

"A Pessimist Sees the Difficulty in Every Opportunity; An Optimist Sees the Opportunity in Every Difficulty."

- Sir Winston Churchill

CHOOSING OPTIMISM

Toronto Spring Convention 2017

May 5-7



Inspiring the Jewish Future

Are You An Optimist?

Test Your Optimism (Life Orientation Test)

	Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree
	4	3	2	1	0	
1. In uncertain times I usually expect the best.						
2. It's easy for me to relax.						
3. If something can go wrong for me, it will.						
4. I'm always optimistic about my future.						
5. I enjoy my friends a lot.						
6. It's important for me to keep busy						
7. I hardly ever expect things to go my way.						
8. I don't get upset too easily.						
9. I rarely count on good things happening to me.						
10. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.						

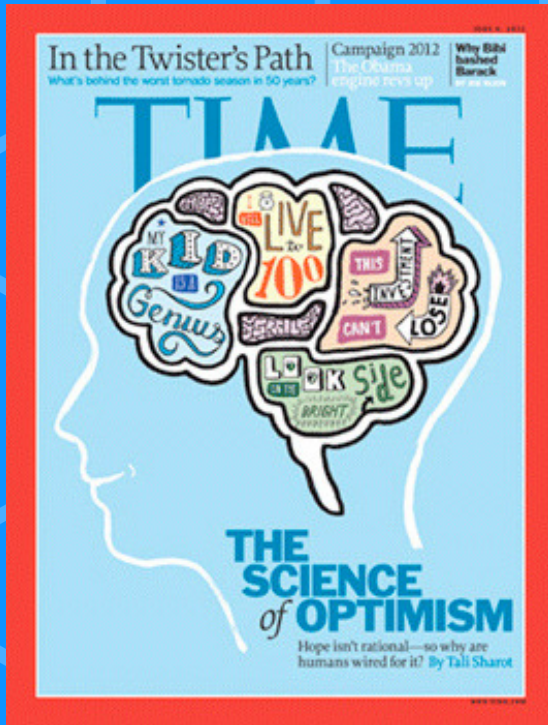
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Extreme
Pessimist

Extreme
Optimist

Optimism: The Scientific Approach



A few years ago Time Magazine ran an article about Optimism Bias. The subtitle, which sums up the article, read "Those rose-colored glasses? We may be born with them. Why our brains tilt toward the positive... in spite of all the negative."

The article outlines how, based upon so many negative life experiences, we should collectively be much more pessimistic about events and their expected outcomes, yet we remain much more positive than we should be based on reality. The question then is what causes us to be optimistic?

This article postulates that according to science optimism is hard-wired into our brains. Optimism was naturally selected during our evolutionary process because without the anticipation of a future reward we would have given up on everything. Even the knowledge of our mortality should lead us to a "dead end" and to despair, causing our survival activities to stop because, after all, why is it worth it? Optimism then is the tool our brains use to ensure our survival. Scientists even use images from MRI scanners to show the activity in certain sections of the brain which cause us to think optimistically and happily, when we otherwise logically wouldn't.

From a purely scientific perspective, optimism is nothing more than an evolutionary survival mechanism.

Stop and Discuss:

What are your thoughts about this? Do you agree with the article's theory? How do you feel about this philosophy?

Optimism in Judaism

TWO STORIES ABOUT THE GREAT LEADER, RABBI AKIVA

Rabbi Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Yehoshua and **Rabbi Akiva** were walking in the vicinity of Rome. From far away, they heard the sounds of a thriving metropolis, and three of them began to cry, but Rabbi Akiva laughed. They said to him, 'Why are you laughing?' And Rabbi Akiva responded, 'And you, why are you crying?' The three rabbis responded, 'These barbarians, who bow to idols and burn incense for false gods, are living in peace and security, while we, the people of G-d, are being burnt with fire – should we not cry?' Rabbi Akiva said to them, 'That is exactly why I am laughing. If people who violate the will of G-d have it so good, how much better will those who act according to His Will, have it?!'



Another time, the same group of Rabbis were walking towards Jerusalem. When they reached Mt. Scopus (from which it is possible to see the burnt Temple), they tore their clothing. When they arrived at the Temple Mount, they saw a fox running out of the ruins where the Holy of Holies had been. They began to cry, while Rabbi Akiva laughed. They said to him, 'Why are you laughing?' And he responded, 'Why are you crying?' They answered, 'If a fox is running around the place where the holy Temple stood, should we not cry?'



Rabbi Akiva then said, 'For that very reason, I am laughing. For if the prophecy which predicted that the Temple 'would be plowed like a field' has come true then I know that the prophecy which predicts that , 'Yet again, elderly men and elderly women will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, and the streets of the city will be full of children, playing in her streets.' will also come true one day. Hearing that, Rabbi Akiva's colleagues said to him, 'Akiva, you have comforted us. Akiva, you have comforted us.'



AND DISCUSS!

- Why is there such a stark difference in reactions between Rabbi Akiva and the other Rabbis?
- Do you think that Rabbi Akiva laughing in the face of hardship means that he was in denial of the terrible things that happened?
- What do you think is the root of Rabbi Akiva's philosophy?

RABBI AKIVA'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

"גַּמְזוּ לטוֹבָה"

Gam Zu LaTova

Also This Is For the Best!

Rabbi Akiva would always say, 'A person should always be accustomed to say: "Whatever G-d does, He does for the best."' Like the incident involving R' Akiva when he was once traveling along the road. When he reached a certain city, he requested lodgings, but no one provided him any. He said: 'Whatever G-d does is for the best.' He went and slept in the field. Now, he had with him a rooster, a donkey, and a lamp; a cat came and ate the rooster; a lion came and ate the donkey, and a wind came and blew out the lamp. After suffering those losses, Rabbi Akiva said: 'Whatever G-d does is for the best.' That very night, an army came and captured the city. Rabbi Akiva said: 'Did I not tell you, 'Whatever G-d does is all for the good?!'

(The commentaries explain that if the lamp had been lit, the soldiers would have discovered him; likewise, had the donkey brayed or the rooster crowed, the soldiers would have heard the noise and come and captured him.)



"Gamzu"
All for the Best

Rabbi Akiva's philosophy is built on the Jewish principle that G-d has a plan for each of us.

Everything that happens, even unpleasant things, are ultimately leading to something good.



Rabbi Akiva was an optimist, not out of naivete, but rather because he believed that there is an all-knowing, infinitely powerful Being who has a master plan for the world.



"Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right."

- Henry Ford

"כל מה דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד"

"Everything God does is for the best"

- The Talmud

"Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement.

Nothing can be done without hope and confidence."

- Hellen Keller

WHAT'S YOUR "EXPLANATORY STYLE"?

Martin Seligman, the renowned founder of 'Positive Psychology' says, "Perhaps the most important distinction between optimists and pessimists is their "explanatory style," or the way they explain misfortune. People who give up easily believe the causes of the bad events that happen to them are permanent. In contrast, those who resist helplessness [optimists] believe the causes of bad events are temporary.



Optimism its the best
Way to see life

RABBI AKIVA ALSO BELIEVED THAT HIS CHALLENGES WERE NOT PERMANENT:

What were R. Akiva's beginnings? It is said, up to the age of forty, he had not studied a thing. He was completely ignorant about Judaism. He was raised in a world of poverty, illiteracy, and ignorance. One day, at the age of 40, Akiva passed a well. He saw a rock with a hole carved into it. He inquired who shaped the rock, and was told it was caused by the slow but constant dripping of water on top of it. Akiva then reasoned: If a substance soft as water can penetrate a rock with slow, persistent motion, so too the Torah, which is hard as iron, can slowly but surely penetrate my heart. And this was Akiva's turning point. He promptly set off to study Torah – for an uninterrupted 24 years, and became the leader of the generation. He believed that the challenges of the first 40 years of his life were only temporary and could be overcome.

- Midrash

Have you ever thought **YOUR OWN** challenges were permanent?

Did you manage to overcome that thought and believe that things can change?

Did you know???!

Studies have shown that optimists:



- have fewer heart problems
- have a much better chance of living to 100
- experience fewer sick days
- produce less cortisol - the hormone that causes stress
- have the fewest work complaints
- get more job offers and promotions
- are more athletic than pessimists.

(Source: Happify Daily - The Benefits of Looking on the Bright Side: 10 Reasons to Think Like an Optimist)

IT'S TIME FOR THE GLAD GAME!

Here is how you play!

Each person brings up a negative event, such as failing an exam or losing a sports league tournament, and starts off saying something like, "I just flunked my exam and I'm trying not to panic." Everyone else then needs to provoke the player to think positively by starting off a phrase, such as, "But now that I've lost the sports league tournament, I'll have more time to--blank." The player then fills in the blank with a positive word or phrase, like "take a walk every morning," or "start the novel I've wanted to write." Each member of the group should share at least two negative events that they can re-frame with an optimistic outlook using "The Glad Game."

Searching for the silver lining in even a relatively disastrous event is the optimistic basis for "The Glad Game."



**SHABBAT
SHALOM!**



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