

# Want to be Happy? Be Thankful!

Parashat Tzav 5789  
Temple Beth El

יב אם על-תודה, וקריבנו--  
והקריב על-זבח התודה חלות  
מצות בלולת בשמן, ורקיקי  
מצות משחים בשמן; וסלת  
מרבכת, חלת בלולת בשמן.

**Leviticus 7:12** If he offer it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the **sacrifice of thanksgiving** unleavened cakes mingled with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes mingled with oil, of fine flour soaked

**Nachman of Breslov** writes, "Gratitude rejoices with her sister joy, and is always ready to light a candle and have a party. Gratitude doesn't much like the old cronies of boredom, despair and taking life for granted."

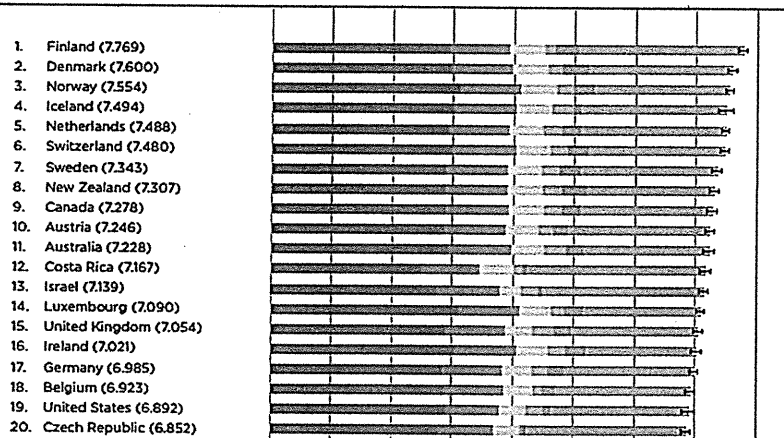
Whenever **Rabbi Menachem Mendel, the Kotzker Rebbe**, replaced a pair of worn-out shoes, he would neatly wrap up the old ones in newspaper before placing them in the trash, and would declare, "How can I simply toss away such a fine pair of shoes that have served me so well these past years!?"

When **Leah**, wife of the patriarch Jacob, had her fourth child, she named him "Yehudah," which means "I am grateful," to reflect her gratitude to God for the gift of another son. Yehudah is the source of the name of the Jewish people (Yehudim), revealing the very direct tie between Judaism and gratitude. An examination of the Jewish prayer book shows it to be primarily concerned with expressions of gratitude.

In **Deuteronomy 10:12**, Moses tells the Jewish people: "What (*mah*) does God ask of you?" The Talmud explains that the word *mah* can be read as *me'ah*, meaning 100. In other words, God obligates us to recite (at least) 100 brachot every day.

THE FIRST WORDS JEWS SAY TRADITIONALLY UPON AWAKENING ARE "I AM THANKFUL," "MODEH ANI." THE VAST MAJORITY OF OUR PRAYERS EXPRESS AWE AND THANKSGIVING - ALMOST NONE OF THEM ACTUALLY ASK FOR THINGS.

Figure 2.7: Ranking of Happiness 2016-2018 (Part 1)



# Give Thanks and Praises

Parashat Tzav

## 1. Leviticus 7:12-15

(12) If he offer it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unleavened cakes mingled with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes mingled with oil, of fine flour soaked. (13) With cakes of leavened bread he shall present his offering with the sacrifice of his peace-offerings for thanksgiving. (14) And of it he shall present one out of each offering for a gift unto the LORD; it shall be the priest's that dasheth the blood of the peace-offerings against the altar. (15) And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace-offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his offering; he shall not leave any of it until the morning.

א. ויקרא ז':י"ב-ט"ו

(יב) אִם עַל־תּוֹדָה יִקְרִיבֶנּוּ וְהִקְרִיב |  
עַל־זֶבַח הַתּוֹדָה חֲלֹת מִצּוֹת בְּלוּלֹת בַּשֶּׁמֶן  
וּקְרִיבֵי מִצּוֹת מְשֻׁחִים בַּשֶּׁמֶן וְסֹלֶת מְרֻבֶּכֶת  
חֲלֹת בְּלוּלֹת בַּשֶּׁמֶן: (יג) עַל־חֲלֹת לֶחֶם חֲמֻץ  
יִקְרִיב קֶרֶבָּנוּ עַל־זֶבַח תּוֹדַת שְׁלָמֵינוּ: (יד)  
וְהִקְרִיב מִמֶּנּוּ אֶחָד מִכָּל־קֶרְבָּנוֹ תְּרוּמָה לַיהוָה  
לִפְנֵי הַזֶּכֶן אֶת־זֶם הַשְּׁלָמִים לוֹ יִהְיֶה: (טו)  
וּבִשֶׁר זֶבַח תּוֹדַת שְׁלָמֵינוּ בַּיּוֹם קֶרֶבָּנוּ יֵאָכֵל  
לֹא־יִנָּח מִמֶּנּוּ עַד־בֹּקֶר:

## 2. Vayikra Rabbah 9:4

Rabbi Pinchas said: This can be compared to king whose tenants and housemates came to pay tribute. One came to pay tribute, and he asked: Who is this? They told him: He is one of your tenants. He said to them: Take his tribute. Another came to pay tribute, and he said: Who is this? They said to him: A member of your household. Take his tribute. Another came to pay tribute, and he said: Who is this? They said to him: He is neither tenant or member of your household, yet he has come to pay tribute. The king said: Give him a stool and let him sit upon it.

So too, a sin-offering is brought for a sin, a guilt-offering is brought for a sin, but a thanksgiving offering is not brought for a

ב. ויקרא רבה ט':ד'

(ד) אמר רבי פנחס: משל למלך, שבאו אריסיו ובני ביתו לכבדו. בא א' וכבדו ואמר: מי הוא זה? אמרו לו: אריסך הוא. אמר להן: טלו סדורו. בא אחר וכבדו ואמר: מי הוא זה? אמרו לו: בן ביתך הוא טלו סדורו. בא אחר ואמר: מי הוא זה? אמרו לו: לא אריסך ולא בן ביתך, אלא בא לכבדך. אמר: יהבו לו סלירא וישב עליה. כך חטאת באה על חטא, ואשם בא על חטא, תורה אינה באה על חטא אם על תודה יקריבנו:

sin, and thus it is written: *If it be for a thanksgiving, he will bring near...*

### 3. Vayikra Rabbah 9:7

Rabbi Pinchas, Rabbi Levi and Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Menachem of the Galilee, "In future times, the observance of the sacrifices will be nullified, with the exception of the Thanksgiving offering which will never be nullified. All of the prayers will be nullified, with the exception of the prayer of gratitude, which will never be nullified. As it is written (Jer. 33:11), "The voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the bride, the voice of them that say, "Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for God's mercy endures forever"-- this is the prayer of gratitude. (Jeremiah 33:11): "As they bring offerings of thanksgiving into the house of the Lord"-- this is the thanksgiving offering.

### ג. ויקרא רבה ט':ז'

(ז) רבי פנחס ורבי לוי ורבי יוחנן בשם ר' מנחם דגליא: לעתיד לבא כל הקרבנות בטלין וקרבתן תודה אינו בטל. כל התפלות בטלות ההודאה אינה בטלה, הדא הוא דכתיב (ירמיה לג): קול ששון וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול כלה קול אומרים הודו את ה' צבאות וגו', זו הודאה. ומביאין תודה בית ה', זה קרבן תודה.

### 4. Rashi on Leviticus 7:12:1

*If he offer it for a Thanksgiving...* If it is for something deserving of thanksgiving, a miracle that happened to him. For example: one who goes down into the sea, or crosses the desert, or who is bound in a jail, or one who is sick and recovers--they must give thanks, as it is written of them (Psalms 107:21-21): *Let them praise Adonai for God's steadfast love, God's wondrous deeds for humanity. Let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell God's deeds in joyful song.*

### ד. רש"י על ויקרא ז':י"ב:א'

(א) אם על תודה יקריבנו. אם על דבר הודאה על נס שנעשה לו, כגון יורדי הים והולכי מדברות וחבושי בית האסורים וחולה שנתרפא שהם צריכין להודות שכתוב בהן (תהלים קז כא כב) יודו לה' חסדו ונפלאותיו לבני אדם ויזבחו זבחי תודה.

### 5. Berakhot 54a

Our sages taught: One who sees the crossing of the sea, or the crossing of the Jordan, the crossing of the streams of

### ה. ברכות נד.

תנו רבנן הרואה מעברות הים ומעברות הירדן מעברות נחלי ארנון אבני אלגביש

Arnon, the hailstones of Elgavish on the descent of Beit Horon, the rock that Og, King of Bashan, sought to hurl upon Israel, and the stone on which Moses said when Joshua waged war on Amalek, and Lot's wife, and the wall of Jericho that was swallowed in its place--upon all these, it is necessary to give thanks and praise before God.

במורד בית חורון ואבן שבקש לזרוק עוג  
מלך הבשן על ישראל ואבן שישב עליה  
משה בשעה שעשה יהושע מלחמה בעמלק  
ואשתו של לוט וחזמת יריחו שנבלעה  
במקומה על כולן צריך שיתן הודאה ושבח  
לפני המקום

6. Rabbi Naamah Kelman:

The offering of thanksgiving in the form of sacrifice, or later in our tradition in the form of prayer, is the highest expression of gratitude. We praise and we exalt and recognize the miracles of our lives. Deeper gratitude recognizes the simple gift of our lives and the gifts of our daily lives. Our rabbis, ancient and contemporary, are telling us that perhaps this is the practice we must really cultivate: the practice of thanksgiving! But how?

7. Rabbi Doug Zelden:

There is a beautiful explanation about when the *chazzan* repeats the Amida aloud and says the Modim prayer and the congregation recites softly a prayer known as 'The Rabbis' Modim.' Why is that? It is because the cantor can recite aloud all the blessings in the Amida and be our agent for such prayers as 'Forgive us,' 'Heal Us,' 'Bless Us with a Good Year,' and so forth. With all our pleas, the cantor or *Baal Tfillah* can be our public messenger and say the blessing for us, as we answer Amen.

However, there is one thing that no else one can say for us. We must say it for ourselves. That one thing is 'Thank You.' Hoda'ah has to come from ourselves. No one can be our agent to say Thank You.

That is the reason for the 'Rabbis' Modim.'



# Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence

## Gratitude Practice Explained

The holiday season is a good time to think about gifts, and not just the paper-wrapped kind. The people in your life can themselves be gifts—and so can a thousand other things, big and little, many of which you probably overlook day to day. Taking time during the holidays to notice, contemplate, and express gratitude for these people and things can make your holidays far more meaningful. Gratitude is a healing and supportive emotion, too. If you're struggling with family drama, stressful travel, or disappointments, the practice of gratitude can help you through.

### **What is gratitude?**

Gratitude is a state of mind that arises when you affirm a good thing in your life that comes from outside yourself, or when you notice and relish little pleasures. Though some people and things are clear blessings, this state of mind doesn't actually depend on your life circumstances. Whether it's the sight of a lovely face or a tasty bite of food or good health, there is always something to be grateful for. Even bad experiences at least teach us something. And gratitude is not just a feeling outside your control that arrives willy-nilly. It's more like a radio channel: you can choose at any time to tune in. Gratitude acknowledges connection, and perhaps for this reason it is central to spiritual traditions worldwide, including Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and East Asian religions. When we contemplate our place in the intricate, interdependent network of life, we feel wonder and joy. That realization can lead us to express thanksgiving.

### **What are the benefits of gratitude?**

More than any other personality trait, gratitude is strongly linked to mental health and life satisfaction. Grateful people experience more joy, love, and enthusiasm, and they enjoy protection from destructive emotions like envy, greed, and bitterness. Gratitude also reduces lifetime risk for depression, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders, and it helps people entangled with those and other problems to heal and find closure. It can give you a deep and steadfast trust that goodness exists, even in the face of uncertainty or suffering.

Not only is gratitude a warm and uplifting way to feel, it benefits the body as well. People who experience gratitude cope better with stress, recover more quickly from illness, and enjoy more robust physical health, including lower blood pressure and better immune function.

Unlike other positive emotions like hope and happiness, gratitude is inherently relational: it reaches past the person experiencing it and into the social realm. It is gratitude in large measure that inspires people to acts of kindness, since it's natural to respond to gifts with heartfelt gifts of your own. And that strengthens your bonds with other people. Grateful people are rated by others as more helpful, outgoing, optimistic, and trustworthy.

### **What is gratitude practice?**

Gratitude isn't just an emotion that happens along, but a virtue we can cultivate. Think of it as something you practice as you might meditation or yoga.

Gratitude practice begins by **paying attention**. Notice all the good things you normally take for granted. Did you sleep well last night? Did someone at work or on the street treat you with courtesy? Have you caught a glimpse of the sky, with its sun and clouds, and had a moment of peace? It also involves acknowledging that difficult and painful moments are instructive and you can be grateful for them as well. Directing our attention this way blocks feelings of victimhood.

Second, consider **writing** about it in a journal or in a letter. Writing helps you organize thoughts, accept experiences, and put them into context, and gratitude journaling may bring a new and redemptive frame of reference to difficult life situations. It also helps you create meaning when you place everyday experiences within a framework of gifts and gratefulness. By writing, you can magnify and expand on the sources of goodness in your life, and think about what resources you've gained from your experiences, even bad ones.

In one study, people randomly assigned to keep weekly gratitude journals exercised more regularly, reported fewer physical symptoms, felt better about their lives, and were more optimistic about the upcoming week compared to people assigned to record hassles or neutral events. In another, young adults who kept a daily gratitude journal reported higher alertness, enthusiasm, determination, attentiveness and energy compared to those who focused on hassles or compared themselves to others less fortunate.

Finally, **expressing** gratitude completes the feeling of connection. Many people in your life have helped you in one way or another. Have you thanked them? Consider sending a letter to someone telling them what their actions meant to you, even if—especially if—it happened long ago. As for a response to blessings that don't come from people, the arts and many faith traditions offer countless ways to express our gratitude. It may be as simple as a moment of deliberate reflection. Either way, the practice of gratitude may be the best holiday gift of all.

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*Adapted from "Gratitude as a Psychotherapeutic Intervention," by Robert A Emmons, Ph.D. Dept. of Psychology, University of California, Davis and Robin S. Stern, Associate Director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, Journal of Clinical Psychology Volume 69, Issue 8, pages 846–855, August 2013.*

**There** is a story -- probably urban legend, but full of truth nonetheless -- concerning the famous violinist Itzhak Perlman. One evening, Perlman was in New York to give a concert. As a child he had been stricken with polio and so getting on stage is no small feat for him. He wears braces on both legs and walks with two crutches. Perlman labors across the stage slowly, until he reaches the chair in which he seats himself to play.

*As soon as he appeared on stage that night, the audience applauded and then waited respectfully as he made his way slowly across the stage to his chair. He took his seat, signaled to the conductor to begin, and began to play.*

*No sooner had he finished the first few bars than one of the strings on his violin snapped with a report like gunshot. At that point Perlman was close enough to the beginning of the piece that it would have been reasonable to have brought the concert to a halt while he replaced the string, to begin again. But that's not what he did. He waited a moment and then signaled the conductor to pick up just where they had left off.*

*Perlman now had only three strings with which to play his soloist part. He was able to find some of the missing notes on adjoining strings, but where that wasn't possible, he had to rearrange the music on the spot in his head so that it all still held together.*

*He played with passion and artistry, spontaneously rearranging the symphony right through to the end. When he finally rested his bow, the audience sat for a moment in stunned silence. And then they rose to their feet and cheered wildly. They knew they had been witness to an extraordinary display of human skill and ingenuity.*

*Perlman raised his bow to signal for quiet. "You know," he said, "it is the artist's task to make beautiful music with what you have left."*

*We have to wonder, was he speaking of his violin strings or his crippled body? And is it true only for artists? We are all lacking something and so we are challenged to answer the question: Do we have the attitude of making something of beauty out of what we have, incomplete as it may be?*

## David Steindl-Rast: Want to be happy? Be grateful (TED talk)

There is something you know about me, something very personal, and there is something I know about every one of you and that's very central to your concerns. There is something that we know about everyone we meet anywhere in the world, on the street, that is the very mainspring of whatever they do and whatever they put up with. And that is that all of us want to be happy. In this, we are all together. How we imagine our happiness, that differs from one another, but it's already a lot that we have all in common, that we want to be happy.

Now my topic is gratefulness. What is the connection between happiness and gratefulness? Many people would say, well, that's very easy. When you are happy, you are grateful. But think again. Is it really the happy people that are grateful? We all know quite a number of people who have everything that it would take to be happy, and they are not happy, because they want something

else or they want more of the same. And we all know people who have lots of misfortune, misfortune that we ourselves would not want to have, and they are deeply happy. They radiate happiness. You are surprised. Why? Because they are grateful. So it is not happiness that makes us grateful. It's gratefulness that makes us happy. If you think it's happiness that makes you grateful, think again. **It's gratefulness that makes you happy.**

...There is a wave of gratefulness because people are becoming aware how important this is and how this can change our world. It can change our world in immensely important ways, ***because if you're grateful, you're not fearful, and if you're not fearful, you're not violent. If you're grateful, you act out of a sense of enough and not of a sense of scarcity, and you are willing to share. If you are grateful, you are enjoying the differences between people, and you are respectful to everybody, and that changes this power pyramid under which we live.***

...**A grateful world is a world of joyful people.** Grateful people are joyful people, and joyful people – the more and more joyful people there are, the more and more we'll have a joyful world. We have a network for grateful living, and it has mushroomed. We couldn't understand why it mushroomed. We have an opportunity for people to light a candle when they are grateful for something. And there have been 15 million candles lit in one decade. People are becoming aware that a grateful world is a happy world, and we all have the opportunity by the simple stop, look, go, to transform the world, to make it a happy place. And that is what I hope for us, and if this has contributed a little to making you want to do the same, stop, look, go.

**“Who is rich? Those who rejoice in their own portion”**

*Pirke Avot 4:1*

- While this is a seemingly simple statement, what is the deeper meaning? Do you find that it is difficult to be grateful for what you have? What would make it easier to acknowledge the good things in your life?
- How realistic is it to always be grateful for the good things in your life? What gets in the way of gratitude?
- How do you acknowledge the things you value in your life, and how often?
- Do you often think about the things you lack rather than acknowledging the things you do have?
- Is there a difference between simply recognizing what you have and being grateful for what you have? If so, what is the nature of the difference?
- It is easy to fall into the trap of comparing yourself to others. How can being grateful help establish a sense of not only having enough, but having more than enough?
- What are the benefits of acknowledging the good things in your life more frequently?

Are you more like Hanan or his father in relating to the goat story? Who responds more honestly? - See more at: <http://www.reformjudaism.org/gratitude-what-does-judaism-teach-us#sthash.RNaNq99S.dpuf>



## Nachum Ish Gamzu

There is an individual in the Talmud whose name is **Nachum Ish Gamzu**. His name can be translated as "comforted is the person who says 'this too'." When you read the stories that are told about him, the meaning is made perfectly clear. No matter what terrible thing befell him in life -- and the Talmud is graphic in listing his misfortunes -- or what uncertainty he had about what lay around the next corner, Nachum Ish Gamzu always responded to life in the same way: "**Gam zu le'tovah**," he would say. "This too is for the good." Such was his sense of gratitude.

Your first task is to memorize the phrase "*gam zu le'tovah*" -- this too is for the good. Repeat it several times to yourself. "*Gam zu le'tovah*." This too is for the good. Got it?

Now you have that phrase firmly in mind. But will it be there tomorrow when you find yourself stuck in traffic or having just dropped an heirloom vase? To ensure that this tool will be there when you need it, your practice is to repeat this phrase every morning this coming week. You may already do the Jewish practice of reciting *Modeh Ani* when you wake up in the morning, which expresses gratitude. But even then, repeat *gam zu le'tovah* to yourself. Repeat it quietly, or aloud, or even chant it to yourself (even in the shower, as one student told me he did). Or you can reprogram the screensaver on your computer. The point is to give yourself repeated exposure to this phrase and its meaning as you begin your day.

When *gam zu le'tovah* has been firmly imprinted in your mind, you will find that phrase at the ready whenever something occurs that seems to run counter to your expectations and wishes. You won't have to *remember* to bring that phrase to your mind. From deep within, the reminder that "this too is for the good" will pop up, and the situation you face will suddenly look different. Try memorizing the phrase and doing the morning recitation for one week, and see for yourself.

## I AM THANKFUL - [http://www.anvari.org/fun/Truth/I\\_Am\\_Thankful.html](http://www.anvari.org/fun/Truth/I_Am_Thankful.html)

... for the husband who complains when his dinner is not on time, because it means he is home with me, not with someone else.  
.. for the teenager who is complaining about doing dishes, because it means she/he is at home, not on the streets.  
.. for the taxes that I pay, because it means that I am employed .  
.. for the mess to clean after a party, because it means that I have been surrounded by friends.  
.. for the clothes that fit a little too snug, because it means I have enough to eat.  
.. for my shadow that watches me work, because it means I am out in the sunshine.  
.. for a lawn that needs mowing, windows that need cleaning, and gutters that need fixing,

because it means I have a home.  
.. for all the complaining I hear about the Government, because it means we have freedom of speech.  
.. for the parking spot I find at the far end of the parking lot, because it means I am capable of walking, and that I have been blessed with transportation.  
.. for my huge heating bill, because it means I am warm.  
.... for the lady behind me at services that sings off key, because it means that I can hear.  
.. for the pile of laundry and ironing, because it means I have clothes to wear.  
.. for weariness and aching muscles at the end of the day, because it means I have been

capable of working hard and using those limbs.

.. for the alarm that goes off in the early morning, because it means that I am alive.

And finally .... for too much e-mail, because it means I have friends who are thinking of me and are trying to make me smile even when they are out of touch.

## 100 Blessings

### Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheynu melech ha'olam...

1. we thank You for bringing us back together with someone we haven't seen in a while.
2. for finding something we've been searching for.
3. for getting a job.
4. for our remembering a dream.
9. for helping us to gain the strength and courage to overcome a handicap.
10. for enabling human beings to discover cures for diseases like AIDS.
11. for glasses
12. for having a mall in Stamford
13. for the excellent sales at that mall
14. for many episodes of "Big Bang Theory"
15. for giving human beings the wisdom to devise democracy and the patience to make it work
16. for having a voice
17. for vacation
18. for giving us a sample of Your love when we overcome the urge to hate
19. for public education
20. for bug spray
21. where would we be without the basic gift of common sense?
22. we see Your mercy in the eyes of the parent whose child no longer uses diapers
23. we see Your mercy in the development of new vaccines
24. we see Your love when we see good in a person
25. we see Your creative and nurturing power when we plant a flower and it grows
26. we are awed by the light and heat of the sun
27. we are awed by the color and beauty of seeing the sunset
28. we are amazed at the life giving power of the ocean
29. we ask that Your spirit of life continue to be seen on fragile Long Island Sound
30. for coming home safely from any trip
31. we are grateful for that little bit of extra time to do the things we enjoy most
32. for air-conditioning
33. for the relief in the eyes of those who have just housebroken their dog
34. for the relief in the eyes of anyone on the last day of school
35. for the good fortune of finding a good song on iTunes
36. for the lessons of life learned daily on soap operas
37. for the relief in the eyes of a parent when the last child goes to college
38. for the smile on the face of a parent when the last college tuition bill is paid
39. we thank you in advance for that day when there are no murders on the news
40. for a school vacation with five consecutive days of no rain
41. We thank you for the intuition to pick those numbers that will enable us to win the lottery
42. for the dexterity and luck to catch a special moment on film
43. for holding those moments that can't be caught on film in our memories
44. for the Olympic spirit
45. for that great feeling of waking up in the morning and going to a job you like
46. for email

47. for a day with no email
49. for learning how to swim
50. we are eternally grateful that You saw fit to invent the save key in our computers
51. for that moment of release and lightness we experience when hearing a very funny joke
52. for hearing that joke in a room full of people, when it sounds like everyone is together, laughing the same laugh at the same time
53. for good, lasting friendships
54. we see your compassion in the faces of doctors searching for a cure for cancer.
55. for providing a gas station just up ahead as the needle hovers close to empty
56. for that same feeling of relief when opening up the trunk and seeing the spare tire, fully inflated
57. for that fresh feeling of having showered and dressed for the first time in days after getting over an illness
58. for shoe laces that don't untie
59. even better yet, for Velcro
60. a warm fire on a cold winter day
61. we thank you for the chance to relieve ourselves after a long car ride
62. we appreciate your gift of life when we save someone's life, by giving blood, by giving food, by giving love
63. we thank you for the good fortune of knowing the right answer when the teacher calls on us
64. for a good pen – they're so hard to find
65. for the ability to get over someone you like
66. we recall that You are slow to anger and are thankful when we are able to soothe the anger of another
67. for finding our way home
68. for learning how to use chopsticks
69. for the opening of a Kosher Chinese restaurant
70. for departing on a trip to Israel
71. who has created Rabbis
72. we thank You for our own personal accomplishments
73. for the excitement that fills the first day of camp
74. recalling that our people went for so long without a home, we pray for a world with no homeless people
75. recalling that the highest level of tzedakkah is to help someone provide for him or herself, we hope for lower unemployment
76. we see the beauty of nature, which lasts only for a moment, when seeing a butterfly
77. we thank You for our Hebrew School class – and great teachers!
78. for women being allowed to read from the Torah in the Conservative movement
79. for the ability to forgive
80. for the ability to remember
81. since You are God of all people, we search for a universal language
82. we thank You for wishing wells
83. we see how bright we too can shine when we see bright stars in the heavens
84. we thank you for the gift of fairytales, allowing our imaginations to expand
85. we thank you for the inspiration allowing for advances in science
86. for plausible excuses
87. for laughter
88. for being able to feel
89. for being able to feel good about oneself
90. for being able to help others to feel good about themselves

**We thank You most of all for:**

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| 91. Time  | 96. The bounty provided us |
| 92. Love  | 97. Being a Jew            |
| 93. Nature  | 98. The State of Israel    |
| 94. Family  | 99. Our bodies             |
| 95. Freedom   |                            |
| 100. ...For being alive. <i>Shehechianu, V'kiyemanu, V'higiyanu laz'man hazeh</i> — <b>AMEN</b> |                            |

What is the relationship between gratitude and happiness? Why is gratitude so important? And, what does religion have to say about it? Does Judaism say anything unexpected?



Although Judaism has endured its share of challenges as a religion, culture, and community, its traditions and teachings emphatically promote gratitude. It is too easy, Jewish sources say, to fall back on the simple route of being dissatisfied with life and focusing on what you lack. True gratitude requires an honest accounting of what you do have, an accounting of which, Judaism argues, will allow you to acknowledge the blessings which are a part of your life. Woven into thousands of years of Jewish thought is the overriding idea that taking time to recognize what you have in life is one of the uniquely beneficial rituals we can undertake.

As this episode begins, Hanan and his father each approaches the very human experience of comparing what one has to what others have, but they do so from two very different places. Hanan's father can't seem to see beyond his feelings of envy, while Hanan tells his father over and over again to "be grateful." Gratitude, Hanan tries to explain, can offer more than his father might think.

First, Hanan says, gratitude will enable his father to not only have enough, but to have more than enough. Second, being grateful will force his father to stay in the reality of the present moment and benefit from the actual experience of life instead of living in the "reality of expectations." And, third, Hanan points out that there is a connection between humility and being grateful.

### ① BEING GRATEFUL – HOW TO HAVE NOT JUST ENOUGH, BUT MORE THAN ENOUGH

Hanan begins his conversation with his dad by referring to a classic Jewish folktale. The "goat story" is his first attempt to help his father take stock of what he actually has instead of what he thinks he lacks. By doing so, his father might find he is more than satisfied with his current situation.

Hanan's telling of this story echoes ideas in classic Jewish teaching. One of the most recognized and quoted texts in Jewish thought is Pirke Avot. Full of aphorisms that teach about the potential for living a more fulfilled life, Pirke Avot (written around the year 200 CE) offers the following:

Who is rich? Those who rejoice in their own portion

*Pirke Avot 4:1*

- While this is a seemingly simple statement, what is the deeper meaning? Do you find that it is difficult to be grateful for what you have? What would make it easier to acknowledge the good things in your life?
- How realistic is it to always be grateful for the good things in your life? What gets in the way of gratitude?
- How do you acknowledge the things you value in your life, and how often?
- Do you often think about the things you lack rather than acknowledging the things you do have?
- Is there a difference between simply recognizing what you have and being grateful for what you have? If so, what is the nature of the difference?
- It is easy to fall into the trap of comparing yourself to others. How can being grateful help establish a sense of not only having enough, but having more than enough?
- What are the benefits of acknowledging the good things in your life more frequently?
- Are you more like Hanan or his father in relating to the goat story? Who responds more honestly?

See the video at [JewishFoodForThought.com](http://JewishFoodForThought.com)  
 theme: Gratitude

## ② THE “REALITY OF EXPECTATIONS”

A transitional moment in the episode occurs when Hanan describes being stuck in the past and anticipating the future as “the reality of expectations” instead of the reality of the present moment. He emphatically explains that you have to be present in order to truly experience life and you must be flexible enough to be able to make the most out of life.. And one sure way to be in the present moment, Hanan says, is to be grateful.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772 – 1810) was one of the great mystical minds in Jewish tradition and the great grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov. Over his lifetime, he revealed mystical and moral teachings for the Jewish community, highlighting the ability of every person to access these lessons. Rebbe Nachman’s teachings were ultimately compiled by his chief disciple, Reb Noson. His writings emphasize the concept of “being present” by questioning the necessity and human understanding of, and connection to, time.

A person with complete understanding knows that time in this world is really nothing. The sensation of time stems from deficient understanding. The greater one’s understanding, the more one sees and understands that in reality, time does not exist.

We can actually feel how time flies like a passing shadow and a cloud that will soon disappear. If you take this to heart you will be free of worries about mundane matters and you will have the strength and determination to snatch what you can – a good deed here, a lesson there – in order to gain something that is truly enduring out of this life. You will gain the life of the eternal world, which is completely beyond time.

Rebbe Nachman finishes the preceding thought by saying:

You must make sure you set aside a time each day when you can reflect calmly on everything you are doing and the way you are behaving and ask if this is the right way to spend your days.

*Likutey Etzot 61*

- Under what circumstances do you find yourself most likely to live in the “reality of expectations” and when in the present moment?
- Are there triggers for you that bring up expectations for yourself? What do they center around?
- What is the greatest danger of being stuck in the “reality of expectations”?
- Most often regret, sadness, and depression are signs of living in the past while fear, worry, and want are signs of living in the future. What are the signs of living in the present?
- When you are feeling grateful for the present, are you able to stay focused or do the past and future creep into the conversation? Why is it so tough to stay in the present?

Rebbe Nachman encourages us to really take time out to reflect on our lives. While this is an important exercise, there is a concept in Judaism which sharpens the idea further. Hakarat ha tov “recognizing the good,” requires people to see exactly what is in their life at the present moment. Though it sounds simplistic, it can be a difficult task. Like Hanan’s “reality of expectations,” hakarat ha tov requires people to stop looking at what has already happened in their lives and what they hope might occur in the future, and to look only at what is. Incorporating Rebbe Nachman’s directive into this teaching and into your own life allows for reflection, specifically on the things for which you are grateful. It allows you to be connected to the present and ultimately connected to a kind of universal timelessness.

- Would you realistically be able to set aside time each day for hakarat ha tov? What do you set aside time for daily? Why are those things important, and do you think they are as important as gratitude? Do you think Hanan’s father would be able to do this?
- When do you feel most connected to the other people in your life? Why is that feeling important and what does it have to do with being present?
- In response to Rebbe Nachman’s charge, do you feel that the way you have spent your day today was useful? If no, do you honestly believe there is anything you can do to change it? What do you think others would say?
- Can being grateful, even for something small, alter your experience of life? Does that seem too simple and, if so, how can the concept be deepened?
- Thinking back on your life, was there ever something for which you didn’t feel grateful at the time that in hindsight you may see differently now?

### ③ GRATITUDE AND HUMILITY

After talking to his father about gratitude on both simple and complex levels, Hanan teaches his father that gratitude can also bring about a profound sense of humility. When you realize how much there is to be grateful for, it is impossible not to feel humble. Jewish thought teaches that even when there are elements of your life that are not yet fulfilled, there is still much to be grateful for right now. Some of this inclination is borne from the difficult experiences of the Jewish community throughout history. But some is the acknowledgement that you are no greater than your neighbor. Recognizing this will likely overpower your ego, leaving you with a gentle humility about the reality of your own life.

A teaching from the Talmud highlights the idea of having some control over how we experience the world and our response to it.

What does a good guest say? “How much trouble my host has taken [for me]! How much meat he set before me! How much wine he set before me! How many cakes he has set before me! And all the trouble he has taken was only for my sake!” But what does a bad guest say? “How much, after all, has my host put himself out? I have eaten one piece of bread, I have eaten one slice of meat, I have drunk one cup of wine! All the trouble my host has taken was only for the sake of his wife and his children.

*Berachot 58a*

- What experiences in your life allow for gratitude and kindness? Do you think you respond to them as often as you would like? The preceding Talmud quote implies that people who are humble in the face of the experiences in their lives are “better” people. Do you agree? Why did the rabbis of the Talmud set up this dichotomy?
- Hanan states that he felt humbled when he was confronted with how little control we actually have in our lives and this led him to be filled with gratitude. What is the connection between gratitude and humility? Is there one? If so, does humility lead to gratitude or is it the other way around?
- How can gratitude and appreciation act as a doorway to actually seeing what you have?
- Do you believe that there are certain things in life that people inherently deserve? What happens if they don’t receive them? Is it possible to live without expecting anything, while still being grateful for what is received?
- Hanan wants his father to be grateful for even the most basic act – breathing. What stops you from being grateful for even basic things like this?
- Is there more power in showing gratitude for the seemingly simple parts of life or the deep and moving experiences in life? Name some examples of each in your life.