

D'var Rav: Words from the Rabbi

LIVING THE GOOD LIFE

It's the (often unspoken) goal of nearly every human being who doesn't live in a war zone or in a state of abject poverty. We all yearn for it. We all work hard to try to achieve it. We all *think* that we know what it is.

Our objective is to live "The Good Life."

More often than not, most of us equate that objective with financial comfort, multiple homes, staying in the best hotels, and drinking the finest wines. In ever-more-affluent Manhattan, there is no shortage of men and women who have or do these things in great abundance. Yet many of these very same people are miserably unhappy. Maybe you've met some of them.

Does that really sound like they're living the good life?

Thinkers have reflected on the concept for centuries. For Aristotle, the good life meant a life of reason and rationality, of quiet reflection on and deliberation about the Big Questions. For the mystics, the good life meant a life of constant connection with God, utilizing ritual, prayer, meditation, and isolation as tools for divine communion.

But classical Judaism offers us a different path. Our religious tradition argues that the good life is, ultimately, one in which each of us finds purpose, meaning, and fulfillment. Living the good life isn't about what you *possess*, but about what you do and who you are. It is about character and experience, attitude and action.

The Bible presents us with the following verse: "Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." This is our road map. It isn't a magic bullet, however—it is a challenge and a recipe for a lot of work.

Implicit in this ancient and famous verse are the keys to what we need to do, and to be, in order to live good lives:

- Strive for an upright character
- Act with moral integrity
- Have compassion for others
- Develop proper perspective
- Get your priorities straight
- Cultivate your mind and heart
- Hold onto hope no matter what

For me, *faith* is the glue that binds all these qualities and behaviors together. Faith may be elusive to many of us, but so, too, is the good life, certainly in its richest and most authentic expression. Our striving along this path is a lifelong task, a journey without

end. But having the courage—even audacity—to take the first steps, and never, ever to give up, is a reward in itself greater than any other.

B'shalom, Niles