

Where Does Happiness Live?

It was quite some time back in the 1960s, during the Cuban Missile Crisis at the height of the Cold War. Cuba was an outpost of the Soviet Union, just 60 miles off the coast of Florida. In fact, in 1962, World War Three nearly started there when America spotted soviet missiles ready to be launched. The US blockaded Cuba and threatened to sink any ships trying to get through. Relations between Cuba and the US were at an all-time low.

It was not uncommon to hijack a plane and demand to be flown to Cuba. (Between 1960 – 67, 19 American planes were hijacked and flown to Cuba. In 1968 alone, 24 planes were hijacked.)

On February 3rd, 1969, a group of Cuban terrorists suddenly stormed the cockpit on Eastern Airlines Flight 10 from Boston to Miami.

The captain came on the loudspeaker and asked everyone to stay calm. He said they had been hijacked and were headed for Cuba. The passengers should have been quaking in their tiny airplane seats and hoping to just make it out alive.

Thing is... they weren't.

They were actually – laughing. The front section of the plane was roaring with laughter. The passengers in the middle and rear wanted to know what there was to laugh about.

Then word got back. Someone had spotted Alan Funt in one of the front seats.

He was the producer of the Candid Camera Series, a man famous for one of the most popular shows in the country and across the world, where Candid Camera staged some hysterically weird or awkward or scary scenarios for an unfortunate victim to experience and react to – all on closed-circuit video. (For example a man who hears his mailbox talking once, twice, and a third time, but when he calls over other people, all is silent:) The object of ridicule would be astounded (and mortified) when suddenly a cameraman would jump out from nowhere and yell, "Smile! You're on Candid Camera!"

Everyone on that plane caught the giggles – all but one man, who sat in the back throughout the ordeal, cowering in fear and preparing for the worst, with not a hint of a grin in sight.

That man was Allen Funt, who happened to be on the fateful flight that day. The seemingly inexplicable burst of hysterics was all on his account. The passengers saw the terrorists, saw Allen Funt on their flight, and immediately assumed that this was just another "Candid Camera" episode – any second the cameramen would jump out, the terrorists would be unveiled as innocent actors, and they would be the laughingstock of everyone watching! So they laughed.



And laughed and laughed. They were still laughing when the plane landed in Cuba, and they found it wasn't a joke at all.

Funt hadn't laughed with them because he knew that there were no actors or cameramen. This was a serious hijacking, and certainly not a laughing matter. All 93 passengers and crew had to wait on the tarmac in Cuba for 11 hours, until the Boeing 727 was ready to return to the USA.

There's lots to be learned from this epic, overly dramatic and slightly exaggerated episode, but if there's one thing it highlights, it's this:

Happiness truly is a state of mind.

The more we live our lives, the more challenges we confront, and the more people we meet and learn from, the more we realize that the definition of עבדו את ה' בשמחה has everything to do with mindset and zero to do with circumstances.

In this Chodesh, we are "marbim b'simcha".

We don't suddenly become wealthier, more popular or more talented.

We don't wake up the morning of Aleph Adar to find that our individual nisyonos have disappeared.

But we make the decision to choose simcha.

Rav Avigdor Miller zt"l famously said, "People search for the city of happiness, but they don't realize it's in the state of mind."

We're all familiar with the endless stories of people who could have been the saddest on the planet but instead were genuinely grateful for their lot. We all know that so many individuals who should, on paper, be dancing in the streets with joy for all they've got are living mired in misery.

Simcha is a place we can all arrive at, if we know the way there.



“This Way To Simcha”

Hang up the poster on a wall or on the board.

Have students jot down on a sticky note the way they feel someone can reach simcha - regardless of circumstances.

Answers can include: emunah, bitachon, sameach b’chelko, kirvas Elokim, hakaras hatov, happy music, flexibility, giving to others, using your strengths, fulfilling relationships, being productive...

Discuss!

Your students will walk away with directions to joy for life.

Lower grades adaptation

Explain that in almost any situation where we would be unhappy, there is a way to decide to be b’simcha and have a positive mindset instead. Discuss scenarios!

Examples:

It’s raining outside.

I can be happy that inside it’s warm and dry, that rain is a bracha, etc.

I missed my bus.

I can be happy that b”H I’m feeling fine and that I will make it to school soon because I have a different way to get there.

The library book I wanted is out.

I can be happy because I’ll have something to look forward to next week, when the book will be available, and because I found a different good book to read.

