Appreciation: The Secret to a Happy Life

**#1**

**Summary of Torah Bereshis 11 1-5**

The descendants of Noah all decided to live together in the great valley of Babel. They appointed the first dictator, and all spoke the same language (Hebrew, according to tradition). They then decided to wage war on their Creator. "We will build a Tower to ascend Heaven and battle the Almighty!"

**Torah Bereshis 11:5**

*And the Lord descended to see the city and the tower that the sons of man (Adam) had built.*

**Rashi on Torah Bereshis 11:5**

**The sons of man (Adam):** *But the sons of whom else [could they have been]? The sons of donkeys and camels? Rather, [this refers to] the sons of the first man, who was ungrateful and said (above Torah Bereishis 3:12):“The woman whom You gave [to be] with me.” These, too, were ungrateful in rebelling against the One Who lavished goodness upon them, and saved them from the Flood.*

**The Chronically Dissatisfied: Making the Connection Between Gratitude and Well-Being, By Fabiana Franco, Ph.D., www.PsychCentral.com**

It seems obvious that if everything seems like doom and gloom then you will have trouble summoning up feelings of gratitude. However, what if the relationship actually works the other way around? Instead of unhappiness and dissatisfaction producing ungratefulness, perhaps being ungrateful actually makes you unhappy. Conversely, taking the effort to practice gratitude could be the key to feeling happier and finding more satisfaction in your life.

**Questions:**

* **Are people by nature ungrateful?**
* **If being grateful makes sense, and is even praiseworthy, why do so many people have difficulty with it?**
* **Do you remember a time when you thanked someone even though it was hard for you? How did it make you feel afterwards?**

**#2**

**Question: Are rich people happier than people who can sustain their basic daily needs (house, cellphone, food, safety etc.)?**

**Pirkei Avos, Mishnah 4:1**

*Who is rich? The one who appreciates what he has.*

**Questions:**

* **How do you understand this statement?**
* **If you had to give up your eyes or hands, which one would you give up? Why?**
* **Eyes or feet? Why?**
* **Sense of taste or five million dollars? Why?**
* **Meeting the president of the USA or spending two quality hours with family or close friends? Why?**
* **Getting a Tesla sports-car or giving $150,000 to charity. Why?**
* **What would you rather have – the newest iPhone, or a real compliment from someone you respect? Why?**
* **How does playing these gifts off each other make us relate to them differently than before?**
* **Are there any benefits to this exercise? What are they?**
* **How do we like our phones before the newest phone comes out? The day the new cooler faster phone comes out?**

**#3**

**Rabbi Avigdor Miller, (Sing You Righteous, pp. 17-18)**

Life is full of intense pleasures which are available to all people, but many fail to appreciate

them ... the air, water, sunlight, wind, rain, trees and gardens, the mountains and the seas, the moon and the stars, fire, heat and cold, the snow and the dew, the use of our limbs, the ability to see and hear and smell and taste and feel, the faculty of speech, the faculty of thought and memory, the variety of food of every taste and color, the marvel of the body’s secretions and all of its magnificent chemistry ...

The universal benefits which all men possess are ignored ... It is only when one is about to leave the world that he looks back with regret, too late, at all that he possessed but failed to enjoy.

**Questions:**

* **What things did you appreciate only after you lost them?**
* **What things have you gained a greater appreciation for because you fear to lose them?**

**#4**

**Torah Shmos 13:3-4**

*Moses said to the people, "Remember this day, when you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, for with a mighty hand, the Lord took you out of here… Today you are going out, in the month of Spring.*

**Rashi on Torah Shmos 13:4**

**“In the month of Spring”:** *Did they not know in which month they went out? Rather, Moses was telling them the following, “See the kindness that He bestowed upon you, that He took you out in the month which is fitting for departure- no hot sun, not cold, nor rains.”*

**Questions:**

* **When things are not pointed out to us, even though they are exciting and awesome, we completely miss it! What is the reason for this?**
* **What two things do you gain a lot from that you usually take for granted?**
* **How could it affect our relationships when we take things for granted?**

**#5**

**Prayer “Mode Ani” (I Give Thanks), Siddur (Prayer Book)**

(First words a Jew is supposed to say upon waking up:)

*I give thanks to you, living and eternal King, for returning my soul to me. Great is Your faithfulness.*

*The Hebrew word for Jew is* ***“Yehudi.”*** *The root of the word is* ***“Hodeh”*** *or* ***“Modeh”*** *(like in* ***“Toda”*** *- “thank you”) which means to thank.*

**Questions:**

* **What two things do you appreciate most?**
* **Being grateful is a Jewish mantra; it even defines who Jews are. But what about when life has gets you down - should we be thankful then as well?**
* **What if we do not have anything to be thankful for?**

**#6**

**Sefer Hachinuch (Book of Education) Mitzvah 33, Mitzvah to honor one’s parents.**

*It is only appropriate for one to recognize and reciprocate kindness to those who have dealt kindly with him, and certainly not to act in a vile manner, estranging oneself and being an ingrate, for this is a bad character trait that is completely despised by both G-d and human beings. One should appreciate the fact that his parents are the source of his very existence in this world, and it is therefore appropriate for him to act as respectfully and beneficially as he can. Besides having brought him into the world, they also expended tremendous effort in raising him as a child.*

*When one sets this quality firmly in their character, a person will rise from this, to recognize the good of G-d, Blessed is He, who is the primary Cause of his existence and the existence of all his forebears, back to Adam, the first man. And he will realize that G-d brought him forth into the light of day.*

**Questions:**

* **How do you understand this concept?**
* **Do you agree with it?**
* **What about agnostics?**

**#7**

**Question:** **Do you have any practical suggestions for how to implement appreciation in the busy routine of life?**

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**PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**

**(1)Get into the habit of thanking.** *Thank those you interact with every day. Thank them sincerely. You will find yourself appreciating them in a deeper way. Think about things they do for you that you might not have noticed. Use these three rules to deepen the appreciation:*

1. *Express it.*
2. *Get into the habit of doing this sincerely.*
3. *Reflect on how this impacts your relationships.*

**(2) Letters/ Calls of Appreciation.**

*Write a letter – not an email – a real letter to your parents expressing appreciation to them for the good they have done for you. Mail it. Reflect on how you feel after sending it. Next week write a letter to a person who had a significant impact on your life. Thank them. Reflect on how that feels.*

*Write a thank you letter to someone in your past who did something for you. Find someone to thank... Write to them or call them and thank them for how they impacted your life.... Then wait a day or two and write down how it felt.*

**(3) Appreciation Notebook.**

*Record two things you are grateful for each day.*

**(4) Appreciation Journal *-*** *Make a list of things you are thankful for: shoulders, salt, insulin, oxygen, eyelids, internet, cell phones, driver’s license, passport, wife, mother, friends, problems (help me refocus) roof, beer... Then take one and really break it down as far as you can.*

**(5) Accountability Friend.**

*Choose a friend to be an accountability partner. Let them know when you’ve completed your goals, and allow them to keep reminding you until you do.*