

Kol Ha-Rav

There has been research suggesting that people aren't happiest when they are earning more and more. Beyond a certain point, they are happiest when their earnings are used to assist others. It's called "under indulging" instead of over indulging. Once a comfortable standard is reached in the U.S.– the study defines that standard–what is done with the extra earnings makes happiness. The study found that after that level under indulgence makes for greater happiness.

A related question: Does increased wealth inflame unrealistic expectations so that one is frustrated at not having more and more? It certainly does. Does increased worldly success also destabilize relationships? Certainly. Gauge your life by the quality of your interpersonal relationships. Don't regret in ten years not paying attention to that gauge.

What is in fact a major obstacle today to interpersonal family relations? In our times, the flight to technology as an end in itself rather than as a means interferes with our personal relationships. I find my Ipad, Iphone, email and text as convenient as the next guy; but I am referring to "Getting Drunk on Technology." In Hebrew "conversation" is called "sifah." The word is introduced in the Bible when Jacob goes out to the field "lasuach", to meditate. Conversation with someone else should require the focus of meditation. In ten years don't regret the destruction of your interpersonal relationships because technology has overwhelmed your life as an ends and not a means. When you eat a meal, or when you are talking to another person, and especially on Shabbat, silence your technology. For our ancestors Shabbat was the cessation of manual labor. Today we are information workers, and so maybe our challenge and our opportunity is to shift the way we handle information on Shabbat. Want to join me in that kind of observance of Shabbat?

Do you know what the Hebrew word for regret is? "Harata" – the same word for "chiseling." So sure, changing the way one lives is indeed as hard as chiseling. But the result will be worth it.

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