

## *Ki Tavo 2017*

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick 9/9/17

There's a story about a fisherman sitting on the beach with his wife one afternoon enjoying the surf. The fisherman had enjoyed a big catch that morning, so he came in for the day. A rich businessman approached him. "Why didn't you keep fishing and bring in twice as many fish?" asked the businessman. "Why?" said the fisherman. "Because then you could have bigger profits. Then you could buy another boat and hire employees." "Why?" said the fisherman. "Then you could keep growing and have more profit." "Why?" said the fisherman. "Because then you could work long and hard for many years and grow rich." "Why?" said the fisherman. "Because then you and your wife could retire and relax on the beach," said the businessman. "But that's what I'm doing now!" And of course that fisherman was right. Satisfaction, happiness and joy are often easier for us to attain than many of us realize. But one of the reasons that we miss the opportunity to recognize and enjoy that sense of deep satisfaction is because we confuse "happiness" and "joy." Jewish tradition teaches us the difference, and that's what I want to speak about today.

The word for "happiness" in Hebrew is "Oh-Sher," which many of us know from Psalm 145 - "Ahsh-Ray"... "Ashray Yashvei Bay-techa" - "Happy are those who dwell in the House of the Lord..." The word for "joy" however, is "*simcha*." The Torah reading for this morning creates a ritual that is designed to bring its participants "*simcha*," great joy. There is this wonderful, fairly elaborate service wherein a Jew who lives in Israel brings his or her first fruits to the Temple as an offering to the Kohen. He or she places them at the Kohen's feet and makes a declaration stating that it is because Gd redeemed us from Egypt that we are privileged to be able to bring this offering for the Kohen, the Levite and the poor to enjoy. As the Torah portion says, "*V'Samachta V-Chol Ha-Tov Asher Natan Adonai Elohecha*" - "And you shall have joy in all the good that the Lord has given you." It is by bringing this gift that you find joy.

On a certain level it does not make sense. You worked hard to grow your crops. Farming is not easy. Finally, the first fruits grow ripe and you are so happy. They had enough sunlight, enough water, no bugs... And then what do you do? You take that long anticipated first crop, and you give it away! And giving away what you have is supposed to make you happy? Maybe yes, maybe no. But joy comes from knowing that you have enough to be able to share it with others. Joy comes from knowing that you have been blessed. Joy comes from appreciating what you already have, and sharing it with others makes you appreciate it all the more. *Simchas* are for sharing. *Simcha* is never about individuals. We don't do *simcha* in solitude. The Jewish holidays are described in Deuteronomy as days of *simcha*, of joy precisely because they are occasions of shared celebration.

Interestingly, the word *simcha* is only used once in each of the first four books of the Torah - *simcha* appears once in Genesis, once in Exodus, once in Leviticus, once in the Book of Numbers. But *simcha* appears 12 times in the Book of Deuteronomy! And I'm sure there are many explanations for why that is, but here's one I would like to posit. It is only in his old age that Moses truly appreciates the meaning of the word. It is only after he has endured so much, and worked as hard as he did his whole life that he appreciates life at this deeper level. It takes a certain level of emotional maturity to understand the deep-seated satisfaction that is *simcha*. We spend so much of our time pursuing happiness. But after a while we find that joy is already all

around us. As Dov Gilden z'l used to say "*Vos geven iz geven*" - "What's done is done..." The past is over and the future is unknown... All we truly have is the here and now. So we come to understand that *simcha* is found when we stop to appreciate what we already have as we share it with others.

That is precisely why the Torah makes the Jew stop and count his blessings by giving up this first fruit offering. He thinks that having a good crop will make him happy, but then he starts to dream of having an even bigger crop. More crops means more produce; more produce means more food to sell; more sales means more money; more money means the ability to buy more stuff. It never ends. It never ends until we bring it to a halt and find joy in the here and now. Happiness is something we pursue. Joy is something that finds us when we stop and appreciate it.