

# “Don’t Worry — Be Happy?”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Recently, scores of books have been written about how to be happy. Many contain useful and helpful advice, missing only the central point: happiness is not actually the principal end of life.

The philosopher Robert Nozick proposed an experiment years ago, the “experience machine.” It would give a virtual experience of everything the person wanted so that it would all seem lifelike and ideal. Most people would reject such an existence. Why? Because although we all want to be happy, happiness is not all we want. We want something deeper, richer and harder than happiness alone.

This observation is as ancient as Greek tragedy and new as modern literature. As the years have passed, Aldous Huxley’s novel, “Brave New World,” has grown in relevance. Remember the words of “The Savage” in his book, rejecting the SOMA drug that made everyone happy: “I don’t want comfort. I want God. I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin.”

The Torah teaches us to “serve God with joy,” but to get there we will have to make our way through disappointment, sorrow and struggle. In the Midrash Rabbi Johanan reminds us that the eye has a dark part and a light part, but one can only see through the dark part. Darkness grants insight and vision. Our task is not to seek happiness, but to reach out to one another, to deepen our souls, and to seek God.