

And Eisav said, “I have much, And Yaakov said, I have everything.” (33:9,11)

The *Chafetz Chaim*, *zi*, states that the varied comments concerning their individual material bounty that Yaakov *Avinu* and Eisav *ha'rasha* expressed define their individual outlook on *olam hazeh*, this world. Eisav contended that he had much; a term that implied he could use more. With such an attitude, he would always seek more. One who has one hundred is dissatisfied. He now wants two hundred. He never has enough. On the other hand, Yaakov declared that he had everything. Material assets had little worth to Yaakov. He got by on what he had and what he had was all that he needed. Indeed, a Jew may say, “I want.” No end exists to what a person might seek. He may not, however, say, “I need,” because this implies that Hashem has not provided him with his needs.

A man had two sons. He owned a large, expensive diamond which he entrusted to one of his sons for safekeeping. He did not divulge this to anyone. Shortly thereafter, the father's soul went to its eternal rest. That son was an upright and honest man. This was demonstrated by the utmost care that he showed for the diamond. Since no one other than his father was aware of the whereabouts of this diamond, the son went to his brother and shared this piece of information with him. He said, “Since the diamond now actually belongs to both of us, let us sell it and split its value.” When the brother heard about the diamond, he had other thoughts regarding its disposal. This brother was unscrupulous and was not interested in sharing what otherwise would not originally have been his. He purchased a worthless glass counterfeit diamond which, to the untrained eye, appeared no different than the real thing. He then suggested to his brother that, since he, too, had received a diamond from his father, it would be much easier for them to place each diamond in a box and draw lots as to who would get which diamond. The upright brother agreed. It sounded like a plan.

The brother whose actions were less than noble purchased two boxes of similar size and appearance. He then placed a hidden mark on the box containing his fake diamond, so that he would recognize it. He suggested that they obtain two witnesses to monitor the proceedings, so that no one would ever claim that he was cheated. The upright brother asked why witnesses would be necessary; after all, they were loving brothers who were splitting up their father's inheritance, which was comprised of two diamonds of equal value and appearance. The other brother insisted that there be witnesses. He went out to search for two such men. Meanwhile, out of boredom, the other brother took the diamonds out of their respective boxes. He stared at the shine of the diamonds. When he was done, he returned the diamonds to their boxes, not realizing that he had unknowingly mixed the two boxes. Hence, the real diamond was now in the box that had a black mark on it, and the counterfeit diamond was in the box that had been the repository of the expensive diamond.

We all know the outcome of the story. The brother who had marveled at the stones had unknowingly placed the expensive stone in the box reserved for the fake. The swindler picked the

wrong box, and, thus, to his chagrin, ended up with a worthless piece of glass. “Had I been an upright person like my brother, this would not have happened,” he lamented.

In his prayer, which precedes the daily *Shacharis*, morning service, *Horav Elimelech, zl, m'Lizhenk* asks, “And spare us from the jealousy that one might have for his fellow; and never should envy enter our hearts... and place in our hearts the positive observation of our friend’s positive character traits; and we should all follow the righteous and just path; and not harbor any resentment toward our fellow.” Beautiful and meaningful words – if we would only listen.

It is all encapsulated in the inspiring immortal words of the *Tanna* (Ben Zoma) in the *Mishnah* (*Shabbos* 32a) (*Pirkei Avos* 4:1), “Who is rich?” *Ha’sameach b’chelko*; “he who is happy with his lot.” Regardless of the “portion” that one receives, he should accept it as Hashem’s gift. When one recognizes the Source of his gift, he should realize that it was not a subjective or arbitrary gift from a mortal, but a profound gift from Hashem Who knows what He is giving, to whom and why. Furthermore, *sameach* is happiness that emanates from the heart, as opposed to *sasson*, which is joy that is articulated and expressed publicly/externally. Joy from the heart is cognitive joy. One thinks it through, understands its depth, and realizes its meaning and purpose.

Contemporary life is unfortunately replete with yearning, striving and unrest. We never seem to have enough. If this would be the case concerning spiritual matters, it would be a good thing. Sadly, we seem to be satisfied with whatever status quo we achieve in the realm of spirituality and “chomp at the bit” when it involves physical/material matters.

Life is filled with challenges. Our grandparents and parents had their set of challenges; we have our challenges, which are endemic to our lifestyle and era. They had hardships; we, too, have hardships. While their sense of adversity was different than ours, one thing remains the same: the ability to cope with adversity. Our coping skills, however, are greatly diminished when they are hampered by a negative state of mind. In other words, our attitude determines whether we will triumph over the challenge, or if it will be the converse, with the challenge getting the better of us.

A person who has a positive outlook on life understands that true joy emanates from appreciating all that he has, even if it is not as much as he wants. There is a well-known anecdotal story about a poor man who lived in a tiny house with his mother, wife and six children. The noise was superseded only by the crowded atmosphere. It was impossible for the man to think, because it was difficult to find a quiet place in the house where he could possibly be alone long enough to think. He went to his *rav* to seek advice on how to relieve his anxiety.

The *rav* listened to his tale of “woe,” and surprisingly suggested that he purchase and bring home several animals: a chicken, a rooster, a duck and a goose. After “they” were settled, the *rav* told him to go back and purchase an old goat and a cow. The man was surprised with his *rav*’s advice, but, as was common many years ago, he listened to his *rav* and, despite the added difficulty that it presented, purchased and brought home the shopping list of animals. After about a week of the

added crampedness and noise, the man returned to his *rav* and complained even more. He begged for help. The *rav* suggested that he purchase a dog and bring it home. The man now had a menagerie of animals, with the stench and varied noises that accompanied it. He was about to go out of his mind. What did the *rav* seek to achieve with his advice? It was impossible to go home. He was more comfortable sleeping in the street.

The man returned to the *rav* and pleaded with him for help in resolving his now even worse situation. The *rav* said to remove one animal each day until he had none left and then return to him. A week passed, and, understandably, the challenges presented by his extra “guests” became a thing of the past. So, too, was the man’s negative attitude. “*Rebbe!* Thank you so much for your advice. I finally had a decent night’s sleep. Life is sweet. With just my family in the house, we have so much room. It is a pleasure!”

Madison Avenue teaches us to want, to seek more and more. Advertisements clamor to tell us that life could be so much more meaningful if we would only have what they are selling. We fall prey to their wiles, not realizing that the greatest joy is derived when one is content with his life. Their goal is to make us feel miserable, when, in fact, we should be happy with what Hashem has provided for us. Sadly, we do not realize our good fortune until it is taken from us. Then, a black piece of dry bread becomes a lavish banquet, and a trip to the park becomes a vacation.

A psychologist once counseled: “A person must always be lighthearted and happy. Even when circumstances are clouded by sadness, one must fight to smile. Somewhere among all the sad thoughts, he must have some recollection of better days which may curve his lips into a smile, and, in turn, brighten his spirit; and a bright spirit cannot be defeated by sadness.”

In conclusion, we all have wonderful aspects of our lives that either elude us or we ignore them. Quite often, the most positive attributes are right under our nose. The reason that we do not notice them is that we are too busy either complaining or looking with envy at our neighbor to realize that we are very fortunate.

A man decided to sell his home, and he consulted a real estate broker. After visiting the house, the agent wrote an elaborate description of the house – no fabrications – only the truth in a positive light. He then gave it to his client for approval. “Is that my house?” the client asked. “If it is, I have changed my mind about selling. It is just the house that I have always wanted, and I never realized that I had it all the time.” As I said, right under our nose.