

## A Formula for Happiness

By Abraham J. Twerski

**W**e live in a world of marvels. Who would have dreamt that one day people would walk on the moon, that computers would make complicated calculations in seconds, or that doctors would be able to replace diseased kidneys, livers and even hearts? Every day scientific progress eliminates sources of human discomfort.

Is it not paradoxical that in an era when we should be the happiest, we may be the unhappiest generation in history? The drug epidemic is nothing other than people's attempt to escape misery. And millions of people who are not addicted to drugs escape via alcohol, food, compulsive gambling or work. Why are we so unhappy?

In Deuteronomy (31:2), Moshe states, "I am one hundred and twenty years old today; I can no longer go out and come in, for God has said to me, 'You shall not cross this Jordan.'" The Rabbi of Gur explained that Moshe lived for one purpose: to elevate himself spiritually by performing *mitzvot*. At

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this point in his life, he had attained the highest spiritual level. There was only one way that he could still grow spiritually and that was by performing those *mitzvot* that are applicable only in the Holy Land. Moshe pleaded to be allowed to enter the Holy Land. When his pleas were turned down, and he saw that there was no way he could

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further his spiritual growth, he accepted death. For Moshe, a life without spiritual growth was not worth living.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch points out that the word *sameach* (happy) is related to the word *tzomeach* (growth). True happiness can come only from spiritual growth. A life devoid of spiritual growth is a life devoid of *simchah*.

Moshe made it clear that *simchah* (joy) is an essential component of Divine service. He warned the Israelites of the dire consequences that would befall the person who "did not serve Hashem, your God, with joy" (Deuteronomy 28:47).

We can learn about growth by observing lobsters. As a lobster grows, its shell becomes confining and oppressive. This causes the lobster to

shed its shell and grow a more spacious one. Each new shell eventually becomes oppressive, leading to the formation of a larger one. The stimulus that enables the lobster to grow is the discomfort it feels when its shell becomes confining. If the lobster would not feel discomfort, it would remain tiny forever.

Growth is often accompanied by discomfort. "For with much wisdom comes much suffering" (Ecclesiastes 1:18). Yet, there can be *simchah* even when one experiences discomfort. This is why we find that our great *tzad-dikim* welcome *yisurim* (suffering); the spiritual growth that is stimulated by the discomfort more than compensates for the suffering.

As a result of scientific advances, Western civilization has become hedonistic. Whereas it is perfectly normal to seek relief from pain, we are at risk of rejecting *all* types of discomfort including those that are the stimuli for spiritual growth. If we eschew spiritual growth because of the discomfort that may accompany it, we may also be lessening the amount of true *simchah* that we can achieve.

Moshe Rabbeinu taught that growth is the source of true *simchah*. There is nothing wrong with seeking comfort, but when maximizing comfort becomes the goal in life, one loses the ability to grow. As a result, one can be very, very comfortable and very, very unhappy. **JA**