

(How to) Have a Happy New Year!

Happy people are not only more pleasant to be around but they truly make the world a better place! We each have an obligation to be happier in the coming year. Here's my rabbinic advice on how to have a happier year (and life).

1. Become aware of your blessings. Stop right now. How are you feeling? Did you have a safe, warm place to sleep last night? Did you have something to eat today? Are most of your body parts working? If you answered yes to any of the above, MAZEL TOV!
2. Be thankful for your blessings. Thank God and God's representatives on earth (teachers, doctors, nurses, plumbers, friends, family) for any of the above blessings of which you are aware. If you want to be traditional, say the Hebrew baruchas. Less traditional? say thanks to God and to everyone else. But say it or write it; don't just think it!
3. Learn when to feel guilty. It is perfectly OK to feel guilty – WHEN YOU'VE DONE SOMETHING WRONG! For other things and at other times, don't feel guilty.
4. Stop worrying so much. There are no doubt things in your life about which you should be worried. There are also many that you should not be dwelling on to the extent that you do. Sort them out (make a list) and decide which are under your control and benefit from your worry. Try not to dwell on the others.
5. Stop watching TV news. This may sound odd but TV news is generally not about the news but about what will shock or appall you. There's a saying in TV news, "If it bleeds, it leads." Anything that looks horrible will lead the news. Skip this source and rely on newspapers or newsmagazines. At least try it for a week.
6. Cut your TV watching way back. Think you're not addicted to TV? Try the test for any addiction; just try stopping for a few days. While there are many wonderful things on TV, much of TV watching is just "killing time." The time that God gives us is far too precious to kill. Substitute a few hours of reading, listening to music, walking, talking, volunteering and, yes, thinking for time you spend in front of the tube.
7. Reestablish contact with that special relative and/or friend. I don't know who he or she is but I predict that there is someone whom you should call or write. If you're not sure whom it is, look at your old photographs; you'll know.
8. Don't just sit there, help someone! Our job as Jews and as people is to make the world a better place. I have no doubt that there is something you can and should be doing for the Temple, for your friends and community, and for our world. Figure out what it is and do it! You'll feel better about yourself and happier for it.
9. Don't let the best be the enemy of the good. Just because you can't do something perfectly or completely correct, don't abandon the effort. A diet or exercise program that you slip up on is still far better than one never started or one abandoned. Just because you can't play that guitar perfectly does not mean you should give it up. Keep on plugging away!
10. ENJOY! One of my favorite Talmudic dicta is that God will hold us to account for all the legitimate pleasures that God has provided for us and that we have chosen not to enjoy.

My family and I wish you and yours a year of health, happiness, love, peace and meaning.

B'shalom,

Rabbi Mike Lotker