



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday April 10, 2026 ~ Parshat Shmini

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Why Israel is Still One of the Happiest Places on Earth

Several years ago, I spoke to the congregation about United Nations' *World Happiness Report*. At the time, many of us found the results surprising. Israel ranked near the very top of the list, despite years of war, political turmoil, and deep internal divisions. I remember asking then: how could this be?

The answer, as Israeli researchers at the time explained, is that the report did not really measure "happiness" in the way we usually think of it. It measured something deeper — what they called "life satisfaction." We can define this as a sense that one's life has meaning, purpose, and connection. That insight stayed with me.

This Shabbat, I want to revisit this idea under very different circumstances. Since that original sermon, Israel has endured several more years of war, national trauma, and upheaval. October 7th and everything that followed changed Israel in profound and painful ways. If there were ever a moment when we might expect Israel to fall in such a ranking, this would be it. And yet, in the most recent [report](#), Israel once again [ranks](#) among the very happiest countries in the world. The top 10 happiest countries (in order) were Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Costa Rica, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Israel, Luxembourg, and Switzerland. By comparison, the USA ranked 23rd, Canada 25th, and the UK was 29th.

So, we are left again with the same question, but now it is even more powerful: How can this be?

The data itself offers an important clue. The strongest factor in these rankings is not wealth, and not even health. It is social support, the simple but profound belief that if you are in trouble, someone will be there for you. And this is where Israel stands out.

In Israel, people live with a deep sense of connection to family, to community, to history, and to purpose. There is a feeling that one is part of something larger than oneself. That one's life

is not just about personal success or individual fulfillment, but about belonging, responsibility, and shared destiny.

Now that is something to consider. Responsibility and shared destiny do not make life easier. They do not remove fear, grief, or hardship. But they do mean that people do not face those challenges alone.

In contrast, the United States, for all its extraordinary blessings, has been moving in a different direction for decades. We celebrate individualism and autonomy, and these values that have brought great strength and creativity. But increasingly, they have also led to isolation, division, and a weakening of communal bonds. The result of these trends is striking: America is a vastly wealthier society, with far fewer external threats. Yet Americans, by comparison, continue to report lower life satisfaction.

The lesson here is not political. It is human, and carries important insights we ignore at our own peril.

A meaningful life is not built on comfort alone, though only a fool would deny its importance. A meaningful life is built on connection, purpose, and the confidence and knowledge that we matter to others, and that others matter to us.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner