



The Azrieli Papers

A Project of Azrieli Graduate School
of Jewish Education and Administration

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Positive Psychology in Jewish Education: Gratitude in the Day School and Synagogue Classroom

ELIEZER SCHNALL, PhD

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Education in Co-curricular Programming:
An Example from the Field

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Jewish Sources: Some Close Readings

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INTRODUCTION: *Dr. David Pelcovitz*

I am honored to introduce “Saying Thanks: Dimensions of Gratitude” by Eliezer Schnall, PhD, Judy Sokolow, EdD, and Moshe Sokolow, PhD.

This monograph is the latest of the Azrieli Papers, our ongoing series of monographs dedicated to the dissemination of the latest thinking in topics related to teaching and research in Jewish education. From its inception, this series has been generously underwritten by Henry and Golda Reena Rothman, to whom, in the spirit of this monograph, we are deeply grateful for their ongoing generosity and support.

* * *

In recent years there has been much excitement about the potential that positive psychology has for bridging the gap between moral knowledge and moral action. Empirical research in this area has consistently documented how a focus on the positive, coupled with the practical intervention and educational approaches that are the hallmark of this school of psychology, can instill such important values as gratitude, forgiveness, and persistence in our children. There is also clear evidence of support by parents for prioritizing the delivery of such interventions. Surveys of American parents over the past 30 years consistently find that they view preparing children to become responsible citizens as one of the most important goals of education. An array of studies conducted over the last decade find that values emphasized by positive psychology are at least as important as grades in predicting long-term success in children. For example, self-discipline is twice as good a predictor of high school grades as IQ. Furthermore, happy adolescents earn substantially more money as adults than their less happy counterparts. Researchers have also found that the skills and values imparted by an approach informed by positive psychology have been found to differentiate flourishing corporate teams relative to stagnating teams in the business world, and also predict greater satisfaction and success in marriage.

After a brief introduction to the importance of incorporating positive psychology in schools, Dr. Schnall summarizes the research on the many benefits of instilling gratitude in children with a particular emphasis on how teaching gratitude in the Jewish religious classroom is essential due to its primacy in Jewish thought and practice. A practical and clear description of how gratitude interventions can be

taught in a classroom setting is followed by a number of examples of how connections to this value can be integrated into lessons on the *parasha* and Jewish holidays.

Dr. Judy Sokolow discusses how the annual Thanksgiving program that she developed at the Ramaz Middle School incorporates many of the pedagogic techniques that can integrate the lessons of positive psychology and Jewish thinking on gratitude in an educational setting. Students are given an active role in preparing a Jewish text in which gratitude is emphasized. This cognitive approach is deepened by a more personal and emotion-driven strategy that asks students to share personal statements of gratitude to someone who has had a major impact on their lives. This program is a particularly good example of how integrating an academic approach with one that is more personal and emotionally driven can help a student more fully internalize values.

Jewish sources add unique insights and depth to our understanding of the central place that gratitude plays in a life informed by Jewish values, and Dr. Moshe Sokolow shares a variety of sources that I haven't previously seen cited in the literature on Jewish approaches to gratitude. Drawing from a wide range of writings in the Torah, Midrash, Talmud, and siddur, Dr. Sokolow adds an additional layer of understanding that can help the educator more fully impart an informed appreciation of this important value to his or her students that is more comprehensively informed by a Judaic perspective.

I teach a required course on positive psychology at the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education. The reaction of my students to this course has consistently been excitement at how applying the lessons of positive psychology in Jewish educational settings shows much promise as an effective approach to values education. By reviewing the relevant literature and developing practical educational approaches to teaching the all-important value of gratitude, the authors of this monograph have made an important contribution to the field of Jewish character education.

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POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IN JEWISH EDUCATION: GRATITUDE IN THE DAY SCHOOL AND SYNAGOGUE CLASSROOM

Eliezer Schnall, PhD

PREFACE

The newly burgeoning field of positive psychology is a cutting-edge area of study for psychologists generally, and for school psychologists in particular (Waters, 2011). Yet Jewish education researchers and practitioners, like their colleagues in the broader world of religious education, have been slow to embrace this exciting new field.¹ This article will, first and foremost, serve to introduce positive psychology to clergy and educators in Jewish schools and synagogues, explaining its relevance to youth in these religious settings.

Goldmintz (2011) laments that whereas in the world of Orthodox Jewish education there is extensive discussion of broad goals and values, how such values are actually inculcated within students receives only limited attention. With that in mind, the present article also emphasizes classroom application of positive psychology, based on empirically tested interventions. By way of example, I explore gratitude (*hakarat ha-tov*), an area of particular focus among positive psychologists (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010), demonstrating the benefits observed in those who possess and express this trait, and delineating how gratitude can be induced in the Jewish day school and synagogue classroom.

INTRODUCTION TO POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Until recent decades, psychology was dominated by the “disease model,” mostly focused on mental disorder, emotional problems, and maladaptive behaviors (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). As early as 1954 though, Abraham Maslow

¹ Recent computerized searches for the term “positive psychology” in the archives of both a major religious education journal and a major Jewish education journal yielded no hits.

decried this state of affairs, declaiming that psychology had ignored all but “the darker, meaner half” (p. 354) of its rightful jurisdiction. Yet it took over four decades until former American Psychological Association (APA) president Martin Seligman declared psychology “half-baked” (Lopez and Gallagher, 2009, p. 3) and a new, more positive, perspective took hold. Under the auspices of such contemporary luminaries as Seligman, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Ed Deiner, and Christopher Peterson, positive psychology was prominently displayed in the millennial issue (Volume 55, Issue 1, January, 2000) of *American Psychologist*, the flagship journal of the APA. The 21st century has subsequently witnessed an explosion of books, journals, conferences, university courses, and think tanks devoted to the study of human virtue and character strengths and the promotion of health and well-being. The fact that health is more than the absence of illness, and that lack of deficits alone is inadequate in order to flourish and thrive, is increasingly taken for granted (Huebner & Gilman, 2003; Keyes, 2009; Park & Peterson, 2009).

As a science that bridges the “Ivory Tower’ and Main Street” (Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar, 2011, p. 468), positive psychology is increasingly popular with researchers, educators, clinicians, media, and the general public (Bird & Markle, 2012; Diener, 2009; Peterson, 2009; Russo-Netzer & Ben-Shahar). In truth, the “pursuit of happiness,” codified in the 1776 United States Declaration of Independence, as well as the pursuit of other positive emotions, is hardly a novel idea in Western culture. However, the emphasis on a data-driven empirically-supported science of positive human function indeed represents a new turn for social scientists.

Forgiveness and gratitude, for instance, avidly examined by positive psychologists, have long been held in high regard as commendable virtues by philosophers, religious thinkers, and many others. But only recently have these traits and emotions been linked by scientific researchers to psychological and physiological health. Based on these observations, the unsubstantiated advice of motivational speakers, self-help books, and infomercials, have, for many, given way to rigorously derived positive psychology interventions. Research participants of varying types who counted their blessings, performed random acts of kindness, or wrote thankful letters were observed to benefit across manifold domains of well-being (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013).

Several alternative hypotheses may explain the efficacy of these interventions.

Some explain that “positive activities” engender psychological benefits, such as fulfilling needs for autonomy, social connectedness, and competence; cognitive benefits, such as contributing toward improved life perspective; and/or emotional benefits (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). Positive psychology interventions may also lead to seemingly unrelated advantageous behaviors; for instance, experimental participants asked to count their blessings also spent more time exercising (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

WHY INCORPORATE POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IN THE SCHOOLS?

School psychology, like the overall field of psychology, has long “viewed the world through problem-focused or deficit lenses” (Terjesen, Jacofsky, Froh, & DiGiuseppe, 2004, p. 163). Even as school programs aimed to prevent (rather than treat) problems become more popular, positive psychology is rarely included even in these efforts (McCabe, Bray, Kehle, Theodore, & Gelbar, 2011). Although in recent decades there has been sporadic discussion of moving beyond the deficit model (Clonan, Chafouleas, McDougal, & Riley-Tillman, 2004), very little change has occurred (Froh, Huebner, Youssef, & Conte, 2011), possibly due to bureaucratic constraints, assessment mandates, and inflexibility of budgets (Chafouleas & Bray, 2004). Ironically, and very tellingly, when Noddings (2003) argued that happiness education should be a primary goal in schooling, critics countered that “happiness and schools don’t go together” (p. 1).

Nonetheless, calls for expanding the role of positive psychology across youth-oriented settings (e.g., Huebner & Gilman, 2003; Norrish & Vella-Brodrick, 2009) are increasing, with some suggesting that schools are uniquely appropriate contexts for positive psychology delivery (Clonan, Chafouleas, McDougal, & Riley-Tillman, 2004). Knoop (2011), for example, in his look toward “Education in 2025,” sees a pivotal role for positive psychology in schools of the future, as do Jenson, Olympia, Farley, and Clark (2004), who view the optimism of its perspective as the antidote to the “sea of negativity” (p. 67) in which many schoolchildren are mired. After all, youth is the ideal time to instill knowledge and skills that may last a lifetime (Norrish & Vella-Brodrick), and schools are among the few institutions in long-term and direct contact with children and families that may possess the staff

and resources for new interventions (Clonan, Chafouleas, McDoudal, & Riley-Tillman). Children spend much time in school at stages of life fraught with risk of adopting maladaptive behavior; the school environment allows targeting both children at special threat of, or indeed exhibiting, emotional or behavioral problems, as well as the broader population of young people (McCabe, Bray, Kehle, Theodore, & Gelbar, 2011), with primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions (Miller, Nickerson, & Jimerson, 2009). While the segment of the school population with established mental illness often receives services, the moderately mentally healthy warrant attention, too, as only those truly “flourishing” display the best academic and psychological outcomes (Norrish & Vella-Brodrick, 2009).

CURRENT POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

APPLICATION IN SCHOOLS

Given the paucity of research specifically centered on the Jewish day school or synagogue classroom, review articles aimed at professionals in these special contexts must rely heavily on information gleaned from the overall research literature (e.g., Pelcovitz, 2011). However, even the general literature of positive psychology has largely focused on adults (Huebner, Gilman, & Furlong, 2009), with some reviewers expressing surprise that children have received so little attention (Diener & Diener, 2009), as has the “relatively neglected context of education” (Lewis, Huebner, Malone, & Valois, 2011, p. 249). Fortunately though, in addition to descriptive studies, recent years have seen the growth of a comparatively small but expanding body of literature describing positive psychology interventions applied in the school environment or with a school-age population.

The diversity of venues where positive psychology interventions have been applied (see, for example, Miller, Nickerson, & Jimerson, 2009; Norrish & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Waters, 2011) is encouraging, involving both public and private schools, coeducational and single-gender. They have also included participants of varying ethnicities and nationalities, and youth of ages spanning kindergarten through late adolescence. Some were aimed at a general population and others at those with special emotional or behavioral problems. It is also encouraging that many of the interventions have been performed by teachers, demonstrating that additional specialized staff may often be unnecessary for these interventions.

Furthermore, positive psychology methods have been added to already existing classes and school subjects, facilitating smooth and undisruptive adaptation.

Of course, such applications require evaluation, and researchers are eagerly examining the efficacies of positive psychology interventions for youth and schools. These studies have targeted numerous endpoints—related to hope, happiness, resilience, serenity, kindness, gratitude, and other character strengths—as well as life satisfaction, school satisfaction, and more. From the point of view of empirical rigor, at least a portion of the relevant studies had the benefit of a large sample size, a control group, and/or random assignment, although the field is admittedly in its early stages. An extended illustrative example, along with guidelines for practical application, follows in the ensuing sections.

HAKARAT HA-TOV: THE VIRTUE OF GRATITUDE

Being thankful isn't just saying thanks. It's a divine feeling that isn't hideable. When you truly are thankful you will do something in return because you owe it to the person and society.

—Gratitude essay from an 11-year-old male research participant
(From Froh, Bono, & Emmons, 2010)

Gratitude is defined as “a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness and appreciation for life” (Emmons & Shelton, 2002, p. 460), generally in response to the receipt of some benefit or gift (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Interventions involving this character strength are considered today to be among positive psychologists' key successes (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010), with research demonstrating the largest effects for these relative to all positive psychology interventions (Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski, & Miller, 2009). The following discussion surrounds the example of gratitude, emphasizing its role in the health and wellness of youth, as well as its application in the school age population. I will also describe the corresponding *mitzvah* of *hakarot ha-tov*, demonstrating its primacy in Jewish thought and practice. Additionally, this article—and its two companion pieces—will present exercises and curricular connections to assist Jewish religious school teachers in applying gratitude in the classroom.

Until recent times, gratitude had been the “emotion most neglected by psychologists” (Emmons, 2004). Nonetheless, just as the overall roots of positive psychology

are evident in sporadic writings that preceded its burgeoning as a modern field of inquiry, the current focus on gratitude studies is not entirely new. Baumgarten-Tramer's (1938) analysis of thankfulness in schoolchildren is an example of such early work. Even long before modern times, though, gratitude was seen as an exalted virtue in the traditions of all the great monotheistic religions (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000) and beyond. Indeed, Cicero opined that gratitude is "the greatest of all virtues" and "the parent of all others" (Wood, Joseph, & Linley, 2007). Emmons and Mishra (2011) go so far as to say that "Gratitude is held in high esteem by virtually everyone, at all times, in all places."

In addition to the long and eminent history of this character strength, as well as the fact that it has become prominent in positive psychology research, gratitude is especially appropriate for application in the Jewish religious classroom due to its primacy in Jewish thought and practice. Many even suggest that gratitude, referred to as *hakarat ha-tov* (literally, recognizing favor), may be the foundation underlying all of the Torah (Schnall, Schiffman, & Cherniak, in press). For example, Rabbi Bahya ibn Pakuda (11th century), in his magnum opus *Hovot Ha-Levavot*, explains that Jews must adhere to God's laws precisely because of the gratitude due for His kindnesses to us. Similarly, Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164) maintains that the debt of gratitude owed by Jews to God on account of our redemption from Egypt explains why we are required to fulfill more *mitzvot* than are members of other nations. Other medieval Jewish philosophers, such as Rabbi Yosef ibn Zadik (d. 1149) in his *Sefer Ha-Olam Ha-Katan*, similarly describe gratitude as a fundamental religious responsibility. In fact, Rabbi Yehuda HeHasid (1140–1217) states pointedly that "there is no worse trait than being ungrateful" (*Sefer Hasidim* 665).²

Another reason that gratitude is particularly appropriate for incorporation in religious education is the connection observed in numerous studies between this character strength and religiosity. For example, gratitude is correlated with various measures of overall religiousness, as well as religious orientation, religious coping, spirituality, prayer, and other related markers (Emmons & Mishra, 2011; Lambert, Fincham, Braithwaite, Graham, & Beach, 2009; Tsang, Shulwitz, & Carlisle, 2012).

² Contemporary scholars make similar observations. For example, Schimmel (2004, p.39) writes that "gratitude is central to the very relationship between God and the people of Israel."

Furthermore, of the various forms of gratitude, thankfulness to God may be especially vital to mental health (Rosmarin, Pirutinsky, Cohen, Galler, & Krumrei, 2011).

As mentioned above, gratitude has been linked to various measures of health and wellness, and studies revealing these relationships have involved a broad range of age groups from youth through late adulthood (Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski, & Miller, 2009). One recent comprehensive review of dozens of such studies (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010) found that gratitude is related to self-esteem, optimism, positive affect, life satisfaction, reduced stress, and many other aspects of well-being. Interestingly, even quality and duration of sleep are related to gratitude (Wood, Joseph, Lloyd, & Atkins, 2009); grateful people experience more positive pre-sleep thoughts which may improve quantity and quality of sleep. Emmons & Mishra (2011) present ten general hypotheses to explain the relationship between gratitude and improved health outcomes, including the possibilities that gratitude may help one cope with stress, reduce negative emotions and materialistic strivings, recall positive memories, motivate moral behavior, contribute to spirituality, facilitate goal attainment, promote physical health, and build social resources.

In line with Emmons and Mishra's (2011) final hypothesis, gratitude seems linked to the creation and maintenance of strong and satisfying social relationships (Bartlett, Condon, Cruz, Baumann, & Desteno, 2012). Similarly, there is a growing literature explicating the connection between this character strength and prosocial behavior. In that vein, McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, and Larson (2001) consider gratitude a moral barometer, moral reinforcer, and moral motive. For example, expression of gratitude unsurprisingly reinforces the behaviors of benefactors (Grant & Gino, 2010). But interestingly, such expression also spurs *beneficiaries* to kindness, and even early adolescents seem to exhibit "upstream generativity" (p. 153) wherein gratitude prompts within them the desire to teach, mentor, parent, and benefit others, as they have benefited themselves (Froh, Bono, & Emmons, 2010). Froh, Bono, & Emmons hypothesize a "cycle of virtue" (p. 153) where gratitude leads to better social integration and emotional well-being, including more gratitude. This self-reinforcing cycle perpetuates the benefits of this character strength in an "upward spiral" (p. 153).

GRATITUDE INTERVENTIONS

Reflect on your present blessings, on which every man has many, not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some.

—Charles Dickens (cited in Emmons & McCoullough, 2003)

The above discussion mentioned numerous benefits observed in those exhibiting gratitude, which, nonetheless, does not necessarily imply that this character strength is the cause of those benefits, as correlational and causative relationships should not be confused. The fact that grateful people may be happier, healthier, or more socially integrated, if based on correlational data alone, need not suggest that gratitude produces these advantages, as other interpretations are equally plausible. For example, those with better health or more meaningful relationships may already have more to be thankful for and are thus subsequently observed to display the most gratitude. In that case, physical, mental, and social well-being would be the causes of gratitude and not its results.

Therefore, the gold standard among clinical researchers attempting to determine causality is not correlational or other observational data, but rather the randomized controlled trial. The nature of such experimental investigation prevents the bias and confusion that may impair other forms of research. Fortunately, at least a portion of extant gratitude research takes this latter form. Recent intervention studies demonstrate methods that are effective both at increasing gratitude and also various forms of well-being.

What follows are descriptions of gratitude interventions with empirical support that could potentially be incorporated in Jewish day school and synagogue classrooms. Until the last few years, gratitude research only involved adults, and its study in children was largely considered “uncharted territory” (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008, p. 217). Nonetheless, we will focus on supporting research involving schools and school-age youth when such exist.

The gratitude intervention receiving the most attention to date is known alternately as the “gratitude list” or “counting blessings,” wherein participants enumerate those things for which they are thankful on a daily or weekly basis, often in a diary or journal. This technique, first explored by Emmons and McCullough (2003), effectively increased gratitude, life satisfaction, optimism, and exercise in

healthy college students (compared to controls), and in one version of the experiment, also led to more kind deeds performed by the participants in the gratitude group. Furthermore, in patients with neuromuscular diseases, this exercise increased gratitude, life satisfaction, and positive affect, and reduced pain and functional impairment. In fact, when Geraghty, Wood, and Hyland (2010a, 2010b) tested the same technique with community samples of persons experiencing impaired body image or excessive worry, the gratitude intervention was as effective as established cognitive behavioral therapy methods at reducing body dissatisfaction and worry, respectively. These results are particularly important to educators and religious leaders concerned with the prevalence of eating disorders and of anxiety disorders among youth in the Jewish community and beyond.

Based on Emmons and McCullough's (2003) pioneering work, Froh, Sefick, and Emmons (2008) assessed the counting blessings paradigm in 221 sixth and seventh grade students (aged 11-14) over a two week period. Eleven middle school classes were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: a gratitude condition where students were asked daily to list as many as five things they were grateful for over the preceding day; a hassles condition where students were asked daily to list as many as five burdens that irritated them since the previous day; or a control condition where no lists were requested. Sample statements from students in the gratitude condition included: "My grandma is in good health," "My coach helped me out at baseball practice," and "I am grateful that my mom didn't go crazy when I accidentally broke a patio table" (Froh & Bono, 2011).

Among various outcome measures, students in the gratitude group—relative to those in the hassles group—reported more gratitude, and also more life satisfaction and optimism, and also less negative emotion. Notably, students in the experimental group, compared to those in either comparison group, also reported higher school satisfaction (e.g., eager to come to school; find school interesting; believe they learn a lot at school). Student responses on these outcome measures included: "I am thankful for school," "I am thankful for my education," and "I am thankful that my school has a track team and that I got accepted into honor society" (Froh & Bono, 2011). The importance of this finding is underscored by the number of middle school and high school students dissatisfied with school (Huebner, Valois, Paxton, & Drane, 2005), as well as the fact that school satisfaction is linked to academic

success and also social success (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002).

The significant results described above were observed after only two weeks of a simple intervention, and remarkably they were not fleeting. Increased school satisfaction was still reported by the gratitude group even three weeks following conclusion of the experiment. It is noteworthy that others have employed even briefer gratitude list-type interventions, lasting as little as five minutes on a single occasion, yet still with the effect of inducing positive mood (e.g., Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003; see also Koo, Algoe, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008).

The “gratitude visit” is a related form of intervention that has received attention since Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) first popularized the method. These researchers randomly assigned some volunteers among their website visitors to write a letter to a benefactor whom they had not previously properly thanked and deliver it to the benefactor that week. Others were assigned to a control condition and instead asked to write about their early childhood memories. Those who completed the gratitude visit scored higher on a measure of happiness and lower on a measure of depressive symptoms, relative to controls. Like the long-lasting effects of counting blessings, these benefits of the gratitude visit were maintained at follow-up assessments as much as a month later.

Others have expanded the exercise to include extended campaigns involving multiple letters of gratitude. In studies conducted by Toepfer and Walker (2009) and Toepfer, Cichy, and Peters (2012) involving mostly young adult university students, writing three gratitude letters led to greater life satisfaction and happiness, and also to reduced symptoms of depression. Importantly, the design of these studies suggests that writing numerous letters, as opposed to writing a single letter, may enhance and extend the benefits of this form of intervention.

Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski, and Miller (2009) assessed a similar gratitude visit exercise in a sample of 89 students in the third, eighth, or twelfth grades. Although no published studies assess positive psychology interventions in Jewish religious students, Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski, and Miller’s investigation may be particularly relevant to that context in that it involved parochial school students, approximately 99% of whom stated that God was “important” or “extremely important” in their lives. Student participants were randomly divided into one of two groups: an experimental group instructed to write a gratitude letter and read it to the benefactor

in person, or a control group assigned to think about daily events and write about their feelings during those events. The researchers offer a sample abridged response from a gratitude letter written by a female student (aged 17) to her mother, excerpted here:

I would like to take this time to thank you for all that you do on a daily basis and have been doing my whole life ... I am so thankful that I get to drive in with you [to school] everyday and that you listen and care about the things going on in our lives ... I thank you for being there whenever I need you. I thank you that when the world is against me that you stand up for me and you are my voice when I can't speak for myself. I thank you for caring about my life and wanting to be involved. I thank you for the words of encouragement and hugs of love that get me through every storm. I thank you for sitting through countless games in the cold and rain and still having the energy to make dinner and all the things you do. I thank you for raising me in a ... home where I have learned who God was and how to serve him ... I am so blessed to have you as my mommy and I have no idea what I would have done without you ...

Results of Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski, and Miller's (2009) study demonstrated that the gratitude letter and visit may also be helpful for children and adolescents. Among those in the gratitude group initially reporting low positive affect, the intervention led to increased gratitude and improved affect at immediate post-test assessment. Furthermore, benefits were again enduring; increased positive affect in this group was still observed two months after conclusion of the intervention.

GRATITUDE INTERVENTIONS: CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS³ IN THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS CLASSROOM

Positive psychology has been instituted in classrooms in one of two forms: development of a “well-being curriculum,” or by initiating a “positive turn” in the existing curriculum (Waters, 2011). The former implies creation of new programs

³ [Ed.: Co- and extra-curricular connections are provided in the companion piece by Judy Sokolow, based upon her experience coordinating “thanks-for-giving” programs in a Modern Orthodox middle school.]

that primarily and explicitly teach positive psychology skills to students. The latter involves molding current academic programs to better incorporate instruction of these new skills.

In the case of the Jewish day school or synagogue classroom, the line between these two approaches may be blurred. After all, teaching *middot* and *mussar*, in the forms of values and ethics education, are already parts of the curriculum in the religious world. As such, a special program based on positive psychology principles expressly designed to inculcate *hakarat ha-tov* might be considered part of a “well-being curriculum” in a secular school, but actually described as a “positive turn” in the already existing *middot* education of a Jewish school.

In addition to incorporating empirically supported exercises into *middot* programs and *mussar* classes, there are numerous ways that Jewish education could take a “positive turn.” For example, educators could expand the teaching of *parashat ha-shavua* and the *hagim*, as well as *tefillot* and *berakhot* instruction, with the addition of gratitude discussion and interventions. Identification of numerous openings for such reflection seems appropriate, as some research suggests that periodic practice of gratitude exercises may be particularly beneficial (Lyubomirsky and Layous, 2013). The following sections suggest specific opportunities within the aforementioned areas of instruction where the theme of gratitude could become a natural component, and where positive psychology interventions such as the gratitude list or letter could be applied as part of classroom activities.

Parashat Ha-Shavua

Due to the impracticality of addressing all *parshiyot* of the Torah in this essay, special attention is offered to the early *parshiyot*, many of which are often taught in expanded form by Jewish educators in addition to their relatively brief study during the week when that portion is read in the synagogue.

Bereishit

As defense of his violation of God’s command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam blames his wife for instigating his disobedience (*Bereishit* 3:12). His statement conveyed ingratitude toward God for the wife He provided him, and Adam is faulted for this misstep by the Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 5b).

Noah

The *dor ha-pallagah* (Generation of the Dispersion) is blamed by the Midrash for the rebelliousness they demonstrated against God in building the Tower of Babel (*Bereishit Rabba* 38:9). After all, this cohort, who lived during Noah's own lifetime, should have been grateful to God who spared their forbears and themselves from death during the great flood.

Lekh Lekha

When Avraham prophetically learns that Sarah is to bear a son, he throws himself upon the ground and laughs (*Bereishit* 17:17). Young students and biblical exegetes alike wonder at the intent behind Avraham's response. The classic explanation, advanced by *Rashi*, is that his laughter was prompted by joy. However, educators might consider also presenting the approach of *Radak* that Avraham's emotional response was driven by gratitude.

Vayera

Lot asks God's angelic messenger to spare the city of Tzoar from its decreed destruction, intending to make it his new home. Astonishingly, in contradistinction to Avraham's similar and unsuccessful pleas for Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's request for Tzoar is granted. The Midrash explains that Lot's extraordinary accomplishment was due to the fact that the angel owed Lot a debt of gratitude for hosting him in his home (*Bereishit Rabba* 50:11).

Hayyei Sarah

The account of Eliezer's visit to Haran offers a particularly compelling example of how Jewish education might take a "positive turn." After Lavan hears that Avraham's servant Eliezer has arrived from Canaan and showered extravagantly expensive gifts on his sister Rivkah, he runs to greet him and invite him home (*Bereishit* 24:29–31). This passage is traditionally taught in accord with the approach of *Rashi* who interprets Lavan's behavior as motivated by selfishness and greed: he feigns graciousness to Eliezer in the hope that he might thereby obtain his money. However, educators might choose to also share the interpretation of Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno who understood Lavan's kindness to Eliezer as based on gratitude for the generosity he had just shown his sister.

Hagim

The sections below describe curricular connections appropriate to the *shalosh regalim*: Pesah, Shavuot, and Sukkot—holidays that often receive a great deal of focus in the classroom. However, many of these connections are also appropriate to various weekly *parshiyot*. For instance, the material provided for Pesah could easily be adapted to the study of *Shemot*, *Va'era*, or *Bo*, and the content suggested for *Shavuot* could be adopted by school teachers and summer camp educational staff teaching the *Aseret Ha-Diberot* recorded in the weekly portions of *Yitro* and *Va'ethanan*, respectively.

Pesah

The themes and texts accompanying the holiday of Pesah are replete with openings for discussion of gratitude. For example, classes focused on Pesah almost invariably incorporate study of the liturgy recorded in the *Haggadah*. This text for the *seder* meal includes many popular prayers and songs, including one that is known by its choral refrain “*Dayyeinu*.” The text of *Dayyeinu* lists numerous acts of beneficence toward the Jewish people for which we owe God our gratitude, such as the miraculous splitting of the Sea of Reeds, and the divine provision of the manna during the forty years of wandering in the desert. The gratitude we express at the *seder* could be contrasted with the ingratitude demonstrated by those Jews who complained about the manna (*Bamidbar* 21:5, see *Gemara Avodah Zarah* 5a).

Contrasting the attitudes of the two central figures in the Pesah narrative, Moshe and Pharaoh, is another way to highlight this character strength.

a. Moshe

When studying the ten plagues, students may be intrigued that it was not Moshe, but his brother Aharon, who symbolically initiated the first three. Moshe was not the one to strike the Nile River to initiate *dam* (blood) and *tzfardei'a* (frogs), nor was he the one to strike the desert sands to bring *kinnim* (lice), as gratitude suggested otherwise in each case. The Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* 9:10, 10:7) says that it would have been inappropriate for Moshe to smite the river that was instrumental in saving his life as a baby (*Shemot* 2:3), or to hit the sands that concealed the Egyptian he killed as a young man (*Shemot* 2:12).

Advanced students prepared for a more complete character study of Moshe might

be challenged to identify displays of gratitude elsewhere in his life. For example, when the Jews are commanded (*Bamidbar* 31:2) to take vengeance upon the Midianite people for their treachery, Moshe does not lead the battle himself, delegating the task to his student Yehoshua instead. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Bamidbar* 31:6) explains that Moshe, who lived in Yitro's household in Midian, believed that gratitude precluded his direct involvement in an attack on the Midianites.

b. Pharaoh

If Moshe, the hero of the Pesah account, is a model of gratitude, Pharaoh, the villain, may be the epitome of ingratitude. The Midrash (*Sekhel Tov Shemot* 1:8) faults him for oppressing the Jews, ignoring all the good done for him and his country by their ancestor and relative, Yosef. After all, it was Yosef whose intercession saved Egypt from hunger and devastation during the great famine described in *Bereishit* 41.

Shavuot

The two texts most closely associated with the holiday of Shavuot are the Ten Commandments and the Book of Ruth. Read in the synagogue on the holiday, these are traditionally taught to students in preparation for Shavuot, and each facilitates a “positive turn” toward gratitude. Moreover, advanced students study the mitzvah of *bikkurim* (first fruits) that are brought on Shavuot, and which also is based upon gratitude. The following sections expand on these themes.

Aseret Ha-Diberot

The commandment most often emphasized to students is the imperative to honor one's father and mother (*Shemot* 20:12). According to the anonymous 13th century *Sefer Ha-Hinukh* (33), this mitzvah is founded upon gratitude. The following excerpt from that work might be discussed with students:

At the root of this mitzvah lies the thought that it is fitting for a man to acknowledge and treat with loving-kindness the person who treated him with goodness, and he should not be a scoundrel, an ingrate who turns a cold shoulder [to him]—for this is an evil quality, utterly vile before God and mankind. It is for a person to realize that his father and mother are the cause of his being in this world; hence in very truth it is proper for him to give

them every honor and every benefit that he can since they brought him into the world and then, too, labored through many troubles over him in his early years.⁴

The Book of Ruth

Schimmel (2004) frames the narrative of this book in the context of gratitude. Rather than return to the security and comfort of her native homeland as her mother-in-law Naomi encouraged her to do, the recently widowed Ruth chooses to remain by her side and join the people of Israel. She also elects to observe the Jewish practice of offering marriage rights to her deceased husband's relatives before others, so that the ensuing progeny may be considered the legal heir of her previous husband. In the immediate sense, it is Boaz who expresses gratitude to Ruth for all she has done (*Ruth* 3:10–11):

“May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich ... I will do for you all that you ask.”

In the larger sense, though, the megillah expresses gratitude to Ruth for her kindnesses toward Naomi, her deceased husband's family, and all of Israel. This gratitude culminates in her emergence as the great-grandmother of the Davidic and Messianic royal line (*Ruth* 4).

Bikkurim

Shavuot is also called *hag ha-bikkurim* (the festival of the first fruits), the holiday marking the period when Jews could fulfill the mitzvah of donating the early yield of their agricultural harvest to the *kohanim* at the *beit ha-mikdash* (see *Devarim* 26:1–11). Expression of gratitude appears central to this mitzvah as well, especially in light of the declaration recited along with the offering. When bringing *bikkurim*, one recited a text thanking God for the annual harvest, the wonders and miracles He displayed in redeeming Israel from Egypt, and also the lush and bountiful Land of Israel. The *bikkurim* declaration thus articulates thankfulness for God's abundant current

⁴ Translation adapted from Feldheim edition, p. 181–182.

and past goodness, and thus provides a natural opening for classroom discussion of religious and other forms of gratitude.

Sukkot

The holiday of Sukkot also includes many themes that naturally lead to discussion of gratitude. After all, dwelling in the *sukkah* recalls the *sukkot* (booths) in which God sheltered the Jewish people during many years of desert wandering following their redemption from Egypt (*Vayikra* 23:43). Gratitude to God is surely appropriate for His care at that critical time following the birth of our nation.

However, many students may be surprised to learn that Sukkot is not only about gratitude for God's kindness in antiquity, but is also intended as a time of gratitude for God's recurrent beneficence. The classic medieval Torah exegetes emphasize that this holiday, also known as *hag ha-asif* (the festival of the harvest), reflects thankfulness to God for the recently harvested produce of the fields (see *Ramban* and *Rashbam* to *Vayikra* 23:39). On this holiday, students could be encouraged to consider the many material and other bounties with which God blessed them and their families.

Tefillot and Berakhot

Instruction in prayers and blessings at almost every grade level could take a "positive turn" involving gratitude. Even the youngest students learn that the first words to be recited upon waking in the morning consist of *Modeh Ani*, thanking God for granting the gift of another day. *Asher Yatzar* and the *Birkhot Ha-Shahar* similarly express gratitude for His numerous gifts to us, such as the abilities to stand upright and to see, and for our physiologic function. Furthermore, the *berakhot* of *Nodeh Lekha* in *Birkhat Ha-Mazon* and the prayer of *Modim* in the *Amidah* are explicit expressions of thanks, whose lengthy enumerations recall the "gratitude list" interventions that could be taught alongside them.

Both the weekday and Shabbat *Pesukei deZimrah* also feature well-known gratitude components that can be emphasized to students practicing or studying them. On most weekdays, we recite *Mizmor l'Todah* ("Psalm of Thanksgiving"; *Tehillim* 100), whose focus is gratitude to God. In fact, the *Shulhan Arukh* (*Orah Hayyim* 51:9) writes that this psalm will be the only one sung in the eventual

Messianic age, which may underscore the everlasting importance of gratitude. On Shabbat and holidays, when *Mizmor l'Todah* is omitted, the *Nishmat* prayer is added. The latter also underscores gratefulness toward God. Perhaps its most representative line is (abridged):

Were our mouth as full of song as the sea, and our lips as full of joyous praise as the breadth of the heavens, we still could not thank You sufficiently, God, for even one of the thousand thousand thousands of thousands and myriad myriad favors that you perform for us.⁵

CONCLUSION

If the overall fields of psychology and education have been slow to adopt the methods and perspectives of positive psychology, Jewish educators need not duplicate this error. As discussed above, positive psychology interventions do not require large budgetary outlays, great effort, or new and specialized staff. On the contrary, research already demonstrates that these new methods can be easily and seamlessly integrated into classrooms, producing lasting benefits.

Goldmintz (2011) has called upon Jewish educators to take an eclectic approach to practice. But the case for positive psychology is stronger than the mere suggestion that it is one approach among many worthy of consideration. Schnall (2013) recently argued that Jewish community professionals should strive to develop empirically validated approaches to their work, rather than simply employing intuitively derived methods that may or may not be the most efficient or effective.⁶ The empirically supported nature of positive psychology techniques make them particularly compelling for incorporation in day school and synagogue classrooms.

The specific case for incorporating gratitude within the proposed “positive turn” in Jewish education is especially strong. On the one hand, research demonstrates

⁵ [Ed.: This *tefillah*, along with several other similar texts, are presented in greater detail in the companion piece by Moshe Sokolow.]

⁶ Empirically derived interventions are already being explored in the religiously observant Jewish community, albeit in a somewhat different context. See the groundbreaking work of Rosmarin, Pargament, Pirutinsky, and Mahoney (2010) who pioneered an efficacious spiritually integrated psychotherapeutic approach to treatment of subclinical anxiety in the Jewish community.

that gratitude interventions may be very effective among youth, nurturing mental health and contributing to important school satisfaction outcomes. Moreover, numerous straightforward curricular connections exist between this character strength and typical *Tanakh*, *Tefillah*, and *Hagim* instruction. Finally, *hakarot ha-tov* is a foundational Jewish value. Within Jewish education, it would only seem natural to adopt an “attitude of gratitude.”

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**HAKARAT HA-TOV AS A PILLAR OF CHARACTER EDUCATION
IN CO-CURRICULAR PROGRAMMING:
AN EXAMPLE FROM THE FIELD**

by Judy Sokolow

Although, while experiencing it, I considered my Jewish education to be richly rewarding in terms of instilling Jewish values (many of which as I grew older I realized are more broadly humanistic), I find that what I now consider best practices in this area has evolved. For example, although we were taught (often in the context of the exegesis of biblical texts) not to be *kefuyei tovah* or ingrates, I do not recall having been imbued with its obverse, the concept of *hakarat ha-tov* (recognizing goodness and expressing gratitude). Furthermore, in terms of hands-on activities designed to promote the internalization of Jewish and humanistic values, *tzedakah* (charity in the form of money) collection was paramount: my educators had me ring doorbells and stand—with a “*pushke*” or collection box in hand—on street corners in the predominantly Jewish section of the neighborhood in which I grew up, heady with the challenge of how many coins (a quarter was a coup, a dollar nirvana) I could amass for a “worthy” cause. These charities’ goals were not clearly defined in anything but broad brushstrokes such as “helping poor children in Israel.”

In reflecting on my own practices as an educator, instilling *hakarat ha-tov* has increasingly emerged as an important objective. Furthermore, although raising funds for *tzedakah* continues to be important, *hesed* (the “hands-on” performance of acts of kindness for specific recipients) is now seen as an equal if not a more significant goal of character education. This paper offers anecdotal accounts of our school’s annual Thanksgiving program, an event that actively involves students in the practice of *hakarat ha-tov*¹ with the hope of encouraging educators who do not already do so to

¹ This paper is informed by my experience over the past four decades in the area of student activities first at Yeshiva University High School for Girls and then at the Ramaz Middle School, where the specific programs mentioned above were developed. It also reflects the good counsel of my colleague Victoria Ginsberg, who engages our students in a host of humanistic endeavors through our *hesed* club.

add this value to *tzedakah* and *hesed* which are already well-established goals of character education in our schools.

The Thanksgiving assembly that has developed in our school over the past dozen years focuses on gratitude. It generally opens with a keynote address by a student that explicates a Jewish text in which *hakarat ha-tov* is highlighted, such as the many referenced in Dr. Eliezer Schnall's article that precedes mine in this monograph. It is through student research in this context, for example, that I originally learned that, in responding to the question of whether American Jews should vote in political elections, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1984), arguably the greatest decisor of matters pertaining to Jewish law in the latter part of the twentieth century, wrote:

A fundamental principle of Judaism is hakaras hatov—recognizing benefits afforded us and giving expression to our appreciation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each Jewish citizen to participate in the democratic system that guards the freedoms we enjoy.

Something else I learned derived from the address that developed around the thesis that the first prayer that the original Pilgrims recited upon their arrival in the New World had its origins in the perennial Jewish prayer of gratitude, *Birkat Ha-Gomel* (traditionally recited by survivors of danger), based on Psalms 107 (Bunker, 2010)².

Another feature of our annual Thanksgiving program are short and often evocative personal statements of gratitude by individual students to someone in their lives with whom they have a special bond. In one case, a student's grandmother had been invited to the assembly, as is generally our practice with such honorees, on the pretext that her granddaughter would be delivering a Thanksgiving speech. It was only when the speech began that she became aware that she was its focus. Her granddaughter said:

“You walk me through it when my friends and I have disagreements and I know you will be there for me whenever I need it. I try to help you with your problems but, one, I don't understand adult talk, and, two, you never really ever have problems that I know of. That's why you're perfect.”

² [Ed.: This theme is described in greater detail in the companion piece by Moshe Sokolow.]

More often, a more serious note is taken. One year, a diabetic student thanked the school nurse for fastidiously helping him to manage his condition and for making certain that he was appropriately provided for when treats were distributed. More recently, a student praised her dad for his volunteer work as an emergency medical technician with Hatzalah and for the unsolicited time he spent in Far Rockaway helping victims of Hurricane Sandy. “You have taught me so much,” she said, “how to read, ride a bike, ski, skate, and, most importantly, to try to be a good person.”

Such honorees are not always relatives or personal friends. On another occasion, a student thanked his synagogue’s cantor, not only for the “beautiful melodies” that he uses in prayer, but for his dedication as his bar mitzvah teacher:

I would go to his office once a week and practice with him. They do say that practice makes perfect. It was not always fun but I managed to stick with it and, more importantly, so did he. My mom, in the speech that she gave at my bar mitzvah, said that there were many things that she was anxious about—but she had no worries about whether I was prepared to *lehn* [read from the Torah] because I had studied with the Chaz [Hebrew nickname for “cantor”]. He gave me all the confidence that I needed.

On another occasion, a student expressed gratitude to the South Korean-born lady who is usually behind the cash register at what is fondly referred to in our school as “the corner store.” He said:

We often come in as a group, happy to be out of school, and very hungry. We tend to take over the store as we all barge in at once, each of us intent on finding the perfect snack that will satisfy us. You are always calm and efficient and sell us what we want with a smile on your face. You are a very important person in our lives and we thank you for brightening our day.

Twice over the years, a student paid tribute to all four grandparents. Asked to reflect on this experience, one student explained:

Of course I have always loved my grandparents and had a strong sense of all they do for me. But it was not until I prepared my Thanksgiving speech that I thought in a more analytical way about the contributions that each makes to my life. I really realized how blessed I am. Articulating my feelings humbled

me and made me realize that my accomplishments are not due solely to my own efforts. My grandparents' loving response also taught me a lot. I now make much more of an effort to thank my parents, teachers, and others in my life, not just with a casual "thank you" but with explanations that show that I am truly appreciative. This helps to deepen relationships and keeps me from being too self-impressed. It also has led me to feel more authentic when I thank God in my prayers.

Our Thanksgiving program is also the venue for our annual presentation of the Ramaz Middle School "*Hakarat HaTov* Thanks-for-Giving Award to an Individual or Organization that Makes the World a Better Place." Presenting this award has value beyond expressing gratitude: it broadens our students' understanding of and appreciation for humanitarian initiatives, and other ideals as expressed in our school's mission statement such as support for the State of Israel. To prepare for the presentation, a committee of students visits the designated organization's site or meets with the individual being honored to gain an in-depth understanding of the good works being acknowledged. They then devise a stratagem for sharing this information with the audience at the assembly. After the guest receives the award plaque, he or she generally speaks, offering more insight into the cause, usually through personal anecdotes.

For example, the year that we honored the Bikur Cholim D'Satmar, an organization that provides home-made food to hospital patients and their families throughout New York City, we visited its headquarters in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, to witness the production side of its operation. We saw young and old women efficiently cooking and packaging food in a pristine kitchen that housed a gas burner embedded in the floor on which was bubbling what one student thought to be "the largest pot of chicken soup in the world." Explanations were gleaned and photos were taken that were used to communicate this experience to the general student body back at school at that year's Thanksgiving assembly.

Perhaps the most exotic of our award recipients over the years was Ambassador Masao Nakayama who, at the time, was the Federated States of Micronesia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. With Japan's defeat in World War II, Micronesia became a United Nations Trusteeship administered by the United

States, followed by independence in 1986, which Israel was among the first countries to recognize. The FSM, together with its Pacific neighbors: the Marshall Islands, Nauru and Palau, typically support the U.S. and Israel at the United Nations on key General Assembly resolutions. The student committee communicated this history to the audience by enacting a mock classroom lesson with appropriate maps and slides of Micronesia's magnificent vistas.

Among the most poignant of all our award presentations was that made to a physician who treats a particular childhood disease. The student committee, which included an artist, created a takeoff on the children's book *Curious George Goes to the Hospital* that highlighted the doctor's expertise and dedication. An element of the back story here illustrates the "rising to the occasion" that makes working with students so rewarding. Unbeknownst to me at the time we decided to honor this physician, a sibling of a current student had been treated (successfully!) by him. When I learned of this, I telephoned the student's parent to ask whether bringing this doctor to school would be upsetting for the child. After speaking to the child, the parent told me that not only did the child think that the doctor richly deserved the award, but that the child wanted to be the one to present the doctor with the plaque at the assembly.

Other recipients over the years of the Ramaz Middle School "*Hakarat HaTov* Thanks for Giving Award" have included the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Hebrew Free Loan Society, the Innocence Project affiliated with the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University, the Jewish Braille Institute, the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry, Facing History and Ourselves, and the Educational Alliance. Although students are not eligible for this award, appropriate student achievement is sometimes acknowledged at the Thanksgiving program. For example, two students who undertook the arduous project of training dogs for service positions—with one of the dogs making a guest appearance on stage.

Perhaps the students' favorite element of our Thanksgiving assembly is the *hakarat ha-tov* expressed in a presentation to a teacher. Again, as with the personal testimonials mentioned above, the element of surprise heightens the experience for the faculty honoree, whose family members are invited and kept hidden in the wings until the right moment. Although students participate in all elements of the program,

their input here is, of course, critical. For example, this past year the gym teacher was presented with a video made by the members of the girls basketball team in which they performed athletic routines—a tribute to a teacher who stresses physical activity as a conduit to good health. At a previous assembly, the American History teacher was honored with a skit that was an imitation of the Magic School Bus series. It featured Ms. Frizzle (whom I had great fun impersonating) leading a group of students on a trip to Washington, D.C., where they found Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln bedroom. Through a conversation about how American history is currently taught, the students sang their teacher’s praises. Actual quotations from Lincoln’s speeches and writings were included in the script.

Musical talent, one of the many gifts for which we express hakarat ha-tov to God, is a mainstay at our Thanksgiving programs, which are usually the venue for the first school chorus performance of the year. Over the years, individual students have played piano, flute, or violin; one year we even had a harpist. From time to time faculty members form an ad hoc chorus, a touch that the students particularly enjoy. This past year, when Thanksgiving coincided with the first night of Hanukkah, our Upper School Guitar Ensemble closed our assembly with a rousing performance of *Ocho Kandelikas (Eight Candles)*.

Expressing gratitude in a thoughtful way is a humbling experience. It requires us to set aside our feelings of power and control and to realize that our successes are not due solely to our own accomplishments. It is a foil against arrogance and self-centeredness. Conditioning students to think about how they rely on others and helping them to express their thankfulness is an important consideration in values education.

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GRATITUDE (AND INGRATITUDE) IN CLASSIC JEWISH SOURCES: SOME CLOSE READINGS

Moshe Sokolow

The very first sentence we utter upon waking in the morning and opening our eyes is: “I give thanks.” Our entire lives are based on giving thanks—to God and to people. Here is but a small sampling of sources¹ that pertain to the obligation to express gratitude.

[I have also added several pedagogical or explanatory remarks in *italics*.]

“מודה אני”

קיצור שולחן ערוך סימן א סעיף ב:

מיד כְּשֵׁינֵעוֹר משנתו, יזכור חסדי ה' יתברך שמו, אשר עשה עמו, שהחזיר לו את נשמתו, אשר הפקידה אצלו עיפה, והחזירה לו חדשה ורגועה, כדי לעבוד עבודתו יתברך שמו בכל יכולתו, ולשרתו כל היום, כי זה כל האדם.

כמו שאמר הכתוב “חדשים לבקרים, רבה אמונתך” (איכה ג:כג). פירושו, בכל בוקר נעשה האדם בריה חדשה, ויודה בכל לבבו להשם יתברך על זאת. ובעודו על משכבו יאמר: “מודה אני לפניך מלך חי וקיים שהחזרת בי נשמתי בחמלה, רבה אמונתך.”

ואף על פי שעדיין אין ידיו נקיות, יכול לומר זאת, כיון שאין בו שם ה'. ויפסיק מעט בין תיבת “בחמלה” לתיבת “רבה”.

As soon as one wakes from sleep, he must recall the grace that God has granted him by restoring his soul, which was entrusted to Him while exhausted and returned fresh and rested so man can serve God with all his ability, all day long, because that is his whole purpose.

As the verse says (Lamentations 3:23): “Newly, daily, your faithfulness increases.”

¹ Some of these sources were cited in a lesson on “Gratitude and Ingratitude” by R. Natan Zolman, appearing on the website of the Ministry of Education of the State of Israel: cms.education.gov.il, and that of לדעת, maintained jointly by the Ministry of Education and the Herzog Teachers' College: <http://levladaat.org/lessons?tag=22>.

This means that every day man is created anew, for which he should wholeheartedly thank God. While still in bed, he should say: “I give thanks to you, the living and ever-existing God, who has compassionately restored my soul. Your faithfulness is ever-increasing.” (One may recite this even if one’s hands are still unclean, because the name of God does not appear in it.) One should pause briefly between the words רבה and חמלה.

*It may be worth noting—apropos of this passage—that most siddurim retain dual versions of the opening word: both **modeh** (masculine) and **modah** (feminine). This is somewhat out of the ordinary, and deserves an explanation. I would conjecture that its purpose is to emphasize that however girls/women may be overlooked or underrepresented in other aspects of prayer, their obligation to express gratitude is equal to that of boys/men.*

* * *

”קהלת רבה” ז’:

”אמר רב יהודה: כל הכופר בגמילות-חסד, כאילו כופר בעיקר”.

Rabbi Yehudah said: Anyone who denies [another’s] benevolence is as though he denies the principles [of belief].

Once the principle of gratitude is rejected, the principle of faith in God is undermined, because both derive from a common source: One who is unable or unwilling to recognize another human being’s graciousness will be unable or unwilling to recognize that of God.

* * *

דברים כג, ח:

(ח) לֹא־תִתְעֵב אָדָמִי בִּי אַחִיךָ הוּא לֹא־תִתְעֵב מִצְרִי כִּי־גַר הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ:

• רש”י: אעפ”י שזרקו זכורכם ליאור. כי היו לכם אכסניה בשעת הדחק.

• ספרי דברים פרשת כי תצא פסקא רנב:

”לא תתעב אדומי”, מפני מה? ”כי אחיך הוא”, וגדולה אחוה.

”לא תתעב מצרי”, מפני מה? ”כי גר היית בארצו.

אמר רבי אלעזר בן עזריה: המצרים לא קבלו את ישראל אלא לצורך עצמם, וקבע להם

המקום שבר.

והלא דברים קל וחומר: אם מי שאין מתכוון לזכות וזכה, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו זכה, המתכוין לזכות--על אחת כמה וכמה.

“Do not loathe an Edomite, because he is your brother. Do not loathe an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land.”

RASHI: In spite of the fact that they cast your male children into the Nile, they provided you with refuge in an emergency.

SIFREI: “Do not loathe an Edomite.” Why? “Because he is your brother,” and brotherhood is great. “Do not loathe an Egyptian.” Why? “Because you were a stranger in his land.”

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said: The Egyptians only provided Israel with refuge for their selfish purposes and yet God allotted them a reward. Moreover! If one earned merit unintentionally and God regards it as meritorious, how much more so for one who intends to earn merit.

* * *

תנחומא “וארא” (י”ד)

מפני מה לקו המים והעפר על-ידי אהרון? (שמות ז, יט; ח, א; ה, יב).

אמר ר' תנחום: אמר לו הקב"ה למשה: המים ששמרו עליך בשעה שהושלכת ליאור, והעפר, שֶהֵגַן עליך כשהרגת את המצרי, אינו דין שילקו על-ידך! לפיכך לקו על ידי אהרון.

Why were the water and earth [in Egypt] struck by Aharon?

Rabbi Tanhuma said, God said to Moshe: The water protected you when you were cast into the Nile, and the earth protected you when you slew [and buried] the Egyptian. It is improper for you to strike them! Therefore, they were struck by Aharon.

God did not want Moshe to practice ingratitude—even to inanimate objects!—in order to teach us all a lesson in gratitude.

Should someone ask: But why did Aharon also conduct the plague of frogs?

What gratitude is owed them? Another Midrash replies: It is sufficient that frogs live in the water that they be treated as the water itself. Gratitude must exceed the bounds of logic and be more than just equivalent.

* * *

פסיקתא זוטרתא (לקח טוב) בראשית פרק ג ד"ה יב:
 "ויאמר האדם: האשה אשר נתת עמדי..."; נמצא כפוי טובה.
 כי לא די שניתן לו עזר כנגדו, אלא מתרעם ואומר, "האשה אשר נתתה עמדי...".

Adam said: "The woman whom you have placed beside me [gave me the fruit to eat]." That made him an ingrate. Not only did he deem it insufficient that God had given him a "helpmeet," but he complained that she had made him eat.

One who shows ingratitude toward another acts as though everything is due him, and that anyone who does him a favor is merely fulfilling an obligation toward him. This attitude—as noted earlier—is what leads to the rejection of belief in God, as one so inclined imagines that life itself is "due him," and he is rid of any obligation of recognition toward Him.

* * *

שמות פרק יז:

(א) ויסעו כל־עדת בני־ישראל ממדבר־סין למסעייהם על־פי ה' ויחנו ברפיידים ואין מים לשאתת העם: (ב) ויבך העם עם־מֹשֶׁה ויאמרו תנו־לנו מים ונשתה ויאמר להם מֹשֶׁה מה־תריבון עמדי מה־תבנסון את־ה': (ג) ויצמא שם העם למים וילן העם על־מֹשֶׁה ויאמר למה־זה העליתנו ממצרים להמית אתי ואת־בני ואת־מקני בצמא:
 (ד) ויצעק מֹשֶׁה אֶל־ה' לאמר מה אעשה לעם הזה עוד מעט וסקלני: (ה) ויאמר ה' אל־מֹשֶׁה עבר לפני העם וקח אתך מזקני ישראל ומטוד אשר הכית בו את־היאור קח בידך והלכת:
 (ו) הנני עמך לפניך שם על־הצור בחרב והכית בצור ויצאו ממנו מים ושתה העם ויעש כן מֹשֶׁה לעיני זקני ישראל: (ז) ויקרא שם המקום מסה ומריבה על־ריב בני ישראל ועל נסתם את־ה' לאמר היש־ה' בקרבנו אם־אין: (ח) ויבא עמלק וילחם עם־ישראל ברפיידים:

The Torah narrates the travels and travails of the Israelites just after their narrow escape from the Egyptian army at the Reed Sea. They arrive in Refidim and have no water to drink. They complain to Moshe who chastises them for challenging God. They then protest that they would have preferred remaining in Egypt to dying of thirst in the wilderness. Now Moshe, following God's instructions, strikes a flinty rock with his staff, causing water to flow from it. The site where this occurred is named "Testy and Contentious" because the people

questioned whether God was with them. Immediately thereafter it says:
“Amalek came and waged war against Israel at Refidim.”

רש"י:

(ח) ויבא עמלק וגו' - סמך פרשה זו למקרא זה, לומר, תמיד אני ביניכם ומזומן לכל צרכיכם, ואתם אומרים (פסוק ז) "היש ה' בקרבנו אם אין"? חייכם שהכלב בא ונושך אתכם, ואתם צועקים אלי, ותדעון היכן אני. משל לאדם שהרכיב בנו על כתפו ויצא לדרך, היה אותו הן רואה חפץ ואומר, אבא טול חפץ זה ותן לי, והוא נותן לו, וכן שניה וכן שלישית. פגעו באדם אחד, אמר לו אותו הן: ראית את אבא? אמר לו אביו: אינך יודע היכן אני? השליכו מעליו ובא הכלב ונשכו.

RASHI: The episode [of Amalek] is adjacent to that [of the water] as though God had said: "I am always in your midst and ready to meet all your needs, and yet you ask, 'Is God in our midst or not?' I swear that a dog will come and bite you, you will cry out to me, and you will know where I am."

This can be compared to a man who carried his son on his shoulders and set out on a trip. The son would see something along the way and ask his father to pick it up for him, which he did—once, twice, even three times. They then met a certain man and the child asked him: "Have you seen my father?" His father replied: "Don't you know where I am?" He threw him down [from his shoulders] and a dog came and bit him.

It is particularly noteworthy that the attack by Amalek, which assumes legendary proportions in rabbinic lore and literature, is attributed here by Rashi to an act of ingratitude. We would not be amiss in suggesting that if the initial attack of Amalek occurred on account of a failure to be grateful, the elimination of Amalek (מחיית עמלק) requires gratuitous expressions of thanksgiving.

* * *

ספר החינוך (מצוה לג):

לכבד האב והאם, שנאמר [שמות כ', י"ב] כבד את אביך ואת אמך וגו', ובא הפירוש [קידושין דף ל"א ע"ב], איזהו כיבוד? מאכיל ומשקה, מלביש ומכסה, מכניס ומוציא: משרשי מצוה זו, שראוי לו לאדם שיכיר ויגמול חסד למי שעשה עמו טובה, ולא יהיה נבל ומתנכר וכפוי-טובה, שזו מידה רעה ומאוסה בתכלית, לפני אלהים ואנשים.

ושיתן אל לבו כי האב והאם הם סיבת היותו בעולם, על כן באמת ראוי לו לעשות להם כל כבוד וכל תועלת שיוכל, כי הם הביאוהו לעולם, וגם יגעו בו כמה יגיעות בקטנותו. וכשיקבע זאת המידה בנפשו, יעלה ממנה להכיר טובת האל ברוך הוא, שהוא סיבתו וסיבת כל אבותיו עד אדם הראשון, ושהוציאו לאויר העולם וסיפק צרכו כל ימיו, והעמידו על מתכונתו ושלימות אבריו, ונתן בו נפש יודעת ומשכלת, שאילולא הנפש שחננו האל, יהיה כסוס, כפרד אין הבין, ויערוך במחשבתו במה וכמה ראוי לו להזהר בעבודתו ברוך הוא.

We are commanded to revere our parents, to wit: “Honor your father and your mother.” [The Talmud] clarifies honor: “feed them and give them drink, clothe them and cover them, help them in and out.”

The root of this mitzvah is that it behooves a person to recognize, and reciprocate, to anyone who did him a favor. He should not be a heel and an ingrate because that is a fundamentally negative character trait and despised by both God and people.

One should acknowledge that parents are the reason for one’s existence and it is therefore fitting to provide them every available honor and advantage, because they brought him into the world and expended great efforts on him in his infancy and childhood.

When one internalizes this trait, he will conclude from it that he owes thanks to God, who is the cause of his and his ancestors all the way back to Adam; who brought him into existence, met his needs throughout his life, established him physically and perfected his limbs, and endowed him with an intelligent and enlightened soul, for were it not for the soul granted him by God, he would be like a horse or a dumb donkey. Let him imagine in what and how many ways it is fitting for him to be cautious in the service of God.

Without appearing to be overly self-serving, we might seize this opportunity to introduce the students to the notion that honoring one’s teachers is regarded as at least equivalent to honoring one’s parents. See the following קל וחומר, drawn from the Mishnah:

* * *

משנה בבא מציעא (ב:יא)

אבדת אביו ואבדת רבו? של רבו קודמת, שאביו הביאו לעולם הזה, ורבו שלמדו חכמה מביאו לחיי העולם הבא.

Whose lost object [takes precedence in returning]: His father's or his teacher's?
His teacher's lost object takes precedence. His father brought him into this world, but his teacher, who taught him wisdom [Torah], enters him into the world to come.

Note that the Mishnah uses the term חכמה rather than תורה. Perhaps this is an indication that students need to respect not only their "rebbe" and "morahs" but their general studies instructors as well!

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דברים רבה, פרשת ואתחנן
למה חשב הקב"ה ונתנה לישראל שיהו קורין אותה בכל יום? שכל הדברות כוללין בה,
שנאמר "ואהבת...".
וכי צריך לאהבתך? ואם תשנאהו, מה אתה מזיקו? ואם תאהבהו, מה אתה מהנך?
אלא שלא תהא כפוי טובה; שהוא אינו צריך לך, שאת צריך לו ולא תאהבהו.

Why did God so endear [the Shema] and give it to Israel to be recited daily?
Because all of the Ten Commandments are include in it, to wit: "And ... you shall love [the Lord your God ...]."

Does He need your love? If you were to hate Him, would it cause Him harm? If you do love Him, does it provide Him benefit?

Rather, you must not be ungrateful; He does not need you, but since you need Him, should you not love Him?

* * *

עבודה זרה ה (ע"א-ע"ב)
תנו רבנן: "מי יתן והיה לבבם זה להם". אמר להן משה לישראל: כפויי טובה בני כפויי טובה, בשעה שאמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל: "מי יתן והיה לבבם זה להם", היה להם לומר: תן אתה. כפויי טובה, דכתיב: "ונפשנו קצה בלחם הקלוקל". בני כפויי טובה, דכתיב: "האשה אשר נתתה עמדי היא נתנה לי מן העץ ואוכל".

The rabbis taught: "Would that their hearts ..." Moshe said to Israel: You are ingrates descended from ingrates. When God said to Israel: "Would that their hearts..." they should have replied: "Do so!" Their ingratitude was: "We are fed up

with the spoiled bread.” Descendants of ingrates, as [Adam said]: “The woman you placed beside me gave me of the tree and I ate.”

* * *

דברים פרשת כי תבוא (פרק כו)

(א) וְהָיָה כִּי־תִבּוֹא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחֲלָה וּירְשֶׁתָּהּ וַיִּשְׁבֶּתָּ בָּהּ: (ב) וְלָקַחְתָּ מִרְאשֵׁית כָּל־פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּבְּיָא מֵאֶרְצְךָ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ וְשָׂמֶתָ בַטֶּנָּא וְהִלַכְתָּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם: (ג) וּבָאתָ אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בַיָּמִים הֵהֵם וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו הַגִּדְתִּי הַיּוֹם לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי־בָאתִי אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָשָׁבַע ה' לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ לֵאמֹר: רש"י:

ואמרת אליו - שאינך כפוי טובה:

When the Land of Israel is settled, the first fruits (bikkurim) are to be placed in a basket and brought to “the place that the Lord your God will choose,” i.e., to the Beit Ha-Mikdash. The one bringing the first fruits approaches the Kohen and recites before him a passage known as “mikra bikkurim” that students should recognize as part of the Haggadah of Pesah.

RASHI comments: “and tell [the Kohen]”: That you are not an ingrate.

* * *

נשמת כל-חי תברך את-שמך:

From פסוקיה דזמרא of Shabbat and Yom Tov, this passage is reported in the Talmud (Berakhot 59b) as having been recited after prayers for rain were answered. It is centered on the verse (Psalms 35:10): “All my bones shall say, God, who is like You?”. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains (The Koren Siddur, 448–9):

“Through a fine series of images, the poet expresses the human inability to adequately thank God, itemizing how the various limbs (“all my bones”) may praise Him.”

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ברכת הגומל:

רמב"ם הלכות ברכות (פרק י הלכה ח)

ארבעה צריכין להודות: חולה שנתרפא, וחבוש שיצא מבית האסורים, ויורדי הים כשעלו, והולכי

דרכים כשיגיעו לשוב.

וצריכין להודות בפני עשרה, ושנים מהם חכמים, שנאמר: "וירוממוהו בקהל עם ובמושב זקנים יהללוהו."

וכיצד מודה וכיצד מברך? עומד ביניהן ומברך: "ברוך אתה יי' אלהינו מלך העולם, הגומל לחייבים טובות שגמלני כל טוב." וכל השומעין אומרים: "שגמלך טוב, הוא יגמלך סלה."

Four are obligated to give thanks: One who recovered from an illness; a prisoner released from jail; seafarers when they reach land; wayfarers when they reach civilization.

They are obligated to give thanks in the presence of ten [a *minyán*], of whom two must be sages, to wit: "They shall exalt Him in the community of the people, and praise him where the elders [i.e., sages] sit."

How does he give thanks and what blessing does he say? He stands among them and recites: "Blessed are You the Lord our God, king of the universe, who bestows favors on the unworthy, and who has bestowed on me such favors."

All those who hear him reply: "He who favored you shall continue to favor you. Selah"

* * *

THE THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY AND BIRKAT HA-GOMEL

In 1789, in response to a resolution offered by Congressman Elias Boudinot of New Jersey, President George Washington issued a proclamation recommending that Thursday November 26th of that year:

... be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation.

In New York City, Congregation Sheerith Israel convened a celebration on that day at which its minister, Gershom Mendes Seixas, embraced the occasion:

... as we are made equal partakers of every benefit that results from this good

government; for which we cannot sufficiently adore the God of our fathers who hath manifested His care over us in this particular instance; neither can we demonstrate our sense of His benign goodness, for His favourable interposition in behalf of the inhabitants of this land.

While the celebrations at that venerable Orthodox synagogue continue, unabated, to this day, other American Jewish appreciations of Thanksgiving have ranged from the skeptical to the outright antagonistic. In an essay entitled: “Is Thanksgiving Kosher?” [<http://www.tfdixie.com/special/thanksg.htm>], Atlanta’s Rabbi Michael Brody examines three halakhic [legal] positions on the subject: Rabbis Yitzhak Hutner, who ruled Thanksgiving a gentile holiday and forbade any recognition of it; Joseph B. Soloveitchik, who regarded it as a secular holiday and permitted the celebration (particularly, eating turkey); and Moshe Feinstein, who permitted turkey but prohibited any other celebration because of reservations over the recognition of even secular holidays.

Newly presented historical information, however, may swing the annual autumnal pendulum back in favor of participation in what now appears to have been a holiday with both a patent Jewish theme and performance. In his recent book: *Making Haste from Babylon, The Mayflower Pilgrims and their World* (Random House/Knopf, 2010), Nick Bunker reveals an item of particular significance for Jewish observers and/or critics of Thanksgiving.

Fleeing from persecution in England, the Pilgrim passengers on the Mayflower brought along their principal source of religious inspiration and comfort: the Bible. One particular edition of the Bible (published in 1618) that is known to have been in the possession of none other than William Bradford, destined to serve as a governor of Plymouth colony, was supplemented by the Annotations of a Puritan scholar named Henry Ainsworth (1571–1622).

Shortly after their landfall in November 1620, Bradford led the new arrivals in thanking God for the safe journey that brought them to America by reciting verses from Psalm 107. Curiously, Ainsworth’s Annotations to verse 32 of that chapter [“And let them exalt him in the church of the people, and praise him in the sitting of the elders”] contains the following remarks:

And from this Psalme, and this verse of it, the Hebrues have this Canon; Foure must confess (unto God) The sick, when he is healed; the prisoner when he is released out of bonds; they that goe down to sea, when they are come up (to land); and wayfaring men, when they are come to the inhabited land. And they must make confession before ten men, and two of them wise men, Psal. 107. 32. And the manner of confessing and blessing is thus; He standeth among them and blesseth the Lord, the King eternal, that bounteously rewardeth good things unto sinners, etc. Maimony in Misn. Treat. Of Blessings, chap. 10, sect. 8.

If any of this looks familiar, it is because Ainsworth essentially copied over an English version of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* ("Maimony Misn."), *Hilkhot Berakhot* ("Treat. of Blessings") 10:8 with which we opened this section, which prescribes the four conditions under which *birkhat ha-gomel*, the blessing after being spared from mortal danger, is to be publicly recited. Citing additional verses from Psalm 107, Bradford compared the Pilgrims' arrival in America to the Jews crossing the Sinai Desert, corresponding to "*wayfaring men, when they are come to the inhabited land,*" one of the four conditions requiring "confession."

Bunker argues, then, that the very first prayer that the Pilgrims recited immediately upon their arrival in the New World had its origins in a distinctly Jewish practice. He goes on to say that he considers this prayer service to be the original "Thanksgiving" and that it took place a full year before the three days of feasting that served as the basis for the current American holiday.

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