

# MAKING OTHERS HAPPY

Category: Holidays, Simchas Torah

*When a young girl requested a pareve ice cream recipe, the Rebbe saw it as a legitimate avenue to strengthen her Judaism. One of the customs of the pilgrims to Jerusalem would be to bring their Maaser, and recite a special prayer of thanks in the Temple. One of the verses they would recite was essentially, "I was joyful and I brought joy to others." The key is: bring them joy, on their level.*

## Pareve Ice Cream

Back in the 1970s, the organization Lubavitch Youth Organization (LYO) would host dozens of young adults guests in Crown Heights every Shabbos, so that they could experience a Chasidic Shabbos with the Lubavitcher Rebbe. On one such Shabbos, two young women from South Carolina came to Crown Heights and stayed at the home of one Mordechai Gutnick and family, which at the time lived in the neighborhood.

The meals, of course, were filled with conversation on Judaism. The girls were interested in everything Judaism had to offer. They learned new things such as lighting Shabbos candles, making the Kiddush, washing the hands before eating bread, and so on. It was all new to them, and the conversation moved to the subject of keeping kosher. They talked about the meat and dairy categories and how it is forbidden to mix meat and dairy in Judaism—how a kosher home has to have two separate sets of dishes and cutlery.

Then, at the end of one meal, they brought ice cream to the table. The guests were dumbstruck. They didn't understand what's going on. Just now they had been talking about separating meat and dairy products, and here, right after the chicken course, they bring them ice cream, which is definitely dairy-based!

They thought that maybe this is some kind of test to see what they would choose to do. In short, they were afraid to say a word so as to not embarrass themselves or their guests.

However, the lady of the house noticed that they were confused. She quickly

explained to them that it was what we call pareve, essentially meaning neutral. Pareve means consumables that are neither meat nor dairy, like water or orange juice, or bread or what have you. If it contains no dairy or dairy derivative, it's pareve. And so the meal quickly got back on track.

The next day, the guests participated in a public talk with the Rebbe, and after Shabbos they went back home.

## **Thank You Letter**

Several weeks later, a thank-you letter arrived from one of the girls, in which she wrote that she had greatly enjoyed the Chasidic atmosphere. She was very impressed by the Rebbe and the farbrengen, the public talk, etc., and she was writing to thank the Gutnick family for their wonderful hospitality.

At the end of the letter, however, she wrote: I told my mother about the pareve ice cream that you served at the table, and she became very curious. She very much wanted to know the recipe for the ice cream.

Rabbi Gutnick got the letter and decided to send it in to the Rebbe. He thought to himself that the Rebbe is always getting letters filled with the woes and troubles of Jewish people asking for blessing, but here, this letter could bring him a little joy and a smile. So he brought the letter to the Rebbe.

The Rebbe indeed responded that it made him happy, but then added that they should "continue her connection to Judaism in a way that suits her." The Rebbe said that they needed to keep their ties alive with the young woman and bring her to Judaism at her own pace and in her own way. On the letter, the Rebbe drew an arrow pointing to the P.S. at the bottom about the pareve ice cream recipe.

In other words, don't send her a book on the Jewish laws of not gossiping or speaking negatively about people (Lashon Hara) to bring her closer to Judaism, or some Torah concept. Rather, just send her the recipe she asked for and thus keep your connection with her alive. (From the Living Torah magazine of JEM.)

# “I Made Others Happy”

Now, we’ve all heard of the concept of maaser, of tithing—of giving ten percent, or some fixed amount, of your money to charity. It all flows from the Torah portion we read today, “Aseir t’aseir es tevuas zarecha”—you shall surely tithe the produce of your seeds.

Here, the Torah is talking about the farmer in the Holy Land who needs to set aside ten percent of his produce and give it to the Levite. Then, from what remains, he needs to give another ten percent to the poor man. In certain years, he would have to bring his maaser instead, up to Jerusalem and eat it there and rejoice in all the good that G-d had given him.

In the Torah portion of Ki Tavo, the Torah describes what that farmer who would bring his maaser to Jerusalem would have to do. It wasn’t enough that he got to Jerusalem—which could be quite a journey by foot or by donkey in those days—and held a festive meal with family and friends. Before that, he’d have to go up to the Temple Mount, enter the Temple and “recite a declaration.” He would have to recite a special prayer before G-d that was known as the “Vidui Maaser,” the Tithe Confession. He would recite. “I have removed all the sacred portions from my house. I have given the appropriate ones to the Levite and to the orphan and widow...” He would continue with several more sentence that ended with, “I have obeyed the voice of the L-rd my G-d, and I have done all that You have commanded me.”

And then, for a reward, he would ask for a blessing from G-d: “Look down from Your holy habitation in heaven, and bless Your people Israel, and the land...” (Devarim 26:12-15).

So you have this Jewish farmer standing there in the Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple, “declaring” before G-d, “I have done all that You have commanded me.” Now, what specifically would he have in mind when he would make such a mandatory declaration? Rashi says something amazing: He would have in mind, “I was happy and I made others happy in doing so.” That’s what “I have done all that You have commanded me” means.

What does G-d want us to do in giving maaser? Be happy and “happify” others. First of all, a person should be happy with his “produce,” with the great blessings

that G-d blesses him with. That itself can be quite a spiritual job! It's not always easy to be happy over what you have. A lot of people constantly worry what the next day will bring, you know.

As a matter of fact, once we had guests in the sukkah when the weather was wonderful—but they were “worried” over what the weather would be at Sukkos next year. Leave it to us Jews—if there's nothing to worry about this year, we'll just fast-forward to next year and worry about that.

But seriously, being happy over what you have, comes from a place of humility. Someone who is busy with himself or herself all day will never have enough. He or she will think that the whole world owes them. It's specifically when a person surrenders control a bit, and doesn't think that he deserves anything, that he will be very happy when he gets something.

But more important than being happy with what you have is “happifying” others. It's not enough that you're happy. You need to see to it that everyone around you is happy.

## **Their Joy, Not Yours**

Now, how do we make others happy? To make others happy, it's not enough to share with them your happiness. It's likely that often what makes you happy will not necessarily make the other happy. For example, on Sukkos, there is a mitzvah to be happy. The halachah, establishes that men discharge their “self-happification” duties by eating meat and drinking wine, while women do it by their husbands buying gifts for them and children by getting candies and treats. (Shulchan Aruch, Laws of Yom Tov 529:7.)

Now, a person might come along and say, “I'll make my wife happy in the same way I make myself happy! I'll drink a ‘L'chaim!’ to myself and I'll invite her to drink with me!” That may be fun, but that's not what “making others happy” means. The person has an obligation to forget about himself a bit and step into the shoes of the other and think not what would make me happy but what would make him happy—and then to go and do it and make him happy. That's the entirety of the Torah “on one foot”—“all that You have commanded me” means being happy and making others happy. That's what G-d wants of us—for us to be happy ourselves, and then we'll have the strength to cause others to be happy.

And that's what the Rebbe meant in our story—to bring that young lady close not with what would have inspired someone else but “in a way that suits her.”

We're now standing before Yizkor. But being happy is not something only for those among the living—rather, it's possible, and necessary, to make happy the souls of those we say Yizkor for.

Now, how do you make a soul happy? Everyone needs to think what would make their loved one happy. What would make them proud? What would bring them pride and satisfaction in their kids? Then, take a resolution to do that one thing or two that will cause them to smile up there in heaven.

And when they smile up there, we can smile down here, too.

Good Yom Tov!