Jewish-American psychologist Dr. Sol Herzig wrote a poignant article entitled: “Six Simple Strategies for Achieving Misery.” In his words, these are the most tried and tested strategies not to achieve happiness:

1. **Cling to Entitlement**: Always feel entitled, that life owes you, that you were born to receive. Always look for the injustice in others having something that you do not, and do not agree to any concession or compromise.

2. **It’s all Personal**: Always assume that everything was done with evil intentions. Always try to find malicious intent and seize every opportunity to see it as conclusive proof that you do not matter to others.

3. **Focus on Problems**: Keep careful track of all your problems and constantly review them. Nurture the attitude that you can’t really move on unless everything is resolved first.

4. **Magnify Everything**: Do not cheat yourself out of misery by maintaining perspective. Try to cultivate negative thinking in respect to every mistake or mishap and magnify it, without allowing for regret or forgiveness.

5. **Expect Catastrophe**: It’s important to remember that terrible, horrible things might happen any minute, and to let your imagination run wild. Diseases, disasters, terror attacks – don’t let anything surprise you. Be alert.

6. **Just say “No thanks” to gratitude**: Take everything you’ve received in life as a given, without thanking those who gave it to you. Try to focus on what you don’t have rather than what you do have.

If we adopt (or rather, don’t adopt) these six tips – we’ll have a truly happy Purim!

He’s at the top of the world, in a senior position, and he’s still unsatisfied. Haman HaRasha is an Amalekite. He comes from the nation the Torah tells us we must wipe out and obliterate their memory. What is Amalek-ism? One of its characteristics is revealed in the figure of Haman, in the beginning of Megillat Esther: “Yet all this means nothing to me every time I see that Jew Mordechai sitting at the king’s palace gates” (Esther 5:13). Meaning, I have an ocean full of honor, but I’m still missing one more drop. Everyone bows to him, but he needs Mordechai to bow. If not – everything else is worthless.

When we speak about a war with Amalek, we are also speaking of a war with these character traits. On focusing on the drop we’re missing and not on the cup mostly full. On nurturing our ego and chasing honor, without appreciating and rejoicing over what we have. These are Amalek-like traits. When we make noise when the name “Haman” is read, we should have intent to erase this worldview as well.

So how should we be happy? Here is a section from Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi’s book, *Invitation to Joy*:

“We live in a happiness-challenged society. In many cases, happiness is simply a decision, a choice. People need to choose to be happy. Instead, they give up on happiness while doing everything else, without even realizing it.
Women today expect themselves to do everything – to work, to raise their children, to succeed at home and outside of it, to host guests, to be immaculate. A generation of perfectionism. I say: give in to yourself along the way, just don’t give up your happiness. Because what do you normally do? You demand to do everything; you don’t give up on anything – besides happiness.

That’s the mistake. A messy bed can be tidied. A dirty counter can shine. A document for work can be written. But an unhappy woman – oh, that is much more serious than any of these. So, true, you didn’t tell a story before bedtime. You didn’t finish the list of what you needed to do. You got upset again. But you forgot to write on your to-do list to smile and enjoy the process. Choose your tasks wisely, decide what to give up and what not to, but one thing – your happiness today, right now – never give up on along the way.

At the beginning of the Megillah, Achashverosh holds a banquet that is all an external show. A celebration of money, gold and alcohol. Faced with such an empty misconception of happiness, Esther eventually brings the nation to a state of ora veSimcha, light and rejoicing. How does Esther express happiness? After a wasteful and egotistical feast, she teaches us to truly be happy through the mitzvot of Purim we still keep today. First, happiness in our inner circle: a meal with the whole family. Second, community: mishloach manot to strengthen our social bonds. Finally, helping the needy: matanot la’evyonim, caring for those who don’t have. That’s how we rejoice. The tables have turned – not accumulating wealth or fame, but going outside of one’s comfort zone to give to and share with others. Instead of thinking that the more we receive, the happier we’ll be, Esther teaches us that the more we give, the happier we’ll be.

Sometimes Purim celebrations are identified with breakdown and mess, but one educator shared with me the following idea: “Essentially, we are all boxed in. We decide things about ourselves: ‘I’m such and such,’ and that’s it, we can’t change it. But on Purim, everything shifts, and we can leave the box. It’s an opportunity for an internal revolution, veNahafoch hu, to break down the boundaries. Usually, when speaking of breaking down boundaries, we have a negative connotation. When we speak about the courage to do things we don’t do all year round, it implies bad things.

But what’s the alternative? What about breaking down my own barriers – for a positive reason? What about being brave, daring – to do the good things I always wanted to do? On these days of Purim, we allow ourselves to go crazy. But who decided that doesn’t mean in a new, higher, more positive direction?”

Ostensibly, matanot la’evyonim is something given to the poor on Purim. A little tzedakah and we’re done. But Chazal write in the Gemara: “There is no real poverty but the poverty of knowledge.” Poverty is not only financial. There are people below the knowledge poverty line.

And that’s not all. The Sefat Emet explains that really each one of us is both wealthy and poor. Every person is “poor of knowledge,” who has yet to learn, and what to learn, from others. And each one of us can give to others from his or her own knowledge. Torah, wisdom, knowledge are also a type of matanot la’evyonim that we need to give and receive, all year round! Purim Sameach!

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