

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks and Happiness

Rabbi Sacks about happiness:

“Happiness is largely a matter of satisfying needs and wants. Meaning, by contrast, is about a sense of purpose in life, especially by making positive contributions to the lives of others. Happiness is largely about how you feel in the present. Meaning is about how you judge your life as a whole: past, present, and future.”

Studies in Spirituality (Koren, 2021), p. 12.

1. According to this source, what is the difference between happiness and meaning?
2. Do you think these terms are related to each other? How?
3. In which holidays we are commanded to be happy?
4. Looking at the following biblical sources containing the root S.M.CH (ש.מ.ח), can you find an explanation of Simcha as Rabbi Sacks describes it or your own explanation?

[בראשית ל"א](#)

כז

לָמָּה נִחַפְּתָה לְבָרִיחַ וְתִגְנַב אֹתִי וְלֹא־הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי וְאַשְׁלַחְתָּ בְּשִׂמְחָה יְבָשָׁרִים בְּתוֹךְ יַבְכְּבוֹר:

Why did you flee in secrecy and mislead me and not tell me? I would have sent you off with festive music, with timbrel and lyre.

[שמות ד'](#)

יד

וַיִּחַר־אַף יְהוָה בְּמִשְׁשָׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלֵא אֶהְרֹן אֶחָיִךְ הַלּוֹי יִדְעָתִי כִּי־דִבַּר יְדַבֵּר הוּא וְגַם הִנֵּה־הוּא יֵצֵא לְקִרְאָתָהּ וְרָצָה וְשָׂמַח בְּלִבּוֹ:

יהוה became angry with Moses and said, “There is your brother Aaron the Levite. He, I know, speaks readily. Even now he is setting out to meet you, and he will be happy to see you.

ויקרא כ"ג

מ

וילקח־תֶּחֱמֶם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרִי עֵץ הַדֶּרֶל כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵנָף עֵץ־עֵבֶת וְעַרְבֵי־גִחַל וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים:

On the first day you shall take the product of hadar* trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy* trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before your God יהוה seven days.

במדבר י'

י

ובַיּוֹם שְׂמַחְתֶּם וּבְמוֹעֲדֵיכֶם וּבְרֵאשֵׁי חֻדְשֵׁיכֶם וּתְקַעְתֶּם בַּחֲצֹצְרוֹת עַל עֲלֹתֵיכֶם וְעַל זִבְחֵי שְׁלַמֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: (פ)

And on your joyous occasions—your fixed festivals and new moon days—you shall sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well-being. They shall be a reminder of you before your God: I, יהוה, am your God.

דברים ט"ז

י"ד

וּשְׂמַחְתָּ בַּחֲגֹג אֹתָהּ וּבְנֶגְדָהּ וּבְחֻדְשֵׁיהָ וּבְאֶמְתָּהּ וּבְהַלְוֵיהָ וּבְהִגְרָהּ וּבְהִיטּוֹם וּבְהַאֲלַמְנָהּ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיהָ:

You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the [family of the] Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities.

טו

שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תַּחֲוֹג לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר יְהוָה כִּי יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל תְּבוּאָתְךָ וּבְכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ וְהָיְתָ אִתְּךָ שְׂמֵחָ:

You* shall hold a festival for your God יהוה seven days, in the place that יהוה will choose; for your God יהוה will bless all* your crops and all your undertakings, and you shall have nothing but joy.

תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עֲבַדְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב מְרֹב כָּל:

Because you would not serve your God יהוה in joy and gladness over the abundance of everything.

5. How can the following sources help us understand the commandment to be happy during the holidays?

“Happiness, or blessedness – the terms are almost interchangeable – means living in accord with the word and will of God, which is how the Bible construes the moral life. It means doing well, living in harmony with the fundamental values embedded in the universe by its Creator.”

Morality (Basic Books, 2020), p. 103.

“*Simcha* is usually translated as joy, rejoicing, gladness, happiness, pleasure, or delight. In fact, *simcha* has a nuance untranslatable into English, Joy, happiness, pleasure, and the like are all states of mind, emotions. They belong to the individual. We can feel them alone. *Simcha*, by contrast, is not a private emotion. It means happiness shared. It is a social state, a predicate of “we,” not “I.” There is no such thing as feeling *simcha* alone.”

‘Collective Joy,’ *Re'eh*, Covenant & Conversation, 5779

6. Read the full article Collective Joy and identify at least two challenges for happiness in modern times as described by Rabbi Sacks.

[‘Collective Joy,’ Re'eh, Covenant & Conversation, 5779](#)

Look at the art pieces below, choose one and describe the type of happiness you see and how it is connected to the sources above. Describe an occasion when you felt you were fulfilling the commandment of שמחה בהגך והיית אך שמחה and explain what the circumstances were. Describe in detail the setting, colors, smells, and people. How can you recreate this experience in the future?







ושמחת בחגך... והיית אך שמח

"You shall rejoice in your festival... and you shall have nothing but joy." (Deuteronomy 16:14,15)