surveyed reported feeling happy, and that that number has been dropping markedly in recent years. So... I felt I had a problem. With a happiness deficiency spreading through our society, despite the feelings of warmth and meaning that we might be feeling here and now, as we gather together on this Rosh Hashanah, though collectively at this moment we might be happy, I'd be foolish to assume that we- as individuals- have somehow have beaten the declining statistics on personal happiness. My problem became that I couldn't sincerely say to you "I wish you happiness in the new year" while knowing as much as I do now about the research and statistics... and that wishing for your happiness isn't going to make any meaningful difference in your life.

Yes, we're going to wish one another happiness- and health- in the new year. It's appropriate to say and it's lovely to hear. You'll see it in our congregational emails. You'll hear it from Rabbi Michael, Rabbi Gordy, from Robin and from me. You'll wish it to one another. It's a warm and appropriate greeting during these days of awe. But similar to the quick "Hi, how are you", it's cursory. And cursory has its time and place. But this morning I want to go a little deeper into what getting HAPPIER in the new year might look like for you. For us.

You might have already caught on that the secondary title of the book is THE ART AND SCIENCE OF GETTING HAPPIER- not Happy.

Oprah and Brooks acknowledge that happiness is not always easy to measure, that happiness is fluid and that happiness can look different for each of us. Happiness, they advise, is not a destination or an achievement. We don't get happy, and stay happy forever. But happiness is a meandering journey with a natural ebb and flow. And when we embrace that perspective, there are ways for all of us to be HAPPIER.

Brooks and Winfrey go on to teach that happiness is derived from experiences that bring us three feelings- or that have three elements- Those being **enjoyment**, **satisfaction** and **purpose**

**Enjoyment.** Enjoyment, they define not as pleasure but as experiences that are meaningful and memorable- those experiences can be identified as the positive ways we interact and the positive activities we undertake with our friends, our family, community, and even at our places of work.

**Satisfaction.** Satisfaction being the result of overcoming a difficult endeavor or succeeding at something challenging. Even our sufferings. Satisfaction is the result of accepting discomfort at times and working through it to accomplish something worthwhile. Brooks teaches that happiness doesn't come when we finally eradicate all of our challenges and suffering, because life will always bring more challenges and suffering. But rather our challenges and sufferings will lead to a satisfaction when we have overcome those obstacles or come to accept new and uncomfortable realities. A disappointing test score. A broken relationship. The death of a loved one. It is incumbent upon us to grow with and learn from our sufferings and challenges, because they are inevitably part of our lives' journeys. We can't be happy unless we've also been unhappy.

**Purpose.** And the third element is PURPOSE. The sense that what we do - in our work or in our personal time- makes a positive difference in other peoples' lives or in the world.

As I studied Brooks' and Oprahs' ideas, The unmistakable connection between our Jewish values and the art of being HAPPIER was set perfectly before me.

The pursuit of positive relationships and experiences with our friends and family, our coworkers and classmates, the stranger at the grocery store. Our commitment to repairing the world- Tikun Olam- even if just for one person. Walking through life with a sense of gratitude for our blessings. The distinction between journeys and destinations. The MAVDIL- the separation- between suffering and satisfaction - metaphorical to the MAVIDL between the mundane and the holy.

Some of our most cherished Jewish values are precisely the things that Brooks and Oprah teach us will lead to being HAPPIER. There is unmistakably a HOLINESS in our striving to be HAPPIER.

It's easy to find holiness in the world God created. Holiness in nature and the smile or cry of a baby. Holiness comes easily here in a sanctuary with community. It's easy to find holiness in our texts, in our songs, in our prayers. The challenge is finding holiness out there, in the world we humans created - amidst the noise and distractions and challenges of the lives we've constructed. The pursuit of being HAPPIER is an act of holiness and tikun olam that would do us all some good in 5784.

Now it's true that if Oprah was here, this is the moment at which she'd tell you to look under your chair...

Brooks and Oprah aren't the only people that have studied and tried to inspire others on the topic of happiness. There's so much that has been written about happiness and the roles of health, and security, and meditation. Dark chocolate and beloved pets. Therapy and life saving medications- in the most extreme cases of depression- are, thankfully, part of a tool kit available to becoming happier. I encourage all of you to pursue a greater understanding of your own happiness through any and all resources available to you.

So on this Rosh Hashanah, my wife Lori and I, with our children Sophie and Evan, wish each of you a Shanah Tovah umetukah, a good and sweet new year. And my prayer for each of you, and for your friends and your loved ones today is that the call of the shofar stirs you- to pursue enjoyment, and satisfaction, and purpose in your relationships with your friends, with your family, with your classmates and coworkers, and to embrace living your most cherished Jewish values each day in the new year.

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