

And you shall not erect for yourselves a pillar. (16:22)

The Torah addresses various forms of idolatrous worship which were common practice among the pagans. **Horav Levi Yitzchak Berditchev, zl**, interprets the *pasuk* homiletically, adding a practical twist. *Chazal* teach that This World, *Olam Hazeih*, is compared to a vestibule before *Olam Habba*, the World to Come. Everything which we do in this world is but a preparation for the World to Come. We eat and drink, so that we are nourished and healthy enough to perform the *mitzvos* which will be our access to *Olam Habba*. Our entire lives revolve around *Olam Habba*, with life on this world nothing more than an avenue for gaining entry to true life.

When *Chazal* refer to life on this world, they use the term *lachem*, “for you.” The phrase, *chatzi lachem*, “part is for you,” *v’chatzi l’Hashem*, “and part is for the Almighty,” is employed by *Chazal* to describe the split between personal, physical enjoyment and *mitzvah* devotion, which is for Hashem. Thus, explains the *Berditchever*, the Torah admonishes, “Do not erect a pillar of worship *lecha*, for you! Do not lend credence to the physical needs as if they are an end to themselves. Physicality and all of its appurtenances are necessary for one purpose: *Olam Habba*. Do not transform them into anything more than that.

While this is a nice thought, how do we impress upon people that this world is not an end to itself? Whatever happened to the concept of happiness? Is one not supposed to enjoy himself on this world? Are temporary pleasures taboo? This question stems from society’s misguided perspective of happiness. Many people equate happiness with fun. Veritably, fun and happiness have little connection with one another. Fun is the enjoyment we experience *b’shaas maaseh*, during the course of an activity. Happiness is what we experience following the activity. It is a deeper, more concrete and abiding emotion. Fun is temporary, while happiness is a more enduring emotion. We do many things which generate fun. We go places, do activities, attend events, which have a positive effect on us, but how long does the joy last? The positive effects end when the fun ends. We experience a wonderful vacation, a great trip – then we return home and find we quickly forget the joyous elements.

We see people having fun, but are they truly happy? **Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita**, tells the story of a fellow who came to a psychiatrist with a problem: He was depressed. Nothing made him feel good. He saw negativity in every aspect of his life. The psychiatrist told him that he was presenting the symptoms of a serious illness, one that could be cured over time. It would take many sessions “on the couch” for him to emerge from his depressive state. What should the patient do in the meantime? The depression was eating away at him. He did not have a year or two to wait until he recovered. The psychiatrist suggested that he go across the street to a show. Apparently, a famous comedian was playing. People claimed that he was hilarious. “Laughter is a wonderful antidote for depression,” the psychiatrist said. “The comedian will take your mind off your problems.” The patient listened and became even more depressed: “Doctor, you do not seem to understand. I am the comedian from across the street.”

Many of us put on a façade of happiness, but it is only our reaction to fun. As long as we do not address the issues in our lives which seem to cloud over the fun, we will never achieve true happiness. When we live our lives in such a manner that it reflects our pursuit of *olam hazeh*, the joy is temporary; it is frivolous fun. It will not last. If our lives, however, reflect a deeper understanding of the meaning of life; if we live for *Olam Habba* and understand that this world is nothing more than a means, a vestibule, for gaining entrance into the World of Truth, then we can achieve inner peace and true joy.

Knowing “where” we are going and establishing priorities in life define our ultimate happiness, and is reflected in our projected attitude in serving Hashem. I recently read a story, related by Rabbi Shlomo Price, which has unfortunately repeated itself more often than we would care to acknowledge, but, if it will help even one person, it is well worth repeating. A prominent *rav* and *mechanech*, educator, was visiting a student of his in one of the up and coming communities in New York. The *rav* davened in the local *shul*. After *davening*, he was approached by a man who was roughly his age. This person had sustained a terrible tragedy: his only son had met a devout Christian girl while he was volunteering at a local hospital and was smitten by her. She convinced him to reject the Torah way of life and embrace Christianity – which he, sadly, did. An intelligent young man with a warm personality, he became a sort of para-priest, working as a missionary in outreach for this Christian organization. Not only had he destroyed his own life, he was facilitating and encouraging the spiritual demise of others as well.

The man asked the *rav*, “I *davened* in the same *minyán* as you. We attended the same *shiur*. Our sons went to the same school; in fact, they were in the same class. Yet, your son became a rabbi, while my son became a priest.” With these words, the father broke down, weeping incessantly.

The *rav* looked at the man and, with a soft, comforting voice, said, “I do not know the perfect answer, because there never is a perfect answer concerning a tragedy, but I do want to share with you a perspective on *mitzvah* observance. It may not ameliorate your situation, but who knows? It might help someone else.

“There are two ways to serve Hashem. There are parents, who, upon rising in the morning, get up with a complaint: ‘I am tired, this hurts, and that hurts. If I could only sleep a little longer. Why do I have to go to *davening* so early?’ All of this is part of their daily morning litany. Then they go to *shul*. Their son asks, ‘Why do you have to go to *shul*?’ ‘I have to *daven*’ is the curt answer. ‘Why?’ asks the son. ‘Because Hashem says so.’ The father does not indicate a sense of personal desire or sense of satisfaction in *davening* – just, “Hashem says so.’ A similar response is given concerning *Shabbos*. ‘I observe *Shabbos*, because Hashem says that I should.’ *Yom Tov*, be it *Pesach*, with the *matzah* that does not appeal to everyone, or the cold, unwelcoming *Succah* in which we must sit, all raise questions in the son’s mind. The answer is always the same: ‘Hashem says that I have to;’ subject is closed. ‘I do not have much choice in the matter. I do what I am told.’

“When this is a father’s response, it reflects an attitude that cries out, ‘I clearly do not want to do this, but I have to because Hashem says so.’ Well, the son will grow up and say, ‘Maybe my father has to, but I do not, and I will not!’

“Then there are parents whose approach to *mitzvah* performance is positive. When they rise in the morning, they are excited, happy to be able to serve Hashem for another day. ‘I can go to *shul*, put on *Tallis* and *Tefillin* and pray to Hashem, thanking Him for all the wonderful things He has given to me.’ When a child grows up hearing this, when he sees his father’s enthusiasm for *Yiddishkeit*, he naturally wants to follow.”

When the unfortunate father heard this, he began to cry. His tears were filled with guilt over lost opportunities and often foolish mistakes which his son had either heard or observed. The message that he must have conveyed to his son was: “I have to be an observant Jew; I must keep *Shabbos*. Kosher may not be fun, but this is what I must do as a Jew.”

Imagine, buying your spouse an expensive gift and saying, “I really did not want to buy this for you, but I have to, since it is our anniversary.” Such presents leave a bad taste.