

# Weekly Teaching

May 4, 2018

One of the greatest religious skills that a person can master is defining life's circumstances, rather than letting circumstances define us.

During our lifetime, there will be many times when we find ourselves pulled between two extremes: a sacred, divinely bright place or a dark place where God's light has been extinguished and replaced with an attitude of anger, bitterness, cynicism and arrogance.

The divinely bright place is defined by a successful cultivation of an "attitude for gratitude," where our spirit of thanksgiving will motivate us to reach out and share God's blessings with each other at every opportunity.

However, most people can't succeed at constantly staying within the "sacred" extreme. Those who try though find it much easier to live a meaningful and happier life than those who don't.

The divine elixir of gratitude sweetens a person's outlook and literally appears to have the power to chase away "gray skies."

Not only do the persons of gratitude improve their own perspectives on life, they have a positive ripple effect on those with whom they come in contact with. Their smiling demeanors and kind words become contagious.

Their words of expressed appreciation become antidotes for the ills that others suffer: worry, doubt, fear, anger, etc.

Learning to develop a constant "attitude for gratitude" becomes the secret not only to spiritual health but, according to many scientific studies, a mechanism for physical health as well. The grateful/happy person's body appears to immensely benefit from the tonic of thankfulness.

It is as if God has hard-wired our bodies to the soulful tune-up that only developing an "attitude for gratitude" can provide.

Practically speaking, happy, grateful people are also less likely to focus on themselves and much more likely to focus on others.

They are not being slowed down by their own self-pity.

Happy, grateful people are able to look out at the world; not distracted by a mundane internal agenda, they can perceive opportunities by which they might be able to do more good.

At the heart of religion, this is why we pray.

With every prayerful utterance, we are attempting to train our mouths to articulate words of gratitude so that sincere thankfulness will meaningfully seep into our hearts, minds and souls.

Within Judaism, this is why the first thing we're supposed to do when we wake up in the morning is to say: "Thank you! Modeh Ani Lefenecha..." Thank you God for waking me up.

Then we're supposed to go on and contemplate all of the additional things we can think of that we can be grateful for, such as "I can move my hands; I can see; I can walk; I can dress; I can eat; I have a home; I have a job; I have a family; I have people I love; I have people who love me."

Our affirmation of life is carried within our posture. A positive person emanates hope, meaningfulness and joy and constantly says "yes" to life.

People who find themselves merely tolerating, bearing up underneath burdens, without hope for better moments in their future, cannot be life affirming.

The kernel of the demeanor of hope is found within our scriptures when God commands: "Choose Life!"

This Divine directive indicates that we have a choice, and our choice can be seen in how we bear each and every day.

It's not a test, it's a choice.

Will we be life-affirming or life-diminishing?

It's a choice we make each morning — a thousand times within a day — to truly live or to merely bide our time.

"Choose Life!"

It's our choice to live a life of thankfulness; to cultivate an "attitude for gratitude."

The beginning of each day, at the first moment of consciousness, we can start our mornings by saying "Thank you" and cultivate an "attitude for gratitude."

Imagine how different our entire day might be if we started this simple prayerful practice.

To wake up and say "Thank You." "Thank you, God for the divine breath you breathed into my nostrils, and your divine spirit that constantly brushes against my cheeks. Thank you!"

How different, might all of our day be, if we just started this simple practice?

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