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***"Should Jews strive to be happy?"***

***Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer***

The first really big thoughts I ever had were as a young child pondering the possibility of life both before me and after me. How, I wondered, could there be a world without my existence? Who hasn't had similar questions?

The corollary to the "before" and "after" query is what to make of the "during" – the "in between." What, we ask, is the goal, aim or purpose of life?

Some people aren't bothered by these questions – or don't have the luxury to sit and reflect on them. Others lose sleep over these questions. Life, they say, must be more than just survival or making a living. Happiness and self-worth must mean more than the material possessions and wealth we acquire.

I believe that for Jews and Judaism happiness is not a goal in and of itself. Rather, it is the reward for doing deeds of loving-kindness – *loving our neighbor as ourselves*; performing acts of justice – *justice, justice, you shall pursue*; learning for learning's sake; thinking critically, staying true to our values and celebrating our heritage. Follow this path and happiness will come as a matter of course, along with self-dignity and a worthwhile sense of purpose.