

**The Seven Habits of Supremely Happy People**  
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Everyone wants to be happy. Ask someone if they would prefer to be happy or rich. While the occasional wise guy might say, 'both!', if push comes to shove there are few who would choose to be miserable millionaires rather than happy people of modest means.

What would it take to make you happy? And if you consider yourself happy -- what would it take to make you happier?

Many people spend their lives waiting to be happy. You may think, "if only I had more money," or "could lose weight," or " (fill in the blank)", then I would be happy. Well here's a secret: You can be happy right now. It's not always easy, but you can choose to be happy, and in the vast majority of circumstances there's no one who can stop you except for yourself.

The truth is, happiness doesn't come from wealth, perfect looks or even a perfect relationship. Happiness comes from within. That is why, if you truly want to be happy, you need to work on yourself first.

*A Zen master visiting New York City goes up to a hot dog vendor and says, "Make me one with everything."  
The hot dog vendor fixes a hot dog and hands it to the Zen master, who pays with a \$20 bill.  
The vendor puts the bill in the cash box and closes it.  
"Excuse me, but where's my change?" asks the Zen master.  
The vendor responds, "Change must come from within."*

Change ...and happiness ...have to come from within.

What's the secret to being happy? You can learn how to do it, just as you can learn any other skill. Those who are happy tend to follow a certain set of habits that create peace in their lives; if you learn to apply these habits in your own life, there's a good chance you'll be happy too! This presentation is titled, "The Seven Habits of Supremely Happy People." Let's begin with the first habit.

**1) Count Your Blessings**

*Henry Ford was once walking along a riverbank when he spied a young man fishing. The young man, with a single rod and reel, was pulling in one fish after another. Ford said, Young man, my name is Henry Ford. And I must say, that's quite a talent you have there. You should sell those fish and buy another fishing pole.*

*Young man: And what would I do with another pole, Mr. Ford?*

*Ford: You could set your second pole up along the riverbank and catch twice as many fish.*

*Young man: What would I do with those fish, Mr. Ford?*

*Ford: You could sell them for another two poles. With the fish then caught, you could buy more poles until the entire riverbank is lined with poles, and you'll be catching an enormous amount of fish.*

*Young man: And then what would I do with all those fish, Mr. Ford?*

*Ford: Well then, young man, you could buy a boat! You'll catch a huge amount of fish. Then, buy a second boat and then more boats, until you have so much money that you can retire, and then do what you really want!*

*Young man: But Mr. Ford, that's what I'm doing now!*

What would it take to make you happy? Happier?

If asked, most would say, "If I only had \_\_\_\_\_, I'd be happy." But it's clearly not true that if we were suddenly granted our heart's desire that we'd necessarily be happy. There are many people who have the items on our personal wish list and aren't happy. And there are people without such things who are happy.

A few years ago a World Value Survey of people in 65 nations, conducted by an international group of social scientists and first reported in the British magazine *New Scientist*, decided that the world's happiest people lived in ....Nigeria. Those ranked second to fifth in the happiness survey were the people of Mexico, Venezuela, El Salvador and Puerto Rico.

These findings defy conventional wisdom. Nigerians live in a volatile, poverty-stricken country. Could they really be more content than, say, proudly prosperous Americans, whose bountiful nation placed a dismal 16th on the list?

We Americans -- like fellow hedonists in Asia, Europe and elsewhere, work hard, earn lots of money and spend gleefully on iPhones, flat-screen TVs, SUVs and all sorts of expensive frivolities. We indulge, we gratify, and we expect to be the happiest people on the planet.

So why aren't we?

Because we live with a myth: Things make us happy.

The famous industrialist billionaire J.Paul Getty was once asked, "How much is enough?" Getty smiled and said, "A little bit more."

The antidote to this fallacious thinking is found in a succinct and incredibly powerful statement in classic Jewish thought. *"Who is wealthy? The one who rejoices in their own portion."* (Ethics of the Fathers 4:1)

Count your blessings. It's not how much you've got, but how much enjoyment you get from what you've got that counts. And a careful look at the above-mentioned rabbinic teaching indicates that if you don't appreciate what you have, then it's not really yours. Possession only means I can say, 'you can't use it.' To **have** something, you have to appreciate it. Focusing on what you don't have -- or what someone else has -- will make you miserable.

A *Far Side* cartoon in my office shows a sheep reclining on a couch watching TV. A sheep news reporter is delivering an urgent message:

*This just in. The grass IS greener on the other side*

Discipline, effort and hard work are needed to achieve this. It's not enough to just hear the idea. We have to fight to get an appreciation that we have good things. Here are a few blessings most of us can count:

Children: Yep, they're a hassle, but would you want to go through life without yours?

Heating and Air Conditioning

Medical Care: You might not like your plan. Most insurance plans today are like those hospital gowns: They don't quite cover everything! But at least insurance is available.

A Place to Call Home. Who cares if the shutters need painting? It's home.

Family and Friends: To listen to you and to give you hugs.

A Job: to help you earn your way.

Availability of food: 800 million people who don't have enough food each day

TV, movies, books, newspapers, Internet, games at your disposal

Music: At click of a switch

Clothes: closets and drawers full.

So if you want to be happy, count your blessings. Make a Blessing Journal. Each day write down three to five things for which you are currently thankful. And don't forget to count the greatest blessing of all: you woke up this morning.

## **2) Treat Others With Kindness**

*The synagogue realized that it had never received a donation from its wealthiest member.*

*Goldberg was a miserably unhappy miser -- but he was a miserably unhappy wealthy miser.*

*So the rabbi and the president paid Goldberg a visit in his expensive home.*

*The president opened the meeting by saying, "Our research shows that even though your annual income is over a million dollars, you've never given a donation to our synagogue beyond payment of annual dues. Wouldn't you like to give something back to your shul?"*

Goldberg thinks for a minute and says, "First, did your research also show you that my mother is dying after a long, painful illness and she has huge medical bills that are far beyond her ability to pay? And secondly, does your research show that my brother, a disabled veteran, is blind and confined to a wheelchair and is unable to support his wife and six children. And thirdly did your research also show you that my sister's husband died in a dreadful car accident, leaving her penniless with a mortgage and three children?"

The humiliated president stammered "I'm sorry, I had no idea..."

At that, Goldberg said "So, if I don't give money to them, what makes you think I would ever give any to you?"

The Talmud states there are 3 traits of a Jew: *bayshanim*, *rachmanim*, *gomlei chasadim*; modesty, compassion, and love of acts of kindness. Just as the identifying signs of a kosher animal are that it chews its cud and has split hooves, one of the identifying signs of a Jew is that he or she does kindness -- known in Hebrew as *chesed*.

Kindness is not only a mitzvah, but has been proven to make you happier. When you're kind to others, your brain produces feel-good hormones and neurotransmitters like serotonin and you're able to build strong relationships with others, fostering positive feelings all around.

Three studies prove that doing kindness makes you happy.

### 1) *Spending Money on Others Promotes Happiness*

A 2008 study published in *Science* found that spending money on other people promotes personal happiness, and has a more direct impact on happiness than spending money on oneself. Money DOES buy happiness -- when you spend money on others.

### 2) *Matchmaking Promotes Happiness*

Studies from 2014 explore the psychology underlying people's proclivity to connect people to each other—to play "matchmaker." One study shows that chronic matchmaking is associated with higher well-being. Other studies show that matching others on how well they will get along increases happiness and is more intrinsically rewarding than other tasks. Taken together, these studies provide correlational and causal evidence for the role of matchmaking in promoting happiness.

### 3) *Giving Time Gives You Time*

Results of four experiments (2012) reveal a counter intuitive solution to the common problem of feeling that one does not have enough time: Give some of it away. Although the objective amount of time people have cannot be increased (there are only 24 hours in a day), research demonstrates that people's subjective sense of time affluence can be increased. Spending time on other people was compared with wasting time, spending time on oneself, and even gaining a windfall of "free" time. It was found that spending time on others increases one's feeling of time affluence.

Consensus: If you want to be happy, give

Even though there are only 24 hours in a day, positive people fill some of that time doing good for others, which in return, does some good for the do-gooders themselves. A project called *Americans' Changing Lives* found a bevy of benefits associated with altruism: "Volunteer work was good for both mental and physical health. People of all ages who volunteered were happier and experienced better physical health and less depression," reported the leader of one of the studies.

Givers also experience what researchers call "the helper's high," a euphoric state experienced by those engaged in charitable acts. "This is probably a literal "high," similar to a drug-induced high," writes Christine L. Carter, Ph.D. "The act of making a financial donation triggers the reward center in our brains that is responsible for dopamine-mediated euphoria."

Develop the habit of kindness:

- 1) Spend Money on others. Give tzedaka and small, frequent gifts
- 2) Pray for Others. One can give through thoughtful prayer.
- 3) Visit the sick, work in a food pantry, raise money for the poor. Give of your time.
- 4) Say kind words and compliments
- 5) Smile. The gift of a smile can be of inestimable value.

### **3) Be Optimistic**

*The newest graduates of the paratroopers school were about to take their first real jump out of an airplane. One of the young men, remembering what he had learned in class, mentioned that it only takes seven seconds of free-fall to drop 1,000 feet. One of the less confident members of the group turned to his partner and nervously said,*

*"Suppose your chute didn't open? What would you do?"  
His friend answered, "I'd have seven seconds to learn how to fly."*

Is your glass half full or half empty?

Optimism is a trait that should become more common, judging by Winston Churchill's famous quote that "a pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." If you want to be a supremely happy person, you need to master the trait of optimism. One might think that being a worry-wart is actually a Jewish trait. Are you old enough to remember the telegram? They used to say there was such a thing as a 'Jewish telegram'. A 'Jewish telegram' read:

*Worry now -- details to follow*

But in fact, whether you were optimistic or not is one of the questions you'll be asked in Heaven! The Talmud relates that one of the questions to be asked on our 'final exam' after 120 years will be:

*Did you await salvation?*

Were you, like the pessimist, a misfortune teller, always sure that nothing would ever go right? Or were you wise enough to realize that optimism is G-d's greatest gift to mankind, and that you longed and hoped all of your days for the ultimate salvation of mankind? It seems there's a great deal of truth in Golda Meir's observation that, "Pessimism is a luxury that a Jew can never allow himself."

Martin Seligman, considered the father of Positive Psychology, defines optimism as reacting to problems with a high sense of confidence and high personal ability. Specifically, optimistic people believe that negative events are temporary, limited in scope (instead of pervading every aspect of a person's life), and manageable. Optimists, Dr. Seligman says, have a unique optimistic explanatory style to help make sense of bad events. They believe bad things happen because of someone or something else; they believe they can change what caused the bad event; and they believe bad events to be solitary, limited occurrences.

Pessimists, on the other hand, view problems as internal, unchangeable, and pervasive.

The are numerous benefits of optimism to one's physical health. Optimism ...

- Has shown to be a protective factor against depression (and a number of serious medical problems, including coronary disease).
- Improves the immune system.
- For every 10 point increase in a person's score on an 'optimism scale', the risk of early death decreased by 19%.
- Optimistic mothers deliver healthier, heavier babies.

Optimism can have a profound effect on one's psychological health. Optimism ...

- Has been shown to correlate positively with life satisfaction and self-esteem.
- Predicts positive affect: Optimists are generally happier with their lives than pessimists.
- Optimists recover from disappointments more quickly and attend to positive outcomes to a greater extent than negative ones.

One study involving IVF revealed that optimists who had failed fertilization attempts tended to endorse thoughts like 'this experience has made our relationship stronger'. Pessimists were more likely to develop depressive symptoms and to feel personally responsible for failed IVF attempts.

-- Optimism at the beginning of college predicts a smoother, psychologically healthier transition to college life, and a larger group of new friends.

Can a pessimist become an optimist? By changing 'explanatory styles', one can develop a more optimistic perspective. Psychologists have developed a curriculum for school children to inculcate in them an optimistic explanatory style. We, however, can draw upon a tried-and-true series of traditional Jewish perspectives to live with a spirit of optimism.

1) Learn to say *gam zu l'tova* -- all is for the best. Faith drives our understanding that the Almighty is running the show -- like in the following story:

*Plans were made to dig a tunnel under the English Channel. The bidding for the tunnel contract was fierce and competitive. Murray Liebowitz surprised everyone when he and his son won the bidding. His friends weren't sure that he was up to the challenge.*

*"Murray," they said, "do you realize that the tunnel must be at least 25 miles long? That's not easy!" "Easy, schmeezy!" Murray replied. "I'll start some men digging on the English side, my son and his men will start digging on the French side, and we'll eventually meet in the middle."*

*"Making underground maps to fit that job is incredibly difficult. The calculations must be painstaking and exact. What if your tunnels don't meet just right?"*

*"So? It's all for the best. They'll get two tunnels for the price of one."*

2) Understand that life is a test.

3) We have no problems .... just challenges and opportunities. Remove the word 'problem' from your vocabulary.

4) G-d cares, loves us, and is with us in the midst of our challenges and difficulties.

Want to enjoy life? Cultivate a spirit of optimism.

#### **4) Strong Personal Relationships**

*When Chani (my wife) was expecting our sixth child, I went to an electronics store to rent a pager. Remember pagers? I've always been a bit behind the times electronically and wanted to have a pager within the month Chani*

was due. In the store I was chatting with the clerk -- a very pleasant woman who clearly appeared to be non-Jewish. I mentioned to her that I was renting the pager because my wife was expecting.

Clerk: "Oh, that's wonderful. Will this be your first?"

Me: "Actually, we're expecting our sixth."

At that the clerk's eyes widened as large as saucers, and she gushed, "Are you Catholic?!?"

Very few things that make me happier than family. And it's a universal; tremendous joy and happiness is available to those who have close personal relationships.

Let me cite three questions from a 2005 *Time Magazine* Poll.

1) *What one thing in your life has brought you the greatest happiness?*

Children/grandchildren -- 35%

Family -- 17%

G-d/faith/religion -- 11%

Spouse -- 9%

2) *What are your major sources of happiness? (top 8 answers)*

Your relationship with your children -- 77%

Your friends and friendships -- 76%

Contributing to the lives of others -- 75%

Your relationship with spouse/partner or your love life -- 73%

3) *Do you often do any of the following to improve your mood?*

Talk to friends/family -- 63% of women identified this as their first response -- the most popular response among women. 51% of men identified this as their first response -- second most popular next to 'listen to music.'

Notice a trend? People overwhelmingly identify relationships as their greatest joy in life. Can people, at times, be difficult? Absolutely. The challenge of interacting with others brings to mind the words of the comic who said, "I love humanity; it's people I can't stand!" But at the end of the day, we need people.

Ethics of the Fathers (1:7) says, "Make for yourself a mentor, and acquire a friend ..." You can be *alive*, but you're not really *living* unless you have close relationships. And the 'joy of relationships' is corroborated by modern social science.

In 2002, two pioneers of Positive Psychology, Ed Diener and Martin Seligman, conducted a study at the University of Illinois on the 10% of students with the highest scores recorded on a survey of personal happiness. They found that the most salient characteristics shared by students who were very happy and showed the fewest signs of depression were "their strong ties to friends and family and commitment to spending time with them."

Joy is contagious. Researchers of the *Framingham Heart Study* who investigated the spread of happiness over 20 years found that those who are surrounded by happy people "are more likely to become happy in the future." This study, which followed 4793 individuals from 1983 to 2003, concluded:

-- *People who are surrounded by many happy people and those who are central in the network are more likely to become happy in the future*

-- *A friend who lives within a mile and who becomes happy increases the probability that a person is happy by 25%*

-- *Similar effects are seen in coresident spouses, siblings who live within a mile, and next door neighbors.*

So ...are you looking to become a supremely happy person? If so, know the following:

- 1) Your happiness depends on the happiness of others with whom you are connected.
- 2) Try to surround yourself with people who share your values and goals. *Adam nimshach achar s'vivav* -- You're affected by the people you hang out with. Ultimately, this will lead to feeling good about yourself, and you'll be happier.
- 3) ) To get the most out of your relationships, improve your ability to communicate. Such as, becoming a better listener. Good listening is a skill that strengthens relationships and leads to more satisfying experiences. A good listener may walk away from a conversation feeling as if their presence served a purpose, an experience that is closely connected with increased well-being.
- 4) Make the effort to connect in person. Texting and tweeting is convenient. But spending the money on a flight to see your favorite person across the country has weight when it comes to your well-being.

Invest time and energy in friends and family. Where you live, how much money you make, your job title and even your health have surprisingly small effects on your satisfaction with life. One of the biggest factors of supremely happy people is strong personal relationships.

## **5) Get Spiritual**

*There was an auction taking place in a small town, and the auctioneer held up a bust and sung out, "What can I get for this excellent bust of Robert Burns?"*

*One of the people in the crowd stood up and said, "Sir, that's not Burns ...it's a bust of Shakespeare."*

*The auctioneer laughed, "Well, that just goes to show you how much I know about the Bible."*

There are increasingly fewer Americans who consider themselves religious. And even for many who consider themselves religious (as identified by regular church or synagogue attendance), they note a difference between being 'religious' and 'spiritual'. One can be religious and not particularly spiritual. And one can be spiritual and not particularly religious.

There are a lot of good things to be said about being religious. But one of the habits of supremely happy people is that they get spiritual.

What is spirituality? Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski describes spirituality as the unique capacity of human beings.

Some in the scientific and academic world refer to humans as *homo sapiens*. *Homo*; from the classification of hominids such as monkeys and gorillas. *Sapien*; meaning intelligent (i.e. *saber* in Spanish, *savant*). But many sense that humans are more than simply intelligent apes. If we're to strive for a definition of spirituality, we must go beyond intellectual development.

- 1) We have the capacity to recognize the difference between good and evil and make choices in accordance with that understanding. It's only when a person acts because it is morally and ethically wrong that we rise above the animal. An animal is a slave to its biological impulses.
- 2) We can ask why we're here. We can search for meaning in life. We can ask that great existential question: What's it all about?
- 3) We have the ability to pursue that purpose in the decisions we make.

And Judaism says we're here for 5 types of pleasure; material pleasures, love, good, creativity, and developing a relationship with G-d

These criteria are components of the spirit. Every human being has this potential. They're above intellect. When a person exercises this capacity, they're being spiritual.

Does being spiritual make you happier?

Studies demonstrate a close link between spiritual engagement (practice) and happiness.

### 1) Meditative acts/ Sacred Moments

Spiritual expression enables people with opportunities to engage in meditative acts. Meditation has been shown to have a strong link with well-being because it calms the body, reduces stress and anxiety, and also supports positive thinking. The cultivation of "sacred moments" in daily life, (moments of reflection and calm) whether through prayer, journal-writing or daily spiritual exercises, has been associated with reduced levels of stress and an increase in psychological well-being.

The experience of sacred time provides a time apart from the "profane time" that we live most of our lives in. A daily period of meditation, a weekly practice of lighting Sabbath candles, or attending worship services, or an annual retreat in an isolated, quiet place of solitude are examples of setting time apart from the rush of our everyday lives.

Transcendent spiritual experiences have a positive, healing, restorative effect, especially if they are "built in," so to speak, to one's daily, weekly, seasonal, and annual cycles of living.

### 2) General happiness

A 2012 review of more than 326 peer-reviewed studies of mainly adult populations found that of those 326 studies, 256 (79%) found only significant positive associations between religiosity/spirituality and well-being.

Influence of religion or spirituality on well-being can be explained through a few key mechanisms, including;

- Coping strategies (stress)
- Support systems for prosocial behaviors.
- Regulations of most faiths decrease the likelihood of individuals experiencing particularly stressful life events (such as divorce or incarceration)
- Studies point to a link between religious and spiritual practice and mirth. For one, happiness habits like expressing gratitude, compassion and charity are generally promoted in most spiritual conventions.
- Asking the big questions helps to give our lives context and meaning.

So, if you want to be happier, become spiritually engaged. Activate the '5 Pleasures' by doing such things as;

Personal growth

Prayer

Learning

Religious practices (undertaken meaningfully)

Hobbies

New activities: surfing, skiing, dancing, sky-diving

Meaningful conversation

### 6) Be Grateful

*A young boy was watching his mother pay bills. The little boy asked "Mom, what are you doing?" She replied "Well honey, I am paying bills- which means I am writing checks to pay money for the work that other people have done for me."*

*Suddenly the little boy had an idea! That day he worked extra hard around the house and slipped a note under his mom's bedroom door at night. When she woke up the next morning she saw a piece of paper, which said "BILL" at*



the top. Underneath it said "Taking out the trash – \$5. Doing the dishes – \$5. Cleaning up my room – \$10. Total Amount Due – \$20." That day the mom paid the young boy \$20 in cash.

However, the next morning the little boy woke up and saw a piece of paper under his door. At the top it was marked "BILL." Underneath it said, "Cooking for you every day that you've been alive – \$5000. All the clothes you've ever worn – \$10,000. Changing all of your diapers and cleaning up after you your entire childhood – \$20,000."

The only difference was at the very bottom it said "Total Amount Due – \$0. Paid in full by the love that you give me each and every day.

What a difference in attitude from that of Rachel Canning, young woman from New Jersey who was in the news last week for suing her parents for child maintenance, future college fees and legal bills.

The antidote to Selfie-ism, and to obtain the deepest pleasures of life, is to have an attitude of gratitude.

A foundation of Judaism is developing a sense of gratitude. This goal directs us to not take anything for granted from G-d or from others. The root of the mitzvah of 'Honor Your Parents' is to express the unpayable debt of gratitude for the gift of life. Many other mitzvos, such as *Bikurim* (First Fruits) and the obligation to remember the Exodus center around helping us to develop the spiritual muscle of gratitude.

The great Roman orator Cicero wrote, "Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others." Being grateful feels good. Gratitude, the state or feeling of being thankful, is an almost-universal concept among world cultures. In fact, nearly all of the world's spiritual traditions emphasize the importance of giving thanks to benefactors, supernatural or otherwise. (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000).

Feeling grateful has a number of benefits. Feelings of gratitude are associated with less frequent negative emotions and more frequent positive emotions such as feeling energized, alert and enthusiastic. Beyond emotions, there is evidence that gratitude is associated with pleasant physical sensations, as well. Algoe and Haidt (2009) found that people experienced pleasant muscle relaxation when recalling situations in which they'd felt grateful. Is it apparent that the mere act of giving thanks can have remarkable impact on a person's well-being.

An additional benefit of being thankful is that gratitude is the grease that allows the wheels of family relationships to turn smoothly. After all, no one are more important to us, or are greater benefactors to our lives, than our family.

Barbara Ann Kipfer began keeping a list of her favorite things as a shy teenager. Soon the list became second nature; she found herself making additions while riding the bus, eating breakfast, and even in the middle of the night. Twenty years and dozens of spiral notebooks later, her list was published as a book titled *14,000 Things to Be Happy About*. Even the title is remarkable! Have gratitude for even the little things.

Here's a list of 10 'little things' for which I'm grateful that happened to me in the past week:

My list of 10 things

- 1) My wife gave me a small hot water heater to make hot chocolate at my office
- 2) Someone outside of my family said to me, "You're Like family".
- 3) One of my children hugged me and said, "I care about you."
- 4) Someone close to me apologized.
- 5) Someone who deserved to get angry at me didn't get angry.
- 6) Goodbye single digits temperatures in St. Louis!
- 7) New eyeglasses
- 8) Sturdy shoes
- 9) One of my children asked me a wonderful question: "What was the highlight of your day?"
- 10) My teenage son is moving out into his own apartment. (Actually, this is a BIG thing!)

At the height of his popularity, Rudyard Kipling was one of the most widely read authors of all time. At one point it was estimated that each word he had in print was worth twenty-five shillings -- today, the equivalent of about \$100. A group of students at Oxford University pooled their change and sent 25 shillings to Kipling. The accompanying

letter read, "Send us your best word." Before long, the reply came. With great anticipation, the students opened the envelope from Kipling to find a single word printed on a piece of paper. It simply said, "Thanks."

Grateful people have been shown to have greater levels of positive affect, a greater sense of belonging, and lower levels of depression and stress. Gratitude is clearly an important part of a Supremely Happy Life.

## **7) Laugh Early and Often**

*A minister, a priest and a rabbi are sitting around, discussing what each wants people to say about him at his funeral.*

*"At my funeral," says the minister, "I want people to say that I was generous to the poor."*

*"At my funeral," says the priest, "I want people to say I visited the sick."*

*"At my funeral," says the rabbi, "I want people to say, 'Look! He's moving!'"*

Did you know that kindergarten children laugh about 300 times per day, while adults only laugh about 17 times per day? Isn't it a shame that as adults we lose the joy of laughter? You've heard it before: Laughter is the best medicine. One of the sure signs of supremely happy people is that they love to laugh, and they harness the positive power of laughter to improve the quality of their lives.

Is laughter a Jewish thing? Absolutely. I did a search Wikipedia for *Comedians* by nationality and ethnicity. Here's what I found:

Peruvian 1

Estonian 4

Saudi Arabian 6

Polish: 6

Protestant, Methodist, Church of England: 0

Black Comedians: 141

Jewish Comedians: 257

On any list of comedians, Jews are over-represented compared to our numbers. It's not just because of our history of being a minority status persecution. In the Bible there is abundant humor in the form of;

### 1) Sarcasm

(Exodus) "Was there a lack of graves in Egypt, that you took us away to die in the wilderness?"

2) Irony (incongruity -- what goes around comes around) Joseph left for dead, rules over his brothers, Jacob fools his brother, is fooled by Lavan

3) Wordplay, Humorous names

4) Exaggeration, Humorous imagery

"The lazy man says, there is a lion on the road.." Proverbs

How does laughter make us happy? The study of humor and laughter and its physiologic, psychologic and spiritual effects on the human body, is called *Gelotology* (from the Greek *gelos* meaning laughter. *Gelotology* has absolutely nothing to do with jello!).

### 1) Physiologically

A good, old-fashioned chuckle releases happy brain chemicals that, other than providing the exuberant buzz we seek does wonders physically. "The body's response to repetitive laughter is similar to the effect of repetitive exercise," explained Dr. Lee Berk, the lead researcher of a 2010 study focused on laughter's effects on the body. The same study found that some of the benefits associated with working out, like a healthy immune system, controlled appetite and improved cholesterol can also be achieved through laughter.

Laughter relaxes the whole body, boosts the immune system, triggers the release of endorphins, and even protects the heart.

In 1964, Dr. Norman Cousins, a physician, was affected with acute inflammation of his spine and was in great pain. His case was so severe that he was given a one in 500 chance of recovery and only a few months to live. But in 1979, Dr. Cousins wrote that 10 minutes of laughter daily allowed him two hours of pain-free sleep. What was his simple therapy approach? It may sound crazy, but all it took was to watch several episodes of the comedy shows Candid Camera and the Marx Brothers every day. Dr. Cousins said:

*I made the joyous discovery that ten minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anesthetic effect and would give me at least two hours of pain-free sleep," he reported. "When the pain-killing effect of the laughter wore off, we would switch on the motion picture projector again and not infrequently, it would lead to another pain-free interval.*

## 2) Psychologically

Feeling a bit stressed during this rainy, snowy winter season? That's not uncommon, so find something about the snow, cold, rain to laugh about. For many people, a cause of stress or ill health is a sense of helplessness, powerlessness, or lack of control. Laughing and a sense of humor help give you back that sense of control. When the weather has been particularly cold, I tell people;

*It's so cold outside I just saw a teenage boy with his pants pulled all the way up!*

Laughter subconsciously releases tension. In today's world, everyone is worried about the economy, health care, taxes, Iran, the Ukraine. Goodness knows, we could stand to lessen the tension! Laughter enhances relationships. Everyone wants to be around someone who laughs. By adding more laughter into your life, you also help others to giggle more and tap into that feel-good groove.

And laughter helps us to better deal with problems, especially if you can laugh at yourself.

Sammy Davis Jr. had to develop the ability to laugh in the face of great difficulties. Sadly enough, part of his challenge in life included fighting off prejudice. By joking about prejudice, he clearly defeated it. He told the joke about the time a bus driver tried to get him to move to the back of the bus.

*Said Davis, "I'll have you know that I'm Jewish."  
"Okay," said the driver, "in that case, get OFF the bus."*

Davis was known for many things, among them the fact that he was a convert to Judaism and he had lost one eye in a car wreck. One of my favorite stories about the entertainer is told about the day he was playing golf with a friend, and a member of his golf group asked him,

*"Sammy, what is your handicap?"  
"Handicap? Man, I'm a one-eyed Negro Jew, do I need one?"*

## 3) Spiritual

Laughter can inform our perspective on faith, and drive home spiritual lessons in a compelling way. Laughter, when used judiciously, can minimize insanity and evil.

*Saadam Hussein, not feeling well and concerned about his mortality, goes to consult a psychic about the date of his death. Closing her eyes and silently reaching into the realm of the future she finds the answer: "You will die on a Jewish holiday."*

*"Which one?" Hussein asks nervously.*

*"It doesn't matter," replied the psychic. "Whenever you die, it'll be a Jewish holiday."*

Want to be supremely happy? Laugh!

In conclusion, there are seven identifiable habits of the supremely happy. The 'secret' of being happy isn't really such a big secret: Those who are happy tend to follow a certain set of habits that create peace in their lives.

- 1) *Count Your Blessings***
- 2) *Treat Others With Kindness***
- 3) *Be Optimistic***
- 4) *Strong Personal Relationships***
- 5) *Get Spiritual***
- 6) *Be Grateful***
- 7) *Laugh Early and Often***

if you learn to apply these habits in your own life, there's a good chance you'll be happy too.