

הַשְׂמֵחַ בְּחֵלְקוֹ

## BEING HAPPY WITH ONE'S LOT

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You have a dream, something you've longed for. The longing consumes your every waking thought and disturbs your equilibrium. Take a second and remember a time when you ended up getting something you really wanted. Try to recall how long the pleasure lasted...

Remember how brief the enjoyment actually was?

There will always be something else you "need." That's the way of the world. But it's an illusion.

A Torah Jew, on the other hand, doesn't have to worry about these things. He never has to question the need to accomplish in this world or figure out the point of all his struggles. A Jew doesn't have to feel this way because he knows what the point is and the reason he is living. And so, a Jew can be happy — truly happy to be alive, with the opportunity to learn Torah on a constant basis.

And it's important that a person find *genuine* happiness in life, not the illusory kind.

Why is that?

"Because," says the *Machzor Vitri*, "only by managing to acquire this wonderful character trait can a person learn Hashem's Torah with a calm, peaceful, and open mind."

On another level entirely, the *Midrash Shmuel* points out that a

person should be filled with an unrestrained happiness that he was granted the ability and merit to be intimately involved in studying Hashem's words and instructions to His people. How lucky this makes us!

So enjoy yourself. Relish the feeling of being blessed and fortunate. You, out of the world's billions, were chosen as one of the fortunate ones to be granted access to the greatest treasure in the world.

Rejoice! You are luckier than you can ever imagine!

**W**hile on a speaking tour in England, I was introduced to Rav Dovid Tugendhaft by my good friend and Rav Tugendhaft's brother-in-law, Rabbi Yonason Hamilton. Rav Dovid is the *rav* of a shul whose congregants are young professionals intent on infusing their lives with Torah in a very real way. One member of Rav Tugendhaft's *kehillah* is a man by the name of Alex Clare.

Now, while most of us engage in rather prosaic ways of earning a living, Alex is more unusual. Alex, you see, is a singer and songwriter — and a very successful one, at that.

Rav Dovid told me how sincere Alex is regarding his *avodas Hashem*. How he comes to shul to learn whenever he can, despite the fact that he has a heavy performance schedule all across Europe and the United States. But Alex is the real thing. He makes sure to maintain a close connection with a rebbi and to keep learning and growing all the time.

How did it all begin, and was it easy for him to get to where he is today? Here is a person who literally has millions of people purchasing his music and streaming to see him in concert. He has hit the “big time.” Was it all smooth sailing, from start to finish?

Of course not. There's a story here. A story of *mesirus nefesh*, of self-sacrifice for what's right. There is another element as well: the fact that Alex was able to be happy with whatever Hashem sent his way. And that's something huge.



Back at the beginning of his career, young Alex Clare was not only trying to break into the glamorous world of the music business; he was

simultaneously in the process of becoming a *ba'al teshuvah*. An interesting mix. Show business is an extremely difficult line of work if you want to follow the lifestyle mandated by the Torah, but Alex was determined to try.

He was working diligently on a new album, to be released by a well-known record company. He was excited by his prospects and looking forward to having his music reach the hearts and souls of people across the world.

While Alex closeted himself in the studio, pouring his passion into the album, the company was working to get him the kind of exposure he would need to reach the masses. One day, his contact at the company called him up.

"Alex? This is Daniel."

"Hi, Daniel. How's it going?"

"Great! Listen, we managed to get a really awesome gig for you!"

Alex could hear the excitement in the other man's voice. "Where's the gig?"

"On the BBC! Prime time on the BBC!"

The BBC is synonymous with British media culture. For the company to have managed to secure him this particular spot, on this particular show, at that particular time of day, when millions of British citizens would be tuned in, was a grand achievement. Alex was thrilled. After all, being a guest on this show could very possibly be the turning point in his career.

"What's the date of the gig?"

Daniel told him. Alex checked his calendar, and the world turned black before his eyes. They had scheduled him to appear on the BBC on Shavuot, of all days!

"Uh, Daniel, I just checked my schedule, and I see that I might have some conflicting things to sort out. Let me get back to you."

"Alex, whatever it is that you have going on that day, cancel it. Nothing can be that important! Call me back ASAP. I'm waiting to hear from you."

Here it was. The dream had come true, yet it had arrived shrouded in conflict and filled with paradoxical emotions. On the one hand, it seemed like a no-brainer. He *had* to appear on the show. This was huge. He could walk to the studio, if necessary. How could he turn down such an opportunity?

On the other hand, he was deeply involved in the process of returning to his Jewish roots. He was learning Torah and davening with a *minyan*. How could he reconcile the person he was trying to become with one who showed up for an interview on the BBC on Sha-vuos? The two could never meet. They inhabited two different worlds. What to do?

It was a tough decision for Alex, but after giving the matter some serious thought, he made up his mind. If he gave in this time, that would set a precedent for the future. He wanted the record company to know that Alex Clare was a religious Jew who would not do certain things — and performing on Yom Tov was one of them. If they were going to work together for the long term, these details needed to be made clear right from the start. He picked up the phone and called Daniel.



“Hey, Daniel. It’s Alex.”

“Made a decision yet?”

“Yes.”

“And?”

“It’s not going to work out that day.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s a Jewish holiday, and I can’t be on TV on a Jewish holiday.”

“Are you sure about this, Alex? You’d be giving up some pretty huge exposure.”

“I’m sure.”

“Well, then, I’m going to be honest with you, Alex. I don’t think this company can represent someone who is willing to throw away such an opportunity. It wasn’t easy getting you this slot. You’re still new, people don’t really know you yet. But we worked hard to get this for you because we believe in you and your music. And now you’re throwing it all away for some holiday!”

“So what are you saying?”

“I’m saying that we can’t represent you anymore. That our business relationship is not working out. That you should find a different company to work with. Good-bye.”

And just like that, Alex was left out in the cold. No recording contract, no promising gig, no BBC slot, and no way to crack through the sea of indifference out there and bring his music to the people.

“That,” said Rav Tugendhaft, “was when Alex decided to leave London and go learn at a yeshivah in Israel for a while. To get away from it all and devote himself to full-time study — at least until things cleared up a little bit. And that’s exactly what he did.”



I’m not going to tell you that this was an easy move for Alex Clare. However, barring the occasional moment when he found himself worrying about whether he’d made the right move, Alex was extremely happy that he’d chosen to turn down his “huge” opportunity. Though it had sounded like a chance to accomplish something good, there was nothing good about desecrating Yom Tov in the process.

As he sat and learned in his yeshivah in Eretz Yisrael, Alex was filled with the peaceful serenity of a person who is truly happy with his lot. There was no time to brood about what might have been — he was too busy learning. Of course, his guitar had accompanied him on his journey, and he used it often, his music ringing out into the Jerusalem night after a long, stimulating day filled with Torah learning.

Yes, it was a good life for the young man from London.

A satisfying, happy life.



One day, Alex received a phone call that changed everything.

“Mr. Clare?”

“Speaking.”

“My name is Jeff Lonnigan,\* and I’m calling you from Microsoft.”

“What can I do for you and Microsoft, Mr. Lonnigan?”

“It’s very simple. Microsoft has heard the last music video that you produced (the music video he had completed before coming to Israel), and they really like it.”

“I’m happy to hear that.”

“In fact, they like it so much that they would like to sign a contract with you, to use your song in the advertising campaign for this year’s brand-new Windows software. Are you interested?”

If Alex had fondly imagined that being seen on the BBC was going to be the turning point in his career, he was suddenly filled with the realization that he had been wrong. The turning point was now. Precisely after he'd left it all and gone to study Torah with serenity and happiness in Yerushalayim.

"I'm in," he told the man from Microsoft.

So Microsoft used his song. And it became a phenomenal hit around the world, primarily in Europe, where Alex's music rose to the number-one spot on all the charts. His concerts were sold out with crowds of ecstatic fans who were beginning to take him very seriously.

Upon the advice of his *rabbanim*, Alex is no longer pursuing yeshivah study full-time, but continues to learn and grow throughout his rigorous performing schedule. He is scrupulous about observing halachah and does not play up the fact that he is a religious Jew, keeping that between Hashem and himself. But he has a beard and always covers his head with a cap, and he doesn't perform on Shabbos. If you're an astute person, it shouldn't be difficult for you to figure out that Mr. Clare is a whole different breed from the average showbiz personality.

He was happy in the *beis medrash*, and he is happy onstage, and he is happy when he studies Torah with his rebbi in London. Because he is a person who is happy and satisfied with his lot.



**T**here was once a wealthy man in Europe who was well known as a benevolent *ba'al tzedakah*. People came to him from far and wide to request his assistance, and he was always happy to help them out. But it went even further than that. He was the kind of person who made those in need feel as if they were doing *him* a favor by asking for money. A special man.

But there came a day when things began changing for him. A number of his investments went sour, and within a short while he had gone from being wealthy and respected to living on a tight budget.

Yet the previously prosperous man didn't complain. Instead of moping around with a sad face, and bemoaning the fortune he used to have, he sat down in the local *beis medrash* and began to learn. And he didn't just learn. He learned like a man possessed. Like a man on fire.

Those who saw him were confused. Here was a man who had been fulfilling the will of Hashem, who had been generous and kind and who had shared his bounty with those less fortunate — and always with a smile. Why had this happened to him? The question was on everyone's lips. Why? Why him?

The only person who remained seemingly unaffected by the magnitude of the tragedy was the previously wealthy man himself, who sat and learned day and night, immersing himself in the wellsprings of Torah without a care in the world. He did this for many years, and eventually evolved from being a businessman who knew how to learn into a genuine *talmid chacham*. In time, he was tacitly "promoted" to the status of *gadol hador*, a spiritual leader of his generation.

When this man passed away, leaving behind numerous *talmidim* and having served his people faithfully and industriously, he was eulogized by the Torah luminaries of *Klal Yisrael*, who spoke at length of his self-sacrifice for Torah and how he had not allowed his incredible loss to sink him into depression, going instead in the opposite direction and turning himself into one of the great leaders of the generation.

In his speech, one of the *gedolim* gave a possible reason for the fact that this man had had his fortune taken away from him by Heaven.

"He would never have become a *gadol hador* were it not that he lost his money," the rabbi said. "That loss allowed him to switch his focus from business and profit to Torah. That's why this exemplary giver of charity lost his fortune."

I'd like to add one additional point: losing his money was a start. But had that man not been able to feel totally content with his lot, even though he had just lost his fortune, he would never have risen to become a *gadol*. It was only his ability to maintain his equilibrium in times of horrific stress and misfortune, to switch tracks midway through life, and to feel happy in his new reality, that allowed this great man to become a true leader and acquire Torah.

Being happy and satisfied with his lot. That was the key.