

Sparks

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The Secret to Happiness

If you think religion is going to give you a quick fix you are wrong. And if you think that religion will put you on easy street you are deluded.

Very often religion is presented as offering the secret to ultimate happiness. I have heard religious leaders try to entice people towards a religious lifestyle promising them that through the synagogue or the church they will find happiness and bliss.

This approach is really no different than any other marketing strategies. People want to be happy and are looking for the magic formula. Marketers bombard us daily with promises for a better life. Blondes have more fun, toothpaste gives your mouth sex appeal, lose weight and feel great. It is too easy to point to a million things that we are missing that are the cause of our unhappiness. People think that all they need is *the more and the right*. If only I had more hair, more muscle more, more shape, more money, more, more, more. If only I had the right person in my life, the right job, the right apartment, the right, the right, the right. People are hoping to find a quick and easy formula for happiness. They want to just add water and stir. They want to pop their problems into a microwave and happiness is ready in just seconds. And there are religious leaders who make that very promise. They claim all you got to do is believe. All you got to do is learn Torah, do the mitzvot and you've got it made. G-d will take care of you and your life will be blessed with bliss.

Although I agree that faith, study and practice are a lot better products to buy than a new car, nicer clothing, or more expensive perfume. But if you think religion is going to give you a quick fix you are wrong. And if you think that religion will put you on easy street you are deluded.

Did Abraham have an easy life? Hardly. The Torah (Bible) teaches us that Abraham was challenged with ten difficult tests. Jacob had an even more troubling life than Abraham. For years he lived as a fugitive running from his brother who sought to kill him. His daughter was raped. His wife dies while giving birth to their son. Jacob's sons sell their younger brother Joseph as a slave but lead Jacob to believe that he was killed. Jacob mourns for years over the loss and is never able to overcome the pain until he is finally reunited with Joseph in Egypt. Jacob did not have a blissful life.

The life of David, who authored many of the psalms, was definitely not a merry-go-round either. Many of the psalms David wrote capture the depth of a person who struggled with and faced the most trying of times. Millions of people for thousands of years have turned to the psalms in their most painful moments finding solace in the words of a man who surely experienced their troubles and was able to express their pain, fears and hopes.

The general history of the Jewish people has certainly not been a barrel of laughs. Has any other nation on earth suffered as much as the Jews? And yet the Torah refers to the Jewish people as the chosen people. They are described as the first born of G-d and a treasured nation.

People are looking for happiness in all the wrong places. And they will never find it. Because happiness is not something you find outside — it lies within your soul. You cannot *find* happiness you have to learn to be happy in whatever is happening.

The Torah does not give any dispensations from the challenges of life. It does not promise an easy life but a meaningful life. It does not offer an instant solution to sadness, but it does offer a *soulution* to sadness and the secret to happiness. Through its' wisdom and guidance, Torah empowers you to be soul and enables you to make I contact with the Ultimate I — G-d.

Now please don't misunderstand me, I have seen plenty of people jump into a Torah life and they are not happy. But that is because they thought it was a quick fix and the road to bliss. They were not willing to really embrace the challenges of life and do the inner soul work that the Torah is expecting and guiding us to do. These miserable souls are only practicing Torah but they are not living it. They may keep the Sabbath but they are not celebrating the *Shabbos*. They may observe the *mitzvas* (religious duties) but they are not immersed in the *mitzvas*. Torah life is like a song. But to make music you need to be more than just a technician you need to be a musician. You have to play the song with more than just your fingers. You have to play it with your soul.

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